

**The catechumenate in late antique Africa: Augustine of Hippo, his
contemporaries and early reception (ca. 360-530 AD)**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Trinity Term 2016

SHORT ABSTRACT

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In the late antique West, every individual becoming Christian first entered the community as a catechumen (*catechumenus*). Many spent several years in this status called the catechumenate, only ending with baptism and the acquisition of the membership of the faithful (*fideles*). This thesis considers the catechumenate not only as an initiation but as a peculiar way of being Christian. It demonstrates the fluid nature of Christian membership and shows how clerics strove to develop their authority over catechumens to build a cohesive community in a context of rivalry between churches and polemical controversies. The catechumenate both enabled converts to adhere progressively to the community and constituted an opportunity for clerics to set a standard path of progression, enforce discipline and define what it meant to be a Christian. This thesis opens up new avenues to study the process of Christianisation by stressing the continuous significance of the catechumenate for the formation of Christian communities in late antiquity. After an introduction, Chapter Two focuses on Augustine's recollections of his time as a catechumen. Chapter Three looks at Augustine to investigate more broadly the practices of *catechumeni*, shedding light on the pervasive polemical context in which they are discussed. Chapter Four provides case studies on the cross put on the forehead to manifest Christian membership and the treatise *De fide et operibus*, exploring how Augustine aimed at shaping practices and ideas. Chapter Five investigates contemporary evidence: first an African canon regulating the ritual participation of *catechumeni*, then sermons describing unique rituals of the baptismal preparation and demonstrating that practices often varied locally. Chapter Six compares the sixth-century letter exchanges between Ferrandus and Fulgentius with John the Deacon's letter to Senarius, showing the enduring importance of the catechumenate in the West and the creative reception of earlier African sources addressing recurrent pastoral problems.

LONG ABSTRACT

In the late antique West, every individual becoming Christian first entered the community as a catechumen (*catechumenus*). Access to baptism was granted only after an intense baptismal preparation, generally over several weeks before Easter, when candidates were called *competentes* or *electi*. The initiation process ended with baptism and the acquisition of the full membership of the faithful (*fideles*). Christian membership was therefore divided into two categories, the catechumens and the baptised. Catechumens were part of the Christian community but had a special and intermediary status, sharing Christian beliefs and parts of the liturgy, but still being excluded from core teachings and hopes of eternal salvation. Many Christians would spend several years in this status, called the catechumenate.

As I show in Chapter One, catechumens have been widely neglected in historical scholarship. Recent research has particularly focused on conversion narratives, on the Christianisation of the state and the aristocracy, and on the interactions between pagans and Christians, as clerics attempted to develop a distinctive Christian identity in a context of religious and cultural plurality. On the other hand, the history, theology and liturgy of baptism have also received particular attention. Liturgists have aimed at reconstructing the sequences of Christian initiation, while pastoral theologians have gathered material in order to reform catechism and religious instruction in modern times. Studies have consequently concentrated on the best available evidence from the late fourth and early fifth century, for instance the catecheses of Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia, often projecting a standardised view of the catechumenate. This state of scholarship results from the fact that baptism has generally been seen as the only normative marker of Christian membership notably because infant baptism became the norm in the middle ages until the Reformation at least. As a result, early Christianity has often been studied in a dialogue with modern assumptions, the catechumenate being considered as a temporary preparation and catechumens as a category of Christians resulting from the failed attempts of ancient churches in implementing swift baptism.

This thesis shifts away from these perspectives and proposes to reconsider the catechumenate as an essential complement to the historical study of conversion and baptism and, more broadly, of religious belonging. It considers the catechumenate not only as an initiation but also as a specific way of progressively adhering and belonging to Christian communities. The thesis explores how Christians saw and concretely organised the integration of converts to their community. It argues that this two-fold division between the catechumens and the baptised was essential for the self-definition of the community and for the negotiation of boundaries with rival groups in a context of widespread division. The thesis devotes particular attention to the context of writing of each source over a long chronology from the fourth to the sixth century, leading to a better understanding of the catechumenate as a constantly evolving organisation shaped by religious controversies. The writings of Augustine of Hippo provide the point of departure as the most extensive body of evidence. They are then compared with little-studied contemporary sources (council proceedings and sermons), before reaching the early sixth century, when rare evidence is preserved in the form of a letter exchange between Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe. This exchange is then compared to the contemporary letter of John the Deacon to Senarius.

The thesis thus provides both a detailed study of Augustine and of contemporary and later evidence, offering a broader overview of the catechumenate in late antique Africa. At the same time, it traces the reception in the sixth century of earlier African writings, particularly Augustine and council proceedings. This broader scope enables me to discover strong commonalities in the evidence as a result of a shared tradition. However, I also demonstrate that within this tradition, clerics had a greater degree of freedom than generally assumed, adapting

rites and catecheses locally. I also show that most discussions of the catechumenate, either in treatises, sermons or letters, pertain to a context of polemics between rival Christian communities or theological views. This context, together with the variety of practices on the ground and the liminal status of catechumens explains why most sources explored in the thesis, written by Catholic clerics, attempt at building a cohesive community. Catechumens were crucial in this process: their initiation was an opportunity to set a standard path of progression, enforce discipline and define what it meant to be a Christian, against divergent theological conceptions, rival churches and different religions. This thesis demonstrates that catechumens were an essential feature of early Christianity at the core of community dynamics.

Chapters Two to Four examine the abundant literary production of Augustine as a unique opportunity to study how the status of *catechumenus* was lived and understood in Augustine's Africa. In Chapter Two I look at Augustine himself as the best-known catechumen of Antiquity. Exploring Augustine's own testimony and recollections provides insights on the *parcours* of an African catechumen, notably showing that Augustine was not initiated as a baby but during boyhood, and that, as a catechumen, the boundaries with other religious groups were fluid and changing, while debates and interactions were commonplace. The study of Augustine's catechumenate is conducted with a critical eye on Augustine's specific aims depending on the context in which he was writing. The presentation of his own catechumenate, while displaying remarkable continuity concerning the narrative of his journey from the early works, evolved towards a more positive appraisal of his youth as a catechumen, first when writing to Manichaeans as a young priest, then particularly to a wider audience as a bishop in the *Confessiones*, which also constituted the last time that Augustine evoked his African catechumenate. Later, during the Pelagian controversy, Augustine more particularly emphasised the role of Ambrose in his initiation to claim his authority against opponents. Thus, contextualising Augustine's recollections informs the evolution of Augustine's thought about his catechumenate, opening the way to critically study his writings in the context of the main polemical controversies in which he was involved.

Chapters Three and Four look at Augustine beyond his own experience, as a major witness and protagonist of the catechumenate in late antique Africa. Chapter Three studies the practices of *catechumeni* and the polemical context in which they are discussed. The analysis of the practices of admission into the catechumenate demonstrates that scholarship has excessively standardised Augustine's allusive and polemical references and thus minimised the importance of catechumens in Christian communities. I argue that Augustine set high standards in matters of behaviour since the beginning of the catechumenate, while the rites and catechesis performed at the admission were regularly repeated during their time as catechumens. These rites highlighted their peculiar status: they were partially included through rites like the sign of the cross on the forehead and the tasting of salt, but barred from sharing the Eucharist with the *fideles*. This distinction deeply mattered to Augustine, since it concretely showed to catechumens that they were Christian but needed baptism to be fully included. This chapter also demonstrates that, as in the case of the recollections of his own experience, almost every mention of ritual practices of *catechumeni* relate to a context of polemics. Augustine employed these practices as an argument to reject opponents. In his fight against Donatists, the bishop strengthened his condemnation of rebaptism by accusing them of downgrading baptised Catholic Christians to the status of catechumens when they converted them; later against Pelagians, Augustine employed the rites of exorcism performed during the catechumenate to demonstrate the necessity of the forgiveness of sins for infants who undergo baptism.

Chapter Four investigates more broadly the significance of *catechumeni* in Augustine's pastoral care. Through two case studies, I show that the liminal status of catechumens constituted both a decisive opportunity for renewal and a potential hurdle for Augustine's attempt to build a closely bounded community. Often preaching or writing in Carthage, Augustine strove to impose strict discipline from the very beginning of the catechumenate,

employing the foundational rite of the cross on the forehead as a tool to bring cohesion to the community and setting a number of rules of admission for catechumens before they may be baptised in the *De fide et operibus* (412-413). I show that the treatise was written in a context of diverging practices and ideas about the catechumenate, at a crucial time in Augustine's life in the aftermath of the defeat of Donatists and at the beginning of the Pelagian controversy (411-412). I argue that the treatise was not a one-off answer to a marginal problem but the outcome of Augustine's regular involvement in the teaching of catechumens in Carthage. Travelling to the city, Augustine received a request to refute writings which restricted pre-baptismal training to learning about the correct faith and seized the opportunity to write a synthesis of his views on the necessity of pre-baptismal commitment to rules of behaviour. The chapter also stresses that Augustine's views were a matter of intense debate, both with other clerics attempting to define alternative rules at a time of still unsettled practices, and with catechumens. While catechumens saw the catechumenate as an opportunity to prudently adhere to Christianity, Augustine saw the process of conversion and integration to Christianity as a tool to redefine Christian membership, erase differences and build a united community.

The final two chapters explore other African evidence of the catechumenate from the fourth to the sixth century, corroborating the continuous significance of the catechumenate of adults in late antique Africa until the sixth century and the fact that catechumens were a major stake for the cohesion of Christian communities in a context of polemics. These chapters also further demonstrate the variety of practices and ideas in Africa, highlighting that norms were not yet set on how the catechumenate should be organised. Finally, they offer an opportunity to trace the influence and reception of Augustine's literary legacy in African and Italian circles.

Chapter Five considers little-studied evidence: council proceedings, the sermons of Quodvultdeus and a selection of anonymous sermons of possible African origin. The exploration of canon law shows that the single canon preserved on *catechumeni* bears evidence of attempts to enforce a distinction between them and the *fideles* in terms of rituals, complementing the conclusion drawn from the study of ritual distinctions in Augustine. Since the canon was promulgated in Hippo in 393, it provides striking evidence of the efforts of Aurelius and other clerics, amongst which the priest Augustine, to reform the African churches and react against a greater degree of freedom in the organisation of the initiation. I then focus on the sermons on the catechumenate attributed to Quodvultdeus, all pertaining to the baptismal preparation, therefore preached to *competentes*. After the exploration of the practices of *catechumeni* in Augustine, this investigation provides an opportunity to shed light on the process of baptismal preparation in late antique Africa through little-studied but particularly informative sermons containing unique details about the rituals of initiation. I first reject the attribution to Quodvultdeus and the assumption of a single authorship for all the sermons. I also argue that most of the sermons cannot be precisely situated but may have been preached from the 420s to the Vandal period in Carthage and the surrounding region. This assessment enables me to provide a fresh perspective on the sermons. A close analysis shows that commonalities between sermons result from the particular genre of catechesis to baptismal candidates. The baptismal preparation, witnessed by the broader community of the baptised, highlighted the radical transformation undergone by the candidates: it was an intense ritual process, including a public renunciation of the devil and a profession of faith. As in Augustine's sermons, the liminality of candidates is employed by preachers to define the duties of the broader community, while the strong polemical tone of the catecheses, particularly on the creed, further demonstrates that the initiation of new members was a particularly essential task in polemics against Pelagians and Arians. The sermons also show that the baptismal preparation was not a fixed process: variations and originality in terms of rites and catecheses resist any attempt to reconstruct a standard organisation of the initiation even within a single region like Africa. This point is then corroborated through the analysis of a selection of anonymous sermons. I show in particular that

beyond the more common creed and Lord's Prayer, preachers employed psalms in the baptismal preparation as foundational texts memorised and recited to develop a sense of commitment.

Finally, in Chapter Six I consider the exchange between Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe and compare it to the better-known contemporary exchange between the Roman deacon John and the Italian aristocrat Senarius. Despite differences between the two exchanges, I show that they both provide syntheses on the catechumenate with the objective of justifying liturgical practices in a context of polemics against Arians and Pelagians. I cast light on the continuity of the pastoral problems raised since Augustine's time against modern assumptions about the supposed ritualisation of early medieval Christianity. Both exchanges are concerned with the initiation of adults and aim at setting clear rules for resolving recurrent tensions arising from the peculiar status of catechumens. Fulgentius and John, who were asked to solve these tensions, aimed at demonstrating the necessity and utility of the catechumenate. Fulgentius cleared the doubts raised by Ferrandus concerning the effectiveness of the emergency baptism of an adult catechumen by showing that the commitment of catechumens through the profession of faith of the Catholics was a necessary and sufficient prerequisite to receive baptism in emergency. In response to Senarius' questions about the biblical origin of the practices of the catechumenate, John argued that all ritual actions fully correspond to the history of salvation and that every individual required this initiation to be purified from sin. Ferrandus and Fulgentius borrowed Augustine's language and reflected his concerns, while John reproduced liturgical arguments developed against Pelagians by Augustine and his successors. Thus, sixth-century sources show remarkable continuity with the preceding century; however, I stress that they also witness the development of a new trend towards normative syntheses combining the authority of the Bible, the experience of the liturgy, and the creative reception of a Christian written tradition in which Augustine features prominently.

This investigation demonstrates the continuous importance of the catechumenate from the fourth to the sixth century, as the framework for progressively integrating converts to Christianity. The catechumenate was a lively organisation, resilient to standardisation at least until the sixth century: sources show that practices varied greatly on the local level, as a result of the relative freedom and inventiveness of clerics organising the catechesis and the rituals. This variety corresponded to a context of division between Christian communities, leading to intense polemics, demonstrating that catechumens were a crucial and disputed group. This thesis therefore opens up new avenues to study the process of Christianisation by stressing the significance of the catechumenate for the formation of Christian communities and by shedding light on the fluidity and complexity of religious belonging in late antiquity.

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NOTE

For the sake of clarity and to reflect the source material studied in this thesis, I employ the terms Manichaean, Arian, Donatist, Catholic, Christian and Pelagian as they are found in my sources written by representatives of the Nicene Church and of the Augustinian tradition. However, I acknowledge that Manichaeans considered themselves Christians, that Arian is an heresiological label designating homoian Christians, that Donatists considered themselves Catholic and that the term Pelagian is a polemical construct designating a wide variety of doctrinal views that cannot be reduced to a single movement or author.

Primary sources are always translated in the main text, except for short significant expressions which are quoted in Latin. Latin terms are provided in brackets when they convey essential information to interpret the text. As a rule pertaining to theses submitted to the Faculty of History, the corresponding original Latin of the text quoted is generally not provided in the footnotes, except when necessary. Extracts from the Bible, however, are always quoted according to the original Latin, to avoid standardising the biblical text. References to primary sources in the footnotes always provide the name of the author followed by the title of the work, except for anonymous works for which only the title is given. Titles of Augustine's works are always abbreviated according to the system adopted in *AL*. For all other titles the abbreviations used are resolved in the main text or in the footnotes. The editions consulted are only systematically given when quoting passages in the original language.

References to secondary literature are first given in full, then abbreviated with the name and year of publication (e. g. Dolbeau (2005), 10-15). When published in source collections, editions and translations of primary sources and their introductions and notes do not follow this rule: they are referred in the following manner: name of the author characterised as editor (ed.), translator (transl.) or annotator (not.), reference to the collection in which the edition or translation is published and year of publication (e. g. Lambot, C., (ed.), *CCSL* 41 (1961), 252-258). They accompany the list of printed sources in the bibliography. Abbreviations for books of the Bible are taken from *JBL* 117 (1998), 560 with the following style: 1 Cor 2, 6; Ps 26, 5. Psalms are quoted according to the Septuagint numbering.

ABBREVIATIONS

Most abbreviations of journal titles are taken from the *Année Philologique* (listed on http://www.annee-philologique.com/files/sigles_fr.pdf). All other abbreviations are listed here:

ACW = *Ancient Christian Writers. The Works of the Father in Translation* (New York-Ramsey NJ-Mahwah NJ)

AL = *Augustinus-Lexikon* (Basel)

CCSL = *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout)

CLA = Lowe, E. A., *Codices Latini Antiquiores: a palaeographical guide to Latin manuscripts prior to the ninth century* (Oxford)

CPL = Dekkers, E., (1995), *Clavis patrum latinorum*, 3rd edition, (Steenbrugge)

CPPM = Machielsens, J., (1990), *Clavis patristica pseudepigraphorum medii aevi*, part I: Opera homiletica, 2 volumes (Turnhout)

CSEL = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna-Salzburg)

DACL = *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (Paris)

DTC = *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris)

EphLit = *Ephemerides Liturgicae* (Rome)

FOC = *The Fathers of the Church, a new translation* (Washington D. C.)

LMD = *La Maison-Dieu* (Paris)

MA = *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, (1931), 2 volumes (Rome)

MGH = *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Berlin)

PG = *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris)

PL = *Patrologia Latina* (Paris)

PLS = *Patrologia Latina Supplementum* (Paris)

QL = *Questions liturgiques* (Leuven)

RAC = *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart)

SC = *Sources Chrétiennes* (Lyon)

WSA = *The Works of Saint Augustine. A translation for the 21st Century* (New York)

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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

Christians are made, not born.

(Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 18)

This thesis aims to explore the catechumenate as a distinctive and essential feature of early Christianity. Catechumens were those not fully initiated: to study them is to see concretely how Christian membership was gradually acquired by individuals and experienced at the communal level.¹ In a context of divisions within Christianity, particularly in Africa, the catechumenate offered a way for churches to monitor the process of acquiring membership and for converts to familiarise themselves with Christianity and develop a sense of belonging. Nuancing the notion of a unified and static Christian identity, the study of the catechumenate sheds light on the progressive nature of religious belonging; I will show that for Christian communities the incorporation of new members was both a challenge in a context of competition, and an opportunity for re-self-fashioning.

Against a straightforward narrative of triumph, the expansion of Christianity in the post-Constantinian era has brought scholars to explore conversion narratives and the Christianisation of the Roman world, assessing the degree to which conversion was achieved, for instance, in the transformation of society, particularly the state and the aristocracy, and through the interactions between pagans and Christians.² Commenting on Markus' innovative

¹ I use 'membership' to refer to status as members of a community: I therefore speak of the membership of catechumens as Christians. I find this term appropriate because it is quite neutral and close to early Christian sources, notably as it recalls the *membra Christi* mentioned in Paul, 1 Cor 6, 15. I employ the term 'belonging' to refer to the individual and collective sense of being part of a Christian community. Identity is a concept that has grown particularly familiar in modern scholarship; because of its manifold possible meanings, I generally refrain from using it for late antique sources, but I refer to it in link to modern scholarship.

² Nock, A. D., (1933), *Conversion, the Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford) is a paradigmatic but now criticised study emphasising the radical and immediate nature of conversion. Recent scholarship rather considers conversion as a complex process, see Finn, Th., (1997a), *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (New York); Kreider, A., (1999), *Change of*

perspective in his book *The End of Ancient Christianity*, Brown noted that “a history of Christianisation in late antiquity and in the early middle ages must begin with close attention to what Christians themselves considered to be ‘Christianisation’”.³ Recent scholarship has followed this thread, particularly focusing on how Christians asserted their identity in contradistinction to other religions. Markus had explored the Christians’ self-definition, arguing that in late antiquity clerics developed a dichotomy between the sacred and the worldly to affirm a particular identity in a changing world.⁴ Recent scholarship has grown even more suspicious of sources that were written precisely at a time when attempts were made to develop a clear-cut Christian identity.⁵ Maxwell recently summarised these issues: “The grey

Conversion and the Origin of Christendom (Harrisburg); Kreider, A., (ed.), (2001), *The Origins of Christendom in the West* (Edinburgh); Mills, K., and Grafton, A., (eds.), (2003), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Seeing and Believing* (Rochester NY); Crook, Z. A., (2004), *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Berlin-New York); Papaconstantinou, A., McLynn, N., and Schwartz, D., (eds.), (2015), *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam and Beyond* (Farnham). For the spread of Christianity, see a recent overview of scholarship in Maxwell, J., (2012), ‘Paganism and Christianization’, in Johnson, S., (ed.), (2012), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford), 849-875. See as well Brown, P., (1998), ‘Christianization and Religious Conflict’ in Cameron, A., and Garnsey, P., (eds.), (1998), *Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 13: The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425* (Cambridge), 632–664; Inglebert, H., Destephen, S., and Dumézil, B., (eds.), (2010), *Le problème de la christianisation du monde antique* (Paris); Brown, P., (2013), *The Rise of Western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*, 10th anniversary revised edition (Hoboken NJ). For a good overview of historiography in the field of relations between pagans and Christians see: Brown, P., Lizzi Testa, R., (eds.), (2011), *Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire: The Breaking of a Dialogue (IVth – VIth Century A.D.)*, *Proceedings of the International Conference at the Monastery of Bose (October 2008)* (Zürich-Berlin). In a recent synthesis, Kreider develops the idea that the expansion of Christianity was driven by the example of the baptised and that catechesis on behaviour played a crucial role (Kreider, A., (2016), *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids MI), 133-184). Kreider gives important insights into the significance of pre-baptismal initiation and sponsorship for the process of Christianisation that match the broader aims of this thesis. However, the study focuses on the earliest sources from the third century, particularly the *Apostolic Tradition*, and does not take enough account of their idealised and normative character and the specific context of composition.

³ Brown, P., (1995), *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge), 16.

⁴ Markus, R., (1990), *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge), 1-17; on the ‘crisis of identity’ of Christians during the period and attempts to address it: 21-83.

⁵ Besides Rebillard’s recent studies (see note 7), see the surveys of Jacobs, A. S., (2008) ‘Jews and Christians’ and Salzman, M. R., (2008), ‘Pagans and Christians’, in Harvey, S. B., Hunter, D. G., (eds.), (2008), *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford, 2008), 169-185 and 186-202. For an enquiry on how Christians reflected in the West on the identity of the ‘average Christian’ in the fourth and fifth centuries see Piepenbrink, K., (2005), *Christliche Identität und Assimilation in der Spätantike: Probleme des Christseins in der Reflexion der Zeitgenossen* (Frankfurt am Main). A recent collection of papers also offers good overviews on conversion in link to the initiation process and identity formation: Bøgh, B. S., (ed.), (2014a), *Conversion and Initiation in Antiquity* (Frankfurt am Main), in particular Bøgh, B. S., (2014b), ‘Introduction’, at 9-23 and Jacobsen, A.-C., (2014), ‘Identity Formation through Catechetical Teaching in Early Christianity’, at 203-223 which provides further bibliography on the problematic uses of the concept of identity.

area is often missing from studies of religion in Late Antiquity: most people were neither strict Christians nor devoted pagans.”⁶

Most recently, offering a model to explore this grey area in late antique Africa in particular, Rebillard has criticised the idea of an overarching Christian identity and argued that Christians displayed multiple identities following a “lateral arrangement of membership sets”, religion constituting only one of them and not necessarily the most significant. Although clerics like Augustine precisely attempted to enforce a “hierarchical arrangement”, individuals did not see their Christian identity as exclusive as early Christian writers would have liked.⁷ Markus’ and Rebillard’s models open new ground for the study of Christianisation by investigating how clerics, often facing resistance, attempted to develop a cohesive Christian identity. However, they do not consider how religious belonging was concretely negotiated within Christian communities.

Full belonging to Christian communities was acquired through baptism since the first century, but from at least the third century and in the next centuries, a more complex organisation is attested: becoming Christian did not simply mean being baptised. The norm for individuals from any background entering Christian communities was to become catechumens and later, if they wished and were granted admission, to receive baptism after an intense preparation. Every individual wanting to become Christian had therefore to undergo an initiation divided into two main stages, which has been called the catechumenate in

⁶ Maxwell (2012), 866. Similarly, on the strong opposition drawn between pagans and Christians as a construct see Kahlos, M., (2007), *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures, c. 360-430* (Aldershot). Kahlos has coined the term ‘*incerti*’ (see *Ibid.* 30-34) to try to characterise these individuals who are neither hard-line pagans nor hard-line Christians.

⁷ Rebillard, E., (2015), ‘Late Antique Limits of Christianness: North Africa in the Age of Augustine’, in Rebillard, E., Rüpke, J., (eds.), (2015), *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Washington DC), 293- 318, at 300. See also Rebillard, E., (2012b), ‘Religious Sociology. Being Christian in the Time of Augustine’, in Vessey, M., and Reid, S., (eds.), (2012), *A companion to Augustine* (Chichester), 40-53. Rebillard, E., (2012a), *Christians and their many identities in late antiquity, North Africa, 200-450 C.E.* (Ithaca NY) provides a broader study, the introduction giving a good overview of the field.

modern scholarship.⁸ To focus on Latin terminology, candidates first became *catechumeni*⁹, translating the Greek κατηχοῦμενος from κατεχειν instruct orally, originally meaning instruction resounding in someone's ear. This status of hearer meant that they were part of the Christian community, but in a distant, liminal position.¹⁰ Catechumens would have only a partial access to the core teachings, rituals and expectations for the afterlife that were reserved to the more restricted community of the baptised; they nonetheless took part in daily liturgical practices and shared common beliefs. Many Christians spent most of their lives in this status.

Those who wished to be baptised, often many years later, had to enter a second phase of preparation, generally over several weeks before Easter, by giving their names to be written on a special register. The preparation leading to baptism was organised to convey the sense of a radical change: in the West from the fourth century catechumens received a new name, *competentes/electi*, and entered a specific ritual and catechetical preparation which included fasting, vigils, exorcisms, penance, regular examination and religious teaching, all meant to deeply transform them as they experienced the great cleansing of all past sins and a “new birth” into full Christian membership. Baptism was the outcome of this complete transformation of the self, bringing individuals to a new belonging within the group of the baptised Christians, the *fideles*, closely bound together by this sacramental initiation and their common celebration of the Christian mysteries.¹¹

⁸ The word ‘catechumenatus’ is never found in early Christian sources. It is already used by Aubespine, G. de, (1623), *De Veteribus Ecclesiae Ritibus, Observationum Libri duo* (Paris), 62 commenting on the canons about catechumens in the collection of the so-called council of Elvira.

⁹ The first mentions of *catechumenus* are in Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41 to condemn the lack of distinction between them and the baptised among heretics; *De corona* 2, 1 listing them as the lowest rank in the Church and *Adversus Marcionem* V, 7 (distinction between *fideles* and *catechumeni* of Marcion). As noted by Rebillard (2012a), 11 and Rebillard, E., ‘Becoming Christian in Carthage in the Age of Tertullian’, in Bøgh (2014a), 47-58, at 48 this presupposes that a peculiar status for catechumens was already in place in the third century, although evidence is scarce about its concrete organisation, beyond a few generic references. See *De anima* 9 (they are dismissed before the Eucharist); *De baptismo* 1, 1 and *De spectaculis* 1, 1 (two stages of progression); *De paenitentia* 6, 1 and 14-17 (employing the terms *audientes* and *novitoli*).

¹⁰ For the concept of liminality see note 37.

¹¹ This summary only presents broad features highlighted in early Christian sources from the West for the period under consideration; for more details see for instance studies in note 22.

This thesis investigates this peculiar organisation and the specific category of catechumens (*catechumeni*), their practices and their role in shaping Christian communities in late antique Africa from the fourth to the early sixth century. The choice to focus on Africa from the fourth century reflects both the available evidence and the current state of scholarship. In the western part of the Mediterranean, a small amount of allusive and well-studied sources is preserved in Tertullian and Cyprian,¹² there is then a large gap until ca. 350, the following period up to ca. 450 is the best documented, while later sources are particularly rare. As I shall show, most studies have either focused on the earliest evidence before the fourth century, investigated a single author, or offered syntheses across regions with a particular concentration on the period between c. 350 and 450. Detailed regional studies over a longer chronology are thus essential to renew our understanding of the catechumenate. In Africa, the extensive writings of Augustine of Hippo are by far the most abundant source; however, nearly contemporary evidence from the fourth and fifth centuries – council proceedings, sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus and anonymous sermons – and letters of Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe from the early sixth century provide a significant opportunity to study the history of the catechumenate on a wider chronological span. This thesis therefore concentrates on Africa starting from the mid-fourth century to highlight local diversity, make best use of Augustine’s *corpus*, trace the evolution of the catechumenate until the sixth century, and follow the early reception of Augustine’s writings on the catechumenate that became particularly influential in the middle ages until modern times.

¹² Besides the few references in Tertullian (see note 9), Cyprian is the only other source, with only a few mentions of *catechumeni*: see *Ad Quirinum* III, 98; *Ep.* 8, 3; 73, 22; *audientes* is employed in *Ep.* 18, 2 (permitting emergency baptism); *Ep.* 29, 2 (about *doctores* who teach *audientes*). Both authors have been studied in Harmless, W., (2014), *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 2nd edition (Collegeville MN), 37-56. Perpetua and other characters of the *Passio Perpetuae* 2, 1; 20, 8; 20, 10 are also said to be *catechumeni*, while *catechumeni* are mentioned in Pontius, *Vita Cypriani* 1, 2 (about Cyprian himself); 6, 4 with no further information however. In the fourth century, Optatus of Milevis’ works only include allusive references against Donatists which are considered in chapter 3.

The catechumenate and historical research

The catechumenate has been a widely neglected topic amongst historians. This may be due to the relatively scarce amount of available evidence on this aspect and its often allusive or interpretatively complex character,¹³ and to the fact that the study of the catechumenate has perhaps been seen as a topic only relevant for theological and liturgical studies. Most existing research has been carried out by liturgists and theologians investigating the history, theology and liturgy of baptism and Christian initiation more generally. Although a full overview of the evolution of scholarly work on the catechumenate would require a separate enquiry, key developments may be shortly summarised as follows. Before the nineteenth century, a number of studies attempting to provide systematic syntheses of the rites and practices of the early Church included learned discussions on the ancient catechumenate in general, for instance the influential works of Martène and Bingham.¹⁴ Later, the catechumenate attracted growing interest from liturgists and pastoral theologians, aiming at reconstructing the process of initiation in the early Church and in particular at gathering material to defend or reform catechism and religious instruction. Such scholarship, started particularly to develop in the second half of the nineteenth century in Germany,¹⁵ gaining further prominence in the twentieth century as part of an effort to produce summaries on early Christian liturgy.¹⁶

¹³ The statement of Robert Taft on the evidence in the East during Byzantine times is in many ways also true for the West: 'Though confusion is by no means a rarity in Byzantine documentation, the evidence for the catechumenate takes the prize: the only thing clear in it is its lack of clarity' (Taft, R., F., (2009), 'When did the Catechumenate Die Out in Constantinople?', in Alchermes, J. D., Evans, H. C., and Thelma, K. Th, (eds.), (2009), *Anathemata Eortika. Studies in Honor of Thomas F. Mathews* (Mainz), 288-295, at 294).

¹⁴ Martène, E., (1700), *De antiquis ecclesiae ritibus libri quatuor* (Rouen), esp. 1-162; Bingham, J., (1840), *Origines Ecclesiasticae; or, the Antiquities of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, book 10: 'Of the institution of the catechumens, and the first use of the creeds of the Church' and book 11: 'Of the rites and customs observed in the administration of baptism in the primitive Church' (London, 1840), 256-395 and 396-607 (first edition London, 1711). See as well the already mentioned investigation of de l'Aubespine (1623). An exploration of scholarship before 1700 is outside the scope of this short synthesis; however, Bingham's study, contains detailed notes that provide a good starting point.

¹⁵ See Palmer, Ch. D. F. von, (1857), 'Katechese, Katechetik, Katechumenen', *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* 7, 441-454; Zetzschwitz, C. A. G. von, (1863), *System der kirchlichen Katechetik*, volume I: *Der Katechumenat oder die kirchliche Erziehung nach Theorie und Geschichte: ein Handbuch namentlich für Seelsorger und Pädagogen* (Leipzig); Mayer, J., (1868), *Geschichte des Katechumenats und der Katechese in den ersten sechs Jahrhunderten* (Kempten); Weiss, A. G., (1869), *Die*

These studies anticipate a particularly important trend for the study of the catechumenate that relates to the preparation, convalidation and completion of the reforms sanctioned by the Second Vatican council (1962-1965). Indeed, the council restored what was thought to be the ancient catechumenate in a changing context, as Western Europe again became characterised by a missionary situation. The generalised practice of infant baptism and its organisation, which prevailed even for exceptional adult baptisms, with a reduced preparation concentrating on the role of sponsors and a theoretical catechism, seemed not, therefore, to match the needs of the time. The council aimed at proposing a new ecclesiology, where the restored catechumenate, with its structured period of preparation intended for new adult converts, would become of major importance. This new development explains that several studies were conducted on the catechumenate and baptism in the first centuries to bring a distant practice back to life. The discussions before and during Vatican II and subsequently the progressive implementation of the reforms sanctioned by the council in

altkirchliche Pädagogik dargestellt in Katechumenat und Katechese der ersten sechs Jahrhunderte (Freiburg); Probst, F., (1884), *Katechese und Predigt vom Anfang des vierten bis zum Ende des sechsten Jahrhunderts* (Breslau); Funk, F. X., (1886), 'Die Katechumenatsklassen und Busstationen in christlichen Alterthum,' *ThQ* 68, 356-390; Kraus, F. X., (1886), 'Katechumenen', *Real-Encyclopädie der christlichen Alterthümer* 2, 147-152; Weiss, A. G., (1886), 'Katechetenamt', 'Katechetischer Unterricht', *ibid.*, 136-138, 138-147; Holtzmann, H. J., 'Die Katechese der alten Kirche', in Harnack, A. von, Schurer, E., Holtzmann, H. J., *et al.* (1892), *Theologische Abhandlungen Carl von Weizsäcker, zu seinem Geburtstage 11. Dezember 1892* (Freiburg), 61-110; Funk, F. X., (1897), 'Die Katechumenatsklassen des christlichen Altertums', *Kirchengeschichtliche Ab-handlungen und Untersuchungen* 1, 182-209; Wiegand, F., (1899), *Die Stellung des Apostolischen Symbols im kirchlichen Leben des Mittelalters. I. (einziger) Teil, Symbol und Katechumenat* (Leipzig). On this scholarship mostly focusing on the catechumenate as a teaching process see Bizer, Ch., (1989), 'Katechetik', *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 18, 686-710. Outside Germany see particularly the synthesis of Corblet, J., (1881), 'Du catéchuménat, esquisse historique', *Revue de l'art chrétien* 25, 5-38.

¹⁶ See: Dölger, F. J., (1909), *Der Exorzismus im altchristlichen Taufritual* (Paderborn); Bareille, G., (1910), 'Catéchèse', 'Catéchuménat', *DTC* 2.2, 1877-1965 and 1968-1987; Schwartz, E., (1911), *Bußstufen und Katechumenatsklassen* (Strassburg), reprinted in *Id.*, (1963), *Gesammelte Schriften. Fünfter Band: Zum neuen Testamen und frühen Christentum* (Berlin), 274-362; Leclercq, H., (1925), 'Catéchèse-Catéchisme-Catéchumène', in *DACL* 2.2, 2530-2579; Puniet, P. de, (1925), 'Catéchuménat', *DACL* 2.2, 2579-2621; Dondeyne, A., (1932), 'La discipline des scrutins dans l'Eglise latine avant Charlemagne', *RHE* 28, 5-33 and 751-787; Capelle, B., (1933a), 'L'introduction du catéchuménat à Rome', *RecTh* 5, 129-154; Borella, P., (1939), 'La "missa" o "dimissio catechumenorum" nelle liturgie occidentali', *EphLit* 53, 60-110; Folkemer, L. D., (1946), 'A Study of the Catechumenate', *ChHist* 15, 286-307; Monachino, V., (1947), *La cura pastorale a Milano, Cartagine e Roma nel sec. IV* (Rome); Chavasse, A., (1948a), 'Les Deux rituels romain et gaulois de l'admission au catéchuménat que renferme le Sacramentaire Gélisien (Vat. Reg. 316)', in *Études de critique et d'histoire religieuse*, vol. offert à Léon Vaganay (Lyon), 79-98; *Id.* (1948b), 'Le carême romain et les scrutins pré-baptismaux avant le IXe siècle', *RecSR* 35, 325-381; Botte, B., (1957), 'Competentes', *RAC* 3, 266-268.

Catholic churches around the globe gave rise to numerous studies by local priests aiming at recovering the practices of the early Church for guidance in modern pastoral work, particularly in Western Europe from the late 1950s until today.¹⁷ Studies concentrated on the origins of practices, on the “patristic age” between c. 350 and 450, or on single authors to draw wide syntheses reconstructing the ancient practice of the Church.¹⁸

The important studies of Stenzel on baptism and of Dujarier on sponsorship and the catechumenate are good examples of such scholarship proposing synthetic views of the main authoritative sources. While Stenzel offered a broad overview of how the rites of baptism developed since the origins until the sixth century following a “genetic approach”, Dujarier focused on sources before 313 AD that would reflect the “original” catechumenate, in particular the now controversial *Apostolic Tradition*.¹⁹ These studies consciously aimed at

¹⁷ For an overview of these pastoral reforms and the scholars’ perspective: see Yarnold, E. J., (1999), “The Catechumenate for Adults Is To Be Restored”. Patristic Adaptation in the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults’, in Swanson, R. N., (ed.), (1999), *Continuity and Change in Christian Worship. Papers Read at the 1997 Summer Meeting and the 1998 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Woodbridge-Rochester NY), 478-494.

¹⁸ Origins: Turck, A., (1964), ‘Aux origines du catéchuménat’, *RSPH* 42, 20-31. ‘Patristic age’: Groppo, G., (1979), ‘L’evoluzione del catecumenato nella Chiesa antica dal punto di vista pastorale’, *Salesianum* 41, 235-255; Yarnold, E. J., (1992), ‘II. Initiation. The fourth and fifth centuries’, in Jones Ch., *et al.*, (1992), *The Study of Liturgy*, revised edition (London), 129-144; Yarnold, E. J., (1994), *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation. The Origins of the RCIA*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh); Pasquato, O., (2006), ‘Catechesi’, ‘Catecumenato/Discepolato’, *Nuovo dizionario patristico di antichità cristiane* 1 (2006), 902-960. Focus on specific patristic authors: Finn, Th., (1967), *The liturgy of baptism in the baptismal instructions of St. John Chrysostom* (Washington DC); Riley, H. M., (1974), *Christian initiation: a comparative study in the interpretation of the baptismal liturgy in the mystagogical writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Ambrose of Milan* (Washington DC); Satterlee, C. A., (2002), *Ambrose of Milan's method of mystagogical preaching* (Collegeville MN); Harmless (2014). Broader syntheses relying on the *Apostolic Tradition* but embracing Roman liturgical sources from the early middle ages: Maertens, Th., (1962), *Histoire et pastorale du rituel du catéchuménat et du baptême* (Bruges); Kretschmar, G., (1970), ‘Die Geschichte des Taufgottesdienstes in der alten Kirche’, *Leiturgia* 5, 1-348.

¹⁹ Stenzel, A., (1958), *Die Taufe: eine Genetische Erklärung der Taufliturgie* (Innsbruck); Dujarier, M., (1962a), *Le parrainage des adultes aux trois premiers siècles de l'Eglise* (Paris). Dujarier’s approach is reflected in his later syntheses on the catechumenate: Dujarier, M., (1979), *A History of the Catechumenate. The First Six Centuries* (New York); *Id.*, (1982), *Brève histoire du catéchuménat* (Abidjan); *Id.*, (1983), *L’initiation chrétienne des adultes. Commentaire historique et pastoral du nouveau rituel* (Abidjan). In the same trend see the volume of *La Maison Dieu* in 1962 dedicated to Christian initiation. Until recently, the *Apostolic Tradition* was thought to be a work written by Hippolytus of Rome in the third century: the text has been reconstructed from the supposed lost original Greek thanks to the several witnesses in Latin and oriental languages, see Botte, B., (ed.), (1989), *La Tradition Apostolique de saint Hippolyte: essai de reconstitution*, 5th edition (Münster). New research has however rejected the authorship and the early dating, questioning the reconstruction of the original archetype of the work, particularly because it is based on a great number of witnesses with numerous variants (see for instance Bradshaw, P., (1996), ‘Redating the Apostolic Tradition: Some Preliminary Steps’, in Mitchell, N., and Baldovin, J., (ed.), (1996), *Rule of Prayer, Rule of Faith: Essays in Honor of Aidan Kavanagh* (Collegeville MN), 3-17; *Id.*, (2001), ‘The

addressing modern pastoral concerns and thus at providing a standardised view of the ancient catechumenate that would pertain to all regions and every Christian community. However, especially recently, liturgists have developed new insights on the regional variety of liturgical practices and refrained from quick judgments and attempts to reconstruct a single and original pattern of initiation.²⁰ These insights have been applied in broader studies on the origins and developments of the rites and theology of baptism and Christian initiation in general, with little attention to the catechumenate however, particularly in the English-speaking world.²¹

More generally, even in recent scholarship dealing with fourth and fifth-century sources in particular and taking regional diversity into account, research has specifically concentrated on the catechumenate as an initiation process, particularly focusing on the intensive ritual preparation preceding baptism during Lent,²² and on its teaching dimension.²³

Problems of a New Edition of the Apostolic Tradition', in Taft, R. F., and Winkler, G., (ed.), (2001), *Comparative liturgy fifty years after Anton Baumstark (1872-1948): acts of the international congress: Rome, 25-29 September 1998* (Rome), 613-622; Marksches, Ch., (2001), 'Neue zur sogenannten *Traditio apostolica*', *ibid.*, 583-598). An English translation with a synoptic view of the texts is provided by Bradshaw, P., Johnson, M. E., and Edward Phillips, L., (2002), *The Apostolic Tradition. A Commentary* (Minneapolis). Most recently the discovery of a new Ethiopian manuscript shall lead to a reassessment of the question (see Bausi, A., (2011), 'La nuova versione etiopica della *Traditio Apostolica*: edizione e traduzione preliminare', in Buzi, P., and Camplani, A., (eds.), (2011), *Christianity in Egypt: Literary production and intellectual trends. Studies in honor of Tito Orlandi* (Rome), 19-69).

²⁰ For a particularly cogent overview and refutation of older scholarship see, Bradshaw, P., (2002), *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 2nd edition (New York).

²¹ These studies are particularly attentive to regional diversity but explore baptism and Christian initiation in general rather than the catechumenate: Saxer, V., (1988), *Les rites de l'initiation chrétienne du IIe au VIe siècle. Esquisse historique et signification d'après leur principaux témoins* (Spoleto); Johnson, M. E., (2007), *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Collegeville MN); Johnson, M. E., (2008), 'Christian initiation', in Harvey-Hunter (2008), 693-710; Ferguson, E., (2009), *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids MI); Gellholm, D., Vegge, T. and Norderval, O., (eds.), (2011), *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Berlin). Bradshaw, P., (2009), *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (London) is a noteworthy exception as it includes (at 55-68) a study on catechumens and the prohibition to hear the Gospel in the first centuries. Gavrilyuk, P. L., (2007), *Histoire du catéchuménat dans l'Eglise ancienne* (Paris) explores the catechumenate regionally over a long chronology, however it mostly focuses on catechesis: for this trend see note 23. Ferguson, E., (ed.), (1993), *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church* (New York-London) assembles previously published papers on conversion, Christianisation and Christian initiation.

²² For wide critical summaries: Cavallotto, G., (1996), *Catechumenato antico. Diventare cristiani secondo i padri* (Bologna); Metzger, M., Drews, W., and Brakmann, H., (2004), 'Katechumenat', *RAC* 20, 497-574. The focus on the baptismal preparation also largely applies to the studies cited in notes 16 and 21.

²³ Ferguson, E., (2001), 'Catechesis and Initiation', in Kreider (2001), 229-268; Satterlee (2002); Colish, M. L., (2005), *Ambrose's patriarchs. Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame IN); Gavriyuk (2007); Finn, Th., (2013), 'Catechesis, Catechumenate, early church', in Bagnall, R. S., *et al.*, (eds.), (2013), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (Malden MA), 1368-70; Harmless (2014). A similar focus on the catechumenate as "catechesis" and a "curriculum" is adopted in Schwartz, D. L., (2013), *Paideia and cult:*

In fact, fourth and fifth-century sources include abundant baptismal catecheses from leading figures like Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia, while Egeria's *Itinerarium* provides a unique account of the baptismal preparation.²⁴ Scholars like Saxer have therefore given great weight to fourth- and fifth-century sources while dismissing the later evolution as a progressive ritualistic decay of the early Church discipline with the generalisation of infant baptism.²⁵ Moreover, the study of the *Apostolic Tradition*, an ideal and normative source, has led scholars, particularly Dujarier, to suppose that while in the third century there was a well-organised and rigorous integration of catechumens lasting three years prior to the request for baptism or less for exceptionally zealous catechumens and a designed period of instruction, any strict regulation and framework designed for them disappeared in the fourth century, with the decay of the catechumenate and the widespread postponement of baptism.²⁶ As a consequence, little is known about the practices and status of catechumens before entering the baptismal preparation and the evolution of the catechumenate more generally beyond the Patristic period.

Christian initiation in Theodore of Mopsuestia (Washington DC), 2. This perpetuates the German tradition presented in note 15.

²⁴ On pre-baptismal catechesis, besides the studies quoted in note 23 see for instance: Touton, G., (1951), 'La méthode catéchétique de St Cyrille de Jérusalem comparée à celles de St Augustin et de Théodore de Mopsueste', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 1, 265-285; Daniélou, H., Charlat, R. du, (1968), *La catéchèse aux premiers siècles* (Paris); Saldarini, G., (1970), 'La catechesi nella tradizione patristica', *Sacra Dottrina* 15, 49-75; Riley (1974); Janeras, S., (1976), 'Sobre el cicle de predicació de les antigues catequesis baptismals', *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 1, 159-182; Brock, S., (1980), 'Some early Syriac baptismal commentaries', *OCP* 46 (1980), 209-261; Brakmann, H., and Pasquato, O., (2004), 'Katechese-Katechismus', *RAC* 20, 422-496; Pasquato (2006), 902-933.

²⁵ Saxer (1988), 590-591, 634-636; see as well, for example: Righetti, M., (1988), *Manuale di storia liturgica*, 2nd edition (Milan, 1988), II, 167 and 244-245; IV, 60-61; Cavallotto (1996), 209; Wahle, S., (2008), 'Gestalt und Deutung der christlichen Initiation im mittelalterlichen lateinischen Westen', in Leonhard, C., Olbrich, R., and Lange, C., (eds.), (2008), *Die Taufe. Einführung in Geschichte und Praxis* (Darmstadt), 29-48, at 29. See chapter 6 p. 241 n. 59 for such views about John's letter to Senarius.

²⁶ For instance Dujarier (1979), 92-97; Dujarier (1982), 69-72. See as well Busch, B., (1938), 'De initiatione christiana secundum sanctum Augustinum', *EphLit* 52, 159-78 and 358-483, at 424; Jungmann, J. A., (1960), *The Early Liturgy, to the Time of Gregory the Great* (London), 248-249; Maertens (1962), 116-120; van der Meer, F., (1961), *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, translated by Brian Battershaw and George R. Lamb (London), 356-357; Lynch, J., (1986), *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton NJ), 94-95. These views are rightly rejected by Harmless (2014), 134 n. 8 and 182 n. 4 particularly on the basis of Bradshaw (2002).

The situation for the study of Africa corresponds to the wider trends in scholarship. Augustine's prominent position in the religious history of the West has led researchers to study, beyond the rites of admission into the catechumenate, the few available pre-baptismal catecheses and references to rites of preparation in detail.²⁷ Little attention has been devoted to the peculiar category of the *catechumeni*, their status and significance in Christian communities. Harmless' book, first published in 1995 and updated in 2014 shortly before his death, is the most important study on the catechumenate in late antique Africa, focusing on Augustine.²⁸ It is part of the trends highlighted. Published in the aftermath of the implementation of the new reforms on the catechumenate in the Catholic Church in the USA, Harmless's book reacted against the focus on the ritual dimension of the catechumenate that left pastors with little guidance when teaching catechumens.²⁹ In the revised edition, Harmless situated his work in the perspective of Catholic *ressourcement* and emphasised the need to "return to the sources" for the organisation of contemporary catechesis.³⁰ Recognising the impossibility of resurrecting the ancient practice, his book therefore focused on Augustine with an "educator's eye", to "reconstruct his working curriculum", providing first and foremost an attentive study of Augustine's catechesis.³¹

²⁷ Major studies are Harmless (2014), 291-403 and Poque, S., (transl., not.), *SC* (1966), 9-153. See as well: Roetzer, W., (1930), *Des heiligen Augustinus Schriften als Liturgie-Geschichtliche Quelle. Eine Liturgie-Geschichtliche Studie* (Munich), 143-172; Busch (1938) with a good overview of earlier scholarship at 162-164 and some attention to regional diversity; Monachino (1947), 171-183; Audet, Th.-A., (1954), 'Note sur les catéchèses baptismales de S. Augustin', in *Augustinus Magister* (Paris), I, 151-60; van der Meer (1961), 357-382; Latte R. de, (1975), 'Saint Augustin et le baptême: étude liturgico-historique du rituel baptismal des adultes chez Saint Augustin', *QL* 56, 177-223; Saxer (1988), 381-399; Lamirande, E., (1992a), 'Catechumenus', *AL* 1, fasc. 5-6, 788-794; Grossi, V., (1993), *La catechesi battesimale agli inizi del V secolo. Le fonti agostiniane*, 2nd edition (Rome), 45-74; Rodomonti, A., (1995), 'Note al "sermo de symbolo ad Catechumenos" di S. Agostino', *Orpheus* 16, 127-139; Cavallotto (1996), 164-194; Gavriluk (2007), 297-318; Johnson (2007), 185-198; Ferguson (2009), 776-816; Wills, G., (2012), *Font of Life* (Oxford), 137-171; Jensen, R.M., Patout Burns Jr., J., (eds.), (2015), *Christianity in Roman Africa. The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids MI-Cambridge), 204-220.

²⁸ Harmless (2014).

²⁹ *Ibid.* 16-25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, XXV. On *ressourcement* see the helpful notes in Harmless (2014), 20-25. The refounded catechumenate (RCIA) is centred on rites particularly because its main sources include the *Apostolic Tradition* and the "Gelasian" sacramentary in the manuscript *Vat. Reg. 316*, both almost completely silent about catechesis.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 26-28.

Fundamentally, the specific agendas and the questions addressed in this scholarship impregnated by pastoral concerns, although extremely useful for the study of specific rites of the catechumenate and of the catechetical function of sermons have only given a limited perspective. Scholarship has often concentrated on the earliest or best evidence, particularly neglectful of sources beyond the “Fathers” from the fifth and sixth centuries. The catechumenate has not been considered as an alternative and peculiar way of being Christian which shaped the process of Christianisation. The lack of interest in catechumens results from the fact that baptism has generally been seen as the only normative marker of Christian membership.³² As a result, early Christianity has often been studied in a dialogue with modern assumptions, the catechumenate being considered as a temporary intensive preparation to baptism that declined in the fourth century when the “real” catechumenate was supposedly restricted to a few weeks before Lent. The status of catechumens in the fourth and fifth centuries is presented as that of nominal Christians, resulting from the failed attempts of the ancient churches in implementing swift baptism. Evidence for emergency baptism, particularly funerary inscriptions, and for widespread postponing of baptism amongst fourth-century emperors, together with repeated calls by bishops against catechumens delaying baptism, were commonly understood by scholars as a failure of the churches and were often connected to the supposed evolution of Christianity in the post-Constantinian era. The modern stereotype developed of masses of catechumens who would have nominally adhered to Christianity out of convenience, putting off baptism as long as possible, often until death.³³ This stereotype,

³² A striking exception is Lamirande, E., (1963), ‘La Signification de *Christianus* dans la théologie de saint Augustin et la tradition ancienne’, *REAug* 9, 221-234 who particularly well highlights the difference between our modern understanding of Christian and the broader sense that it had at Augustine’s time and the ambiguities that it created.

³³ Besides studies in note 26, see: Büsching, A. F., (1747), *Dissertatio historico-ecclesiastica de procrastinatione baptismi apud veteres eiusque caussis* (Halle); Wiegand (1899), 122; Dölger, F. J., (1913a), ‘Die Taufe Konstantins und ihre Probleme’, in Dölger, F. J., (ed.), (1913b), *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit: gesammelte Studien. Festgabe zum Konstantin-Jubiläum 1913 und zum goldenen Priesterjubiläum von Mgr. Dr. A. De Waal* (Freiburg), 377-447; Monachino (1947), 33; Chavasse, A., (1951), ‘Histoire de l’initiation chrétienne des enfants, de l’Antiquité à nos jours’, *LMD* 28, 26-44; Mesot, J., (1958), *Die Heidenbekehrung bei Ambrosius von Mailand* (Schöneck-Beckenried), 74-89; Dujarier (1962a), 36-46; Dujarier, M., (1962b), ‘L’évolution de la pastorale catéchuménale aux six premiers siècles de l’Eglise’, *LMD*

however, has been recently rejected. Rebillard has offered an alternative solution to the evidence about postponement through the study of Augustine's sermons. By emphasising that complaints about delaying baptism in Augustine relate to the specific liturgical context of calls to baptism at the beginning of Lent, Rebillard concluded that there was no widespread postponement of baptism by indifferent catechumens in the early Church. Rejecting these negative judgments, Rebillard went further to conclude that catechumens did not constitute a pastoral problem for Augustine.³⁴ Harmless followed this lead but remarked that Rebillard's conclusion should be nuanced: bishops were eager to maximise the success of their institution by promoting baptism, while it was not a "massive problem" for them.³⁵ Rebillard and Harmless recently agreed that there were no "masses of indifferent catechumens" delaying baptism until death.³⁶ While this new scholarship rightly rejects the generalisation of deathbed baptism, I argue that it still does not take enough account of the significance of catechumens as a specific category of late antique Christianity.

This thesis shall show that the negative appraisal concerning the fourth- and fifth-century catechumenate, as well as the relative disinterest in the *catechumeni* in early Christian studies in general result from a lack of enquiry on the *catechumeni* as a Christian category in its own right in late antiquity, well beyond the third century. The investigation on Augustine shall considerably nuance Dujarier's views and go beyond the recent minimising of the practice of postponing baptism by showing the significance of *catechumeni* as a liminal category in

71, 46-61; Kretschmar (1970), 147-148; Schmitz, J., (1975), *Gottesdienst im altchristlichen Mailand: eine liturgiewissenschaftliche Untersuchung über Initiation und Messfeier während des Jahres zur Zeit des Bischofs Ambrosius (Obit. 397)* (Cologne), 30-34; Nagel, E., (1980), *Kindertaufe und Taufaufschub* (Frankfurt am Main), 109-119; Janssens, J., (1981), *Vita e morte del cristiano negli epitaffi di Roma anteriore al sec. VII* (Rome), 33; Saxer (1988), 424; Grossi (1993), 17-18; Cavallotto (1996), 253-258; Brown (1998), 657-658; Metzger-Drews-Brakmann (2004), 518-519; Roten, Ph. de, (2005), *Baptême et mystagogie: enquête sur l'initiation chrétienne selon s. Jean Chrysostome* (Fribourg), 188; Pasquato (2006), 945-956; Gavriluk (2007), 288-289; Johnson (2007), 115-119. A good synthesis in Ferguson (2009), 617-626.

³⁴ Rebillard, E., (1998), 'La figure du catéchumène et le problème du délai du baptême dans la pastorale d'Augustin. A propos du *post-tractatum* Dolbeau 7: *De sepultura catechumenorum*', in Madec, G., (ed.), (1998), *Augustin prédicateur (395-411). Actes du Colloque International de Chantilly (5-7 septembre 1996)* (Paris), 285-292 translated as *Id.*, 'Catechumens and the delay of baptism in the preaching of Augustine' in *Id.*, (2013), *Transformations of Religious Practices in Late Antiquity* (London), 37-46; Rebillard (2012b), 40-53. Rebillard's views confirm doubts already expressed in Monachino (1947), 171.

³⁵ Harmless (2014), 229; more broadly: 66-70, 225-229.

³⁶ Rebillard (2012a), 65; Harmless (2014), 229.

Augustine's life and pastoral care, particularly his effort to include them in his teaching. The study of other African evidence shall reinforce this conclusion by shedding light on attempts in regulating the position of *catechumeni* in Christian communities and on the role of rites and catechesis during the baptismal preparation for creating cohesion and defining community boundaries. The supposed "ritualisation" of the catechumenate with the spread of infant baptism shall similarly be reconsidered through the sixth-century evidence clearly illustrating the continuity of pastoral issues from the preceding centuries in a changing context. Van Gennep's definition of the middle stage in rites of passage as a liminal period, between rites of separation and incorporation, provides insights into the relevance of progressive phases of integration in the formation of Christian communities and their self-identification. Moreover, Turner's characterisation of the liminal phase in ritual processes as a period when individuals are "betwixt and between" and contribute to upset and redefine society may fruitfully be applied to the category of *catechumeni* in late antiquity to stress their significance.³⁷ While I employ liminality as a useful concept, this thesis however is not a study of ritual *per se* but a study of discussion of ritual in late antique Africa, demonstrating the need to contextualise the evidence.³⁸

³⁷ Gennep, A. van, (1909), *Les rites de passage* (Paris), esp. 14 and 133-136 (applied to Christian baptism, however blurring the distinction between the first phase of the catechumenate and the baptismal preparation). For Turner see for example Turner, V., (1969), *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure* (London), esp. 94-130 on liminality and *communitas*. Turner, however, paved the way for the concept to be used in a much more flexible way to analyse modern societies, with the coinage of the term "liminoid" as a permanent liminal state. This reduced the specific significance of liminality to interpret rites of passage. For a recent overview of these two figures and of scholarship on liminality, with more literature: Thomassen, B., (2014), *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (Farnham-Burlington VT), 21-89 and some new avenues for research at 90-110. On ritual theory more generally see Bell, C., (1992), *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York-Oxford, 1992).

³⁸ See further: Buc, P., (2001), *Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton NJ-Oxford).

Argument

This thesis intends to shift away from scholarship impregnated by pastoral concerns focused on resurrecting the ancient catechumenate of a “golden age” as a standard initiation process. It will stress that the peculiar liminal category of catechumens and the organisation of the catechumenate greatly mattered to how the community negotiated its boundaries in late antique Africa until at least the sixth century. First, I demonstrate that the catechumenate was a highly local and changing organisation: sources do not provide evidence for a single and standard way of initiating people to Christianity. Even within a limited geographical area like Africa, practices varied widely and there was a high degree of freedom in the way catechumens were initiated.

Second, I show that most sources on catechumens pertain to a context of polemics: while the study of Christianity in Africa is to a great extent the story of a series of controversies which permeate much of the literary production, this aspect appears to be particularly relevant for catechumens. Because of their liminal position, their integration constituted a major stake in disputes between competing churches and doctrines. The contextualisation of Augustine yields particularly important results, showing how catechumens were disputed against Donatists and their rites debated in controversies with Donatists and Pelagians. In particular, this thesis defends the innovative hypothesis that Augustine was deeply involved in the teaching of catechumens in Carthage at the request of the local clergy, precisely because his expertise was deemed fundamental to lead his party in the context of religious tensions. Thus, practices were subject to debate, could be adapted and varied locally, precisely as a result of a constant and creative re-thinking of the initiation into the Christian community within a context of intense rivalry, especially in Carthage.

Third, I argue that the development of the liminal category of the catechumens was a necessary and essential feature of early Christianity, offering a powerful tool for renewal of the

whole community by re-negotiating its boundaries. At the same time, the gradual incorporation of liminal Christians into a closely-knit community represented a challenge for clerics attempting to create a uniform Christian sense of belonging based on baptism. Exploring the development of the catechumenate in a context of polemics is therefore of crucial importance to better understand the dynamics behind conversion to Christianity and more broadly how Christian belonging was progressively defined.

A major contribution of the thesis is to provide both a detailed study of Augustine and a broader investigation on the catechumenate and catechumens in late antique Africa. The focus is not so much on Augustine, as it is on Augustine and his world: adopting a wider chronology counterbalancing Augustine's influential account, I investigate available sources from c. 360 to Ferrandus' and Fulgentius' letters in the early sixth century. The thesis particularly underlines continuity in terms of the catechumens' significance in Christian communities and the pastoral problems raised by their liminality in African sources from the fourth to the sixth century, across the Roman and Vandal periods. The catechumenate for adults and its peculiar function in Christian communities can be traced throughout the period as the major process through which individuals negotiated their Christian belonging. This demonstrates the continuation of a long-lasting African tradition and leads me to assess the degree to which Augustine's writings influenced the rest of the preserved evidence; while fifth-century evidence seems to share a similar environment with Augustine, later sixth-century sources clearly borrowed Augustine's polemical arguments, theology and language in the controversies of the time against Arians and Pelagians. This reclaiming of tradition led to attempts to draw normative syntheses on the catechumenate that would define practices and ideas for future generations. Thus, this study, by comparing Augustine to near contemporary sources and by focusing on how later writers integrated his views on the catechumenate, both contributes to restore a sense of balance in the study of late antique Africa and sheds light on

the reception of Augustine, an area of research that has raised increasing interest in recent scholarship.³⁹

Method

I have chosen to adopt a definition of the catechumenate that is as broad as possible. I consider it as the time spent by individuals in the community as catechumens from their admission into the Christian community until their baptism – thus without restricting it to a particular aspect, whether teaching or rituals. The selection of material has greatly benefited from Harmless' charts giving a list of all the references to catechumens identified in Augustine's writings.⁴⁰ Harmless however did not focus on these charts but investigated more broadly the teaching methods employed by Augustine and explored what both catechumens and baptised Christians heard mostly from Augustine's preaching.⁴¹ Integrating Harmless' findings into a broader set of evidence including treatises and letters, this study seeks to open new avenues of research and cast light on what Augustine recommended and taught to catechumens. The evidence assembled in Harmless' charts constituted the starting point of my enquiry; I then expanded it first through a detailed search in the *Library of Latin Texts* (Brepols) database, where all works of Augustine are indexed, based on the main keywords referring to catechumens, particularly *catechumenus*, with all its spellings, and identified several additional occurrences.⁴² Then, I have read in detail a number of particularly relevant works: *De baptismo*; *De catechizandis rudibus*; *Confessiones*; *De fide et operibus*; *De fide et symbolo*; *De gestis*

³⁹ See particularly Dolbeau, F., (2004), 'Un demi-siècle de travaux philologiques sur Augustin', *REAug* 50, 271-293; Graham, S. R., (2005), *The dissemination of North African Christian and intellectual culture in Late Antiquity* (University of California Los Angeles PhD. Thesis); Weidmann, C., (2012), 'Augustine's works in circulation' and Leyser, C., (2012), 'Augustine in the Latin West, ca. 430-ca. 900', in Vessey-Reid (2012), respectively at 431-449 and 450-464; Dolbeau, F., (2013), 'La transmission des oeuvres d'Augustin et l'évolution intellectuelle de l'Occident médiéval (Ve-XVe siècles)', *ETHL* 89/4, 229-252; Pollman, K., and Willemien, O., (eds.), (2013), *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine* (Oxford).

⁴⁰ Harmless (2014), 229-234 and 348-350 provides charts focusing on *catechumeni* and *competentes*.

⁴¹ For instance, Harmless (2014), 235-283 explores a winter preaching series (on which see chapter 4 note 2) preached to a mixed audience.

⁴² www.brepols.net (accessed 20/7/2016).

Pelagii; *De Peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum*; *Retractationes*, and the Dolbeau sermons.⁴³

The amount of evidence assembled allows a renewed study. The investigation shows that in comparison to other contemporary sources, Augustine's *corpus* is not only exceptional for its size, dwarfing the literary production of any other author from the Latin West, but also for the attention devoted to *catechumeni*. While the baptismal preparation of candidates (*competentes*) during the Lenten period has received much attention from scholars, particularly because it can be studied in a relatively wide range of sources in and beyond Augustine, very few sources are available to study what it meant to become and be a *catechumenus* in a Christian community of late Antiquity. Augustine is therefore a major source and the starting point of this enquiry to study the *catechumeni* as a specific Christian category of great significance.

Moreover, Augustine is not only a witness of the distinction between *catechumeni* and *fideles* as two categories of Christians (*christiani*),⁴⁴ but he also draws a consistent distinction between the *catechumeni* on one side, and the *competentes*, the candidates for baptism on the other, as already noted by Poque and Harmless.⁴⁵ These are clearly technical terms consistently used: in the *De fide et operibus* and Sermon 392, the bishop distinguishes between two categories of partially initiated Christians with the terms *catechumenus* and *competens*.⁴⁶ Evidence on the rite of giving one's name to enter the preparation for baptism shows that for Augustine *competens* is not merely a category of *catechumenus* but truly represents a new status, different from that of *catechumenus*: the transition enacted by giving one's name transformed the candidate's position

⁴³ See Dolbeau, F., (2009), *Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique*, 2nd revised edition (Paris).

⁴⁴ See Augustine, S. 46, 31: "Quaeris: 'Paganusne es, an christianus?' Respondet: 'Christianus': ovis est enim Dei. Quaeris ne forte catechuminus sit, et irruat sacramentis. Respondet: 'Fidelis'" (Lambot, C., (ed.), CCSL 41 (1961), 557); *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2: "Interroga hominem: 'Christianus es?' Respondet tibi: 'Non sum', si paganus est aut Iudaeus. Si autem dixerit: 'Sum'; adhuc quaeris ab eo: 'Catechumenus, an fidelis?'" (Willems, R. (ed.), CCSL 36 (1955), 382). See more on *christianus* and *catechumenus* in Lamirande (1963; 1992a); *Id.*, (1992b), 'Christianus (christianismus, christianitas)', *AL* 1, fasc. 5/6, 842-845.

⁴⁵ Poque, S., (1971), 'Trois semaines de prédication à Hippone en février-mars 407. Le *Tractatus in Iohannis Euangelium XI* et l'appel aux catéchumènes', *ReAug* 7, 169-187, at 178-183; Harmless (2014), 295.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *F. et op.* 6.9; S. 392, 2.

within the community, which was reflected in the terminology.⁴⁷ As Poque explains, using Augustine's imagery, *catechumeni* are conceived in the womb but *competentes* are already in the stage of labour.⁴⁸ Indeed, Augustine never employs *catechumenus* to refer to the current status of his hearers in any of his sermons preached to *competentes* on the creed and the Lord's Prayer.⁴⁹ While some inconsistency of vocabulary could be understandable in other contexts, in the case of preached texts to his congregation, the use of specific technical terms corresponds to specific categories in his audience. Thus, the existence of a specific category of the *catechumeni* is a remarkable fact that shall guide our study of Augustine's *corpus*, shedding light on a little-known aspect of late antique Christianity. Instead of considering the catechumenate only as a process of initiation from conversion to baptism, I take Augustine's *corpus* as a case study to explore the role of *catechumeni* as a longstanding group within Christian communities of late Antiquity.

Bearing in mind that Augustine certainly offers a very specific viewpoint, his assumptions are built on a shared world. This is particularly relevant for the study of preaching: sermons are dialogues and not merely monologues as they might seem. Sermons speak the words of the preacher but they still convey much on the shared experience of the preacher and the audience.⁵⁰ To some extent, even the rest of Augustine's literary production needs to be understood as more than a single voice speaking: letters are shared documents with an audience and an influence going far beyond the limited dialogue of correspondents, while treatises are without exception writings reacting to specific situations, often written to

⁴⁷ Augustine, *S.* 216; 228, 1; 229, 1: "Quando catechumeni differebamini, in horreo servabamini. Nomina vestra dedistis, coepistis moli ieiuniis et exorcismis" (*PL* 38 (1841), 116). The catechumens' status is distinguished from the giving of names.

⁴⁸ Poque (1971), 178-182.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *S.* 56-59 and 212-215; in *S.* 212, 2 he speaks of their status of *catechumeni* in the past tense: "hoc est ergo symbolum quod vobis per scripturas et sermones ecclesiasticos iam catechuminis insinuat est" (Poque, *S.*, (ed., transl., not.), *SC* 116 (1966), 184). See also *S.* 351-352 on penitence; this material is discussed in Poque (1971).

⁵⁰ See Rebillard, E., (1997), 'Interaction between the Preacher and his Audience: The Case-Study of Augustine's Preaching on Death', *Studia Patristica* 31, 86-96; Dagemark, S., (2004), 'Augustine's Sermons. Circulation and Authenticity Evidenced by Examples of Preaching and Response', in *Comunicazione e Ricezione del Documento Cristiano in Epoca Tardoantica*, (2004), *XXXII Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità cristiana, Roma, 8-10 maggio 2003* (Rome), 693-761.

respond to a particular need or controversy. They may reflect shared problems and ideas: when not actively promoting the diffusion of his works, the author was aware of the potential spread of his writings to wider audiences and wrote accordingly. Thus, the study of Augustine sheds light more broadly on the importance of the *catechumeni* in Africa.

In this thesis, however, I study Augustine as the starting point of a wider investigation on African practices and thought: the exploration of contemporary and later African sources restores some balance in the evidence and leads to a refined understanding of the significance of the catechumenate in late antique Africa. This broader scope shows strong commonalities in the evidence, so correcting the impression of Augustine's idiosyncrasy and situating him in a broader African environment. At the same time, it sheds light on local adaptations and leads me to evaluate the weight of Augustine's influence on other Africans. Particular attention has therefore been paid to analyse as much other African evidence as possible. Archaeological evidence does not offer clear clues on the catechumenate in North Africa: even epigraphical sources are of little help, since they mostly consist of standardised funerary inscriptions rarely containing details about initiation beyond the mention of baptism.⁵¹ The investigation has therefore concentrated on literary sources, selecting the evidence thanks to repertories listing sources from the fourth to the sixth century.⁵² For the fourth and fifth centuries, council proceedings and the collection of sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus provide most of the evidence; I complemented this with a preliminary exploration of the numerous anonymous and pseudo-epigraphic sermons.⁵³ After the fifth century, sources are particularly rare: there

⁵¹ The only relevant evidence found during my research are two inscriptions mentioning *audientes* which could be interpreted as references to catechumens: CIL VIII 23048 (Africa, Byzacena): *Bonifatia audi/ens in p(ace) christi vi/xit annu / unu et m(enses) IIII* and [...]*s audien/[...]vix an/[...]s duo/[...]in christo* referred in Mazzoleni, D., (2002), *Epigrafi del mondo cristiano antico* (Rome), 36 and Carletti, C., (2008), *Epigrafia dei cristiani in Occidente dal III al VII secolo. Ideologia e prassi* (Bari), 55. The second fragment is dated between the fourth and the sixth centuries by Duval, N., (1976), *La mosaïque funéraire dans l'art paléochrétien* (Ravenna), 97-119. These fragments are ambiguous and cannot be used as relevant evidence for the study of the catechumenate.

⁵² CPL; CPPM; Gryson, R., (2007), *Répertoire général des auteurs ecclésiastiques Latins de l'Antiquité et du Haut moyen âge*, 2 volumes (Freiburg).

⁵³ This excludes a short reference to catechumens in Optatus of Milevis' *Contra Parmenianum*, discussed in chapter 3 in connection to Augustine's interpretation of 1 Cor 3, 6 against Donatists. Hagiography could not

are no well-localised sermons that would directly relate to the liturgical performance of the catechumenate and would give us an idea of how communities practiced initiation.⁵⁴ I nevertheless identified particularly informative evidence in letters exchanged between Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe in the early sixth century, detached from the initiation process and attempting to define how the catechumenate should be understood more generally. These letters are not isolated documents but reflect a trend reaching beyond Africa. I have therefore chosen to put them in a wider context of debates by analysing the remarkably similar exchange between the deacon John and Senarius written in Italy around the same period.

This thesis aims to renew scholarship not only by considering a wider spectrum of sources, but also by adopting a historical approach, therefore devoting constant attention to the specific context of writing of each piece of evidence. In both the reformist approach and the more general field of liturgical studies, African sources, and particularly Augustine, have been studied as evidence of North-African initiation rites and catechesis, or as an illustration of the “patristic” perspective, merging all evidence as if every text of Augustine, for instance, could be studied as part of a same standard and coherent whole that would constitute Augustine’s contribution to the study of the catechumenate. Thus, a fuller contextualisation of

be considered within the limits of this study. Nevertheless, out of the thirty late antique *Acta* and *Passiones*, those dating from the second half of the fourth century and later, whether “Donatist” or “Catholic”, do not contain any particularly relevant information on the catechumenate. On these *Passiones* see the forthcoming book of S. Fialon derived from her doctoral thesis: Fialon, S., (2012), ‘*Mens immobilis*’. *Recherches sur le corpus latin des actes et des passions en Afrique romaine (IIe- VIe siècles)* (Université de Montpellier PhD. Thesis).

⁵⁴ The sermons attributed to Fulgentius (FU s Frai in Gryson (2007), I, 498), not to be confused with the pseudo-Fulgentius collection of eighty sermons (PS-FU s in Gryson (2007), I, 499-501) do not contain evidence on the catechumenate. Pseudo-epigraphic and anonymous sermons of possible late antique African origin are more informative: some are perhaps authentic sermons of Fulgentius according to Dolbeau, see PS-AU s Dol 1-7, PS-FU s Mor and s Lem in Gryson (2007), I, 502-503; Dolbeau, F., (2001), ‘Sept sermons antiques tirés d’un homélaire latin d’Olomouc’, *RBen* 111, 353-398 and Dolbeau, F., (2002), ‘A propos des sermons d’Olomouc: un post-scriptum’, *RBen* 112, 236-245 reprinted in Dolbeau, F., (2005), *Augustin et la prédication en Afrique. Recherches sur divers sermons authentiques, apocryphes ou anonymes* (Paris), 399-445 and 446-455; while Dolbeau first expressed doubts, at *ibid.* 693 he asserts that the sermons should be attributed to Fulgentius. Besides issues of dating and localisation, the detailed study of all these sermons is beyond the scope of this thesis; a sample is examined in chapter 5; I have carried a more extensive preliminary investigation on these sermons in my article ‘The catechumenate in anonymous sermons from the late antique West’ to be published in 2017 in *Studia Patristica* (Leuven).

the evidence in Augustine, putting it in the chronology of his life and works has never been attempted, even in Harmless' informative study,⁵⁵ while other African sources have been little studied. Such an approach leads me to reconsider the conclusions of previous scholarship on the organisation of the catechumenate by showing that texts cannot be simply used in order to reconstruct one single path of initiation. Every time that Augustine and other Africans preached or wrote, mentioning catechumens, the specific context behind the text plays a crucial role in the perspective adopted. African sources inform us about rites, the catechesis to be given, and refer to catechumens in a variety of works and genres, always with a clear intent. They shed light on the catechumenate just as much as they contribute to shape it over time.

Structure

I begin this investigation in Chapter Two by focusing on Augustine's own catechumenate. Without dismissing Augustine's recollections as mere retrospective reconstructions, I explore the well-documented initiation journey of a catechumen in late Antiquity, shedding light on the fluidity of affiliations and the progressive nature of religious belonging. At the same time, I show that Augustine's recollections convey a particular point of view and evolve over the course of his life depending on the context. His African catechumenate is cherished as the point of reference for the conversion in Milan, while the broader narrative, displaying continuity in its core features since 386, is adapted to the specific concerns of the cleric. Augustine progressively reconsidered his religious upbringing in a more positive light, first in works addressed to potential Manichaean converts in the early 390s, and then in the *Confessiones*, where he presented his return to the Catholic Church as the inevitable outcome of his quest for truth. The Pelagian controversy brought him again to reflect on his

⁵⁵ The charts about *catechumeni* and *competentes* (Harmless (2014), 229-234 and 348-350) do not give the dating or the circumstances of composition of each text.

initiation in Milan, as he employed Ambrose's authority as an argument in polemical works. The study of Augustine the catechumen then leads to examine more broadly the practicalities of the catechumenate and the significance of the catechumens' status in polemics in late antique Africa through the lenses of a major protagonist. In Chapter Three, I investigate the process of admission into the catechumenate and suggest the importance and repetition of special rites designed for *catechumeni* over the course of their membership, meant to underline their peculiar status as partially included Christians. I suggest that Augustine particularly required a change of behaviour from the very beginning of the catechumenate both in the *De catechizandis rudibus* and in the *Contra Faustum* and applied rules of admission. Augustine also emphasised the division between *catechumeni* and *fideles* in terms of ritual participation. By setting catechumens apart, special rites, perhaps performed when catechumens were dismissed from the church before the Eucharist, delimited clear boundaries and at the same time concretely established a path of progression. The chapter also shows that catechumens were a disputed group: Augustine's references to the rites mostly pertain to his fight against Donatists over rebaptism and against Pelagians over the necessity of infant baptism.

This investigation paves the way for exploring, in Chapter Four, the significance of catechumens for Augustine's definition of Christian membership in a polemical context. Their liminal status provided both an opportunity for renewal and a major challenge. Thanks to a study of Augustine's conceptions on the rite of the cross on the forehead performed by catechumens and baptised Christians alike, and of his polemical treatise *De fide et operibus* written against unnamed opponents, I demonstrate that Augustine aimed at enforcing the inclusion of catechumens in his teaching on morals and employed them as a tool for redefining the margins of his community, dictating rules of behaviour for all Christians and bringing cohesion to his community. I also argue that Augustine played a major role in the teaching of catechumens in Carthage and that his views were often developed in dialogues

and polemics, as he faced resistance from other clerics and from the catechumens themselves in a context of unsettled practices and ideas.

The broader scope of the thesis is then to integrate the well-known writings of Augustine in a wider perspective on the catechumenate in late antique Africa. Chapter Five explores the catechumenate in other African sources from the fourth and fifth centuries. A canon from the *Breviarium Hipponense* (393) includes essential contemporary evidence showing the extent to which Augustine's attempts at normalising the catechumenate corresponded to a wider trend within his Church under Aurelius' primacy. Then, I focus on the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus which do not provide information on *catechumeni* but enable me to follow their initiation after the enrolment to prepare for baptism. Rejecting the attribution to a single author, I show that these little-studied sermons furnish unique descriptions of rituals and extensive catecheses, which shed new light on the process in parallel to Augustine's better-studied evidence. These sermons illustrate how contemporaries initiated candidates, particularly in the context of the Vandal invasion. I stress that, as in the case of Augustine, catechesis played a crucial role to create cohesion and build a united community in a context of competition for members between Arians and Catholics. A detailed study of these sermons also demonstrates the degree of variety in practices and the improvisation of clerics. I then take into account pseudo-epigraphic or anonymous late antique sermons of possible African origin. Through a first selective study, I aim at giving an idea of the potential of these sermons for highlighting the extent of local adaptations of the initiation and the inventive nature of pre-baptismal catechesis.

Chapter Six traces the evolution of the catechumenate in the early sixth century: I start by exploring the exchange of letters between Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe, which provides the last available evidence in late antique Africa. These letters inform us on the continuing uneasiness of clerics with the status of catechumens in their communities, emphasising the importance of the catechumenate as the path to acquire Christian

membership. They show that earlier African sources, particularly Augustine's writings and canonical collections, impinged on the debates of the time and contributed to the development of authoritative views on the catechumenate. I then put this exchange in perspective by comparing it to the contemporary and better-known letter of the Roman deacon John to the Italian aristocrat Senarius. I argue that striking commonalities between the letters shed light on the ongoing process of definition of the catechumenate in the Western Mediterranean in polemics against Arians and Pelagians. Against the assumption that these documents would witness a sort of medieval ritualisation, I show that their emphasis on the liturgy corresponds to earlier arguments developed by Augustine and his followers in controversies, now employed to develop new authoritative syntheses. Finally, the conclusion provides an overview of the main outcomes of this study, highlighting the importance of catechumens for the history of Christianity in late antiquity, and suggesting avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2.

Augustine the catechumen: patterns and narrative

While Augustine is the most informative source to study the catechumenate in late antique Africa, he also is one of very few individuals who reflected back on his own catechumenate. Starting the exploration of Augustine, our focus in the next chapters, from his own perspective about his time as a catechumen shall provide both an introduction to the complexities of the catechumenate in late antique Africa through a well-known *parcours* and demonstrate the necessity of a detailed contextualisation of the evidence to gain new insights into material which is shaped by the circumstances in which Augustine wrote. Studies which focus on Augustine's life before baptism or on Augustine's conversion abound,¹ and Augustine has often been used as a source for the history of the catechumenate and baptism.² However, there has been little work on Augustine's own catechumenate and even less work restricting the enquiry to Augustine's point of view. As I will show in this study, the major biographies and studies of Augustine's life tend at best to allude to his catechumenate without any specific enquiry,³ while the few studies addressing this aspect leave little to no room for Augustine's African catechumenate, focusing on the Milanese period and often examining it in

¹ See surveys with extensive bibliography in Madec, G., (1989), 'Le néoplatonisme dans la conversion d'Augustin. État d'une question centenaire (depuis Harnack et Boissier, 1888)', in Mayer, C., Chelius, K. H., (eds.), (1989), *Internationales Symposium über den Stand der Augustinus-Forschung* (Würzburg), 9-25 and Madec, G., (1994), "Conversio", *AL* 1, fasc. 7/8, 1282-1294. See as well: Courcelle, P., (1968), *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin*, 2nd edition (Paris); Ferrari, L. C., (1984), *The Conversions of Saint Augustine* (Villanova); *Id.*, (1989), 'Saint Augustine's Conversion Scene: The End of a Modern Debate?', *Studia Patristica* 22, 235-250; Ries, J., (2005), 'La conversion de saint Augustin du Manichéisme au catholicisme: controverses anciennes et positions récentes', in Tongerloo, A. van, Cirillo, L., (eds.), (2005), *Il Manicheismo. Nuove prospettive della ricerca. Quinto congresso internazionale di studi sul Manicheismo* (Turnhout), 355-371; Dobell, B., (2009), *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion: The Journey from Platonism to Christianity* (Cambridge); BeDuhn, J., (2009 and 2013), *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma. Volume 1: Conversion and Apostasy, 373-388 C.E. Volume 2: Making a 'Catholic' Self, 388-401* (Philadelphia).

² See chapter 1 p. 20 n. 27.

³ van der Meer (1961), 347, 351, 359; Mandouze, A., (1968), *Saint Augustin. L'aventure de la raison et de la grâce* (Paris), 84-85; Lancel, S., (1999), *Saint Augustin* (Paris) 30, 36; Brown, P., (2000), *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, revised edition (Berkeley) 30, 34, 70-71, 116-120; Bonner, G., (2002), *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*, 3rd edition (Norwich), 38-39; O'Donnell, J. J., (2005), *Augustine: a new biography* (New York), 53-61, 212-213; Chadwick, H., (2009), *Augustine of Hippo: A Life* (New York), 7, 25, 33, 38, 116-117; Lane Fox, R., (2015), *Augustine. Conversions and Confessions* (London), 38, 45-48, 191, 195.

a synthesis of all relevant contemporary sources to reconstruct his experience.⁴ This study fills this gap by exploring and critically assessing Augustine's catechumenate *per se* from the very beginning until baptism, deliberately limiting the investigation to Augustine's own words. This has the main advantage of sharpening the focus on Augustine's perspective, which will help to better understand his own role in shaping the catechumenate in African communities and his influence on contemporaries and in the century after his death.

The first goal of this chapter is to make full use of the unique opportunity of following a late antique catechumen's journey from birth to baptism. I argue that Augustine became a catechumen later than is generally thought and that this initiation should be reassessed taking into account new hypotheses about the cases of his parents Monica and Patricius. Moreover, I particularly shed light on the links between Augustine's youth as a Christian catechumen and as a Manichaean hearer and stress the overlapping features of the two categories. Augustine grew up as a Christian in Africa, converted to Manichaeism in this context and, as a Manichean hearer, was never fundamentally far from returning to Catholic Christianity. Concerning his stay and conversion in Milan, I suggest that while Augustine particularly wanted to emphasise his involvement in church practices upon his arrival in Milan, he seems to have made his full commitment to baptism only later, during his stay in Cassiciacum.

The second goal of this chapter is to carefully contextualise the evidence: no work was written by Augustine with the intent of giving to the reader an overview of his initiation. Instead, each of his works followed specific objectives. Thus, this chapter offers a new assessment of Augustine's recollections of his catechumenate, showing that they concentrate

⁴ Busch (1938), 385-483, at 385-390; Wills (2012), 59-133; Harmless (2014), 88-130 all offer broad surveys the latter two focusing on Milan. Shorter summaries: Courcelle (1968), 211-221; Trapè, A., (1974), 'La Chiesa Milanese e la conversione di s. Agostino', *Archivio Ambrosiano* 27, 5-24; Della Corte, F., (1986), 'Agostino catecumeno', in *Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani* 97 (Rome), 89-96; Lamirande (1992a), 791; Oort, J. van, (1991), *Jerusalem and Babylon: A study into Augustine's City of God and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden), 25-30; Finn (1997), 215-235; Finn, Th., (1998), 'Ritual and Conversion: The Case of Augustine', in Petruccione, J., (ed.), (1998), *Nova et Vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton* (Washington DC), 148-161; Madec, G., (2001), *Le Christ de saint Augustin: La patrie et la voie*, 2nd edition (Paris), 23-32.

at key moments with specific concerns: the writings of Cassiciacum, the anti-Manichaean writings of the priesthood, the *Confessiones* and the Pelagian controversy, in particular in 411-413, when he wrote the treatise *De fide et operibus* and recalled his initiation in Milan in his correspondence, finally, in polemical writings against Julian of Aeclanum between 418 and 421. It is crucial for our understanding of Augustine's life to assess whether and how his views changed over time. Thus, this study shall contribute to the debate on Augustine's change of perspective between 386 and the *Confessiones* and later, by both emphasising continuity concerning the core elements of Augustine's recollections of his catechumenate and highlighting a telling evolution in terms of a more positive appraisal of his youth as a bishop.⁵ Finally, more generally, and in particular for the *Confessiones*, I shall underline that Augustine used the narrative of his own catechumenate as a protreptic to bring other catechumens to conversion. This assessment, however, should not lead me to entirely mistrust Augustine's account or only study it as a retrospective reconstruction: in doing so, I would not fully exploit the valuable information contained in the source but also risk applying a pre-established set of modern scholarly questions to deconstruct the evidence.⁶ On the contrary, I combine a critical assessment of the evidence, in light of Augustine's particular concerns and aims, with a careful synthesis of what Augustine still conveys, both willingly and casually, on his lived experience.

The complexity of this research is precisely to keep a proper balance between the two chronologies in Augustine's life: his experience of the catechumenate and references to it in his literary production. Indeed, they only very briefly overlap in the writings of Cassiciacum: the rest of his descriptions are written after the events. As a result of the lack of works written

⁵ Harrison, C., *Rethinking Augustine's early theology: an argument for continuity* (Oxford, 2006), by focusing on these dialogues and relating them to broader themes of Augustine's theology (esp. 35-73), has reassessed the widely accepted assumption that Augustine's views and theology radically changed in 396 when he became a bishop. On this debate see the overview in Harrison (2006), 3-9 notably discussing the diverging views of Brown (break) and Madec (continuity).

⁶ I disagree, for instance, with the reductive perspective recently adopted by BeDuhn (2009; 2013). For a critical review of this approach, see Oort, J. van, (2011), 'Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma in Context', *VChr* 65, 543-567. For the debate on the reliability of Augustine's account in the *Confessiones*: Madec (1989); Ries (2005).

in his youth, it is not possible to follow with continuity Augustine reflecting on his experience. However, despite our dependence on his later intermittent recollections, it is important to follow and emphasise the progressive evolution of his experience over time, since it is the way he lived it. Thus, I broadly follow the chronology of Augustine's catechumenate to shed light on his experience and at the same time I pay attention to the context in which he wrote to show how the appreciation and use of his own past evolved in correspondence to the key moments that I have evoked. In this respect, the writings of Cassiciacum shall be analysed as an exception in Augustine's works, providing the only account of Augustine the catechumen writing about his own catechumenate.

I. Family and Church: integration into the catechumenate

"A parentibus"

Augustine's upbringing as a Christian and more precisely as a catechumen is primarily known to us from the *Confessiones*. However, it may be overlooked that before he wrote the *Confessiones* as a newly appointed bishop, Augustine already provided more general and allusive references to his Christian background. In fact, a close perusal of the evidence demonstrates that his youth as a catechumen in Africa is the most often alluded to and quoted element of his Christian initiation in his works and, at the same time, the *Confessiones* are the last time when Augustine refers to this aspect of his life, except for a brief reference to himself as *catechumenus* in the *Contra Cresconium* between 405 and 407.⁷ This striking and unnoticed fact seems to suggest that Augustine particularly valued and emphasised these aspects in the period from his conversion in 386 to the composition of the *Confessiones* (between 397 and 403), while they became more irrelevant later.⁸

⁷ Augustine, *Cresc.* IV, 64.79, see note 86.

⁸ The composition of *Conf.* most probably began in 397; however, despite several attempts to provide an accurate dating – see most recently Lane Fox (2015) suggesting a composition in a few weeks in spring 397

Already in the *Contra academicos*, written as a catechumen at Cassiciacum towards the end of 386, Augustine recalls this past in the prologue of the second book to Romanianus, in a first autobiographical recollection, where Augustine acknowledges Romanianus' role as a mentor who guided him in the quest for truth. He particularly recalls how the reading of the Platonic books led him to reconsider the religion (*religio*) of his youth, which bore a special attraction to him and which was "planted (*insita*)" into him as a *puer*.⁹ The allusion shows to Romanianus the path that Augustine has chosen to find the truth: Augustine reclaims his family heritage as a catechumen and has now decided to retire to the villa in Cassiciacum, preparing to enter ritual initiation and receive baptism at Easter 387; his own experience is already used to exhort others to conversion. Significantly, later allusions to his youth use very similar terminology. These concentrate first in two anti-Manichaean works written at the beginning of the priesthood (391-392), the *De utilitate credendi* addressed to the Manichee Honoratus and the *De duabus animabus* written to all his Manichaean friends, and then in the *Confessiones*.¹⁰

First, at the beginning of the *De utilitate credendi* and of the *De duabus animabus* the expressions used are: "the religion which was planted on me as a child by my parents (*religione quae mihi puerulo a parentibus insita erat*)" and "the seeds of the most true religion wholesomely planted on me since childhood (*religionis verissimae semina mihi a pueritia salubriter insita*)".¹¹ Then, in the *De utilitate credendi*, Augustine recalls how he returned to the "Church to which I had been brought by my parents (*ecclesia cui traditus a parentibus eram*)" while in the *Confessiones* he

– there are few clues to be certain about when the work was completed. This issue is intimately related to the question of the unity of the work despite its three parts (I-IX, X, XI-XIII). See an overview of issues in Feldmann, E., (1994), 'Confessiones', *AL* 1, fasc. 7/8, 1134-1193, at 1143-1157 and 1184-1185; while the consensus was to favour a *terminus ante quem* in 401, Hombert, P.-M., (2000), *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustinienne* (Paris), 12-23 has suggested that the work (book X) was completed in 403 because of close parallels with *In Ps.* 36, III from September 403.

⁹ Augustine, *Acad.* II, 2.5 (on the work see Voss, B. R., 'Academicis (De -)', *AL* 1, fasc. 1/2 (1986), 45-52).

¹⁰ On *Util. cred.* see Hoffmann, A., (1997), *Augustins Schrift 'De utilitate credendi'. Eine Analyse* (Münster), for the dating: 35-37. On *Duab. an.*: Decret, F., (1978), *L'Afrique manichéenne (IVème-Vème siècles). Étude historique et doctrinale*, 2 volumes (Paris), I, 81-92; Decret, F., (2001), 'Duabus animabus (De -)', *AL* 2, fasc. 5-6, 667-672.

¹¹ Augustine, *Util. cred.* 1.2 (Zycha, J., (ed.), *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 4); *Duab. an.* 1.1 (*ibid.*, 51).

speaks of “the Catholic Church recommended to me by my parents (*catholica ecclesia mihi a parentibus commendata*)”, then of the “name of Christ put on me as an infant (*mihi nomen Christi infanti est inditum*)” and finally of his status of catechumen as a child: “Let me fix my feet on that step (*gradu*) where as a boy I was placed by my parents (*a parentibus positus*)”.¹² Augustine is remarkably consistent in linking his affiliation with the Church and Christianity to the action of his family. *Insitus* and *positus* convey the idea of the action of making him a catechumen and thus fixing him in the Church in the corresponding grade (*gradus*).¹³ They refer precisely to the beginning of Augustine’s Christian belonging. The image of planting is very common in Augustine and refers here to the ritual actions of initiation.¹⁴ The other phrases describe initiation as a heritage rather than a beginning: it is the Church entrusted to him, to which he can refer and on which he can build.

Beyond these distinctive features, there are however a number of important differences, which point to two different contexts. At the beginning of the *De duabus animabus* and the *De utilitate credendi* Augustine refers to his youth to explain the circumstances of his adhesion to Manichaeism: he wants to show to his African Manichean friends how wrong he was in abandoning the religion of his youth. On the contrary, in the middle of the *De utilitate credendi* and in all the passages of the *Confessiones* – except for the description of his enrolment as a catechumen in the first book, which I shall discuss in the next section – Augustine closely relates this Christian upbringing to his decision to return to the Catholic Church in Milan. Interestingly, he only refers to the *parentes* first in the *De utilitate credendi* and in the *Confessiones* to refer to this return. Augustine does not restrict this heritage to his mother Monica, contrary

¹² Augustine, *Util. cred.* 8.20 (Zycha, J., (ed.), *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 25); *Conf.* V, 14.25; VI, 4.5; 11.18 (Verheijen, L., (ed.), *CCSL* 27 (1981), 72, 77, 86; transl. Chadwick, H., (1991), *Saint Augustine. Confessions* (Oxford), 104 adapted).

¹³ Noted as well by Mandouze (1968), 91 and Wright, D. F., (1998), ‘Monica’s Baptism, Augustine’s Deferred Baptism, and Patricius’, *AugStud* 29/2, 1-17, at 15, reprinted in *Id.*, (2007), *Infant baptism in a historical perspective. Collected studies* (Milton Keynes), 89-104.

¹⁴ See chapter 3.

to what studies of Augustine's youth generally emphasise, but systematically to his *parentes*.¹⁵ Van Oort read the recommendation of the *parentes* as a later tribute of Augustine to his father who was baptised shortly before he died when Augustine was in Carthage for his studies and would thus have inspired Augustine to return to the Church in Milan years later.¹⁶ More broadly the term *parentes* may refer not only to his parents, but also to his relatives in general.¹⁷ Moreover, Augustine used a generic terminology (*religio*) both in the *Contra academicos* and in the works from the priesthood when referring to his Christian youth before adhering to Manichaeism, while in the description of his stay in Milan in the *De utilitate credendi* and the *Confessiones* the more distinctive Church terminology (*ecclesia; catholica ecclesia; nomen Christi; gradus*) suggests the development of a narrative of inclusion in terms of worship and Church membership in Milan. Interestingly, the *Contra academicos* is the only instance when Augustine employs *religio* to refer to the reclaiming in Milan of his African Christian upbringing; all this seems to point to a change of perspective from Augustine as a cleric and his aim of closely associating his initiations in Africa and Italy, with a particular reference to his family.

Sealed with the cross

In the first book of *Confessiones*, because of the autobiographical character of his work, Augustine furnishes a detailed description of his incorporation into the Christian community of his family. First, in the narrative of his infancy, Augustine recalls:

We found however, Lord, people (*homines*) who prayed to you and from them we learnt to think of you, in our limited way, as some large being with the power, even when not present to our senses, of hearing us and helping us. As a boy (*puer*) I began to pray to you.¹⁸

This is the first instance in the *Confessiones* explicitly referring to Augustine's Christian upbringing. The *homines* that he recalls, although the term is generic and very common in

¹⁵ Also noted by Wright (1998), 15.

¹⁶ van Oort (1991), 28-30.

¹⁷ Lamirande (1992a), 791; van Oort (1991), 27; Wright (1998), 15 read *parentes* literally.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Conf.* I, 9.14 (Chadwick (1991), 11).

Augustine, could refer to clerics.¹⁹ It is important to note that Augustine says that he learnt (*didicimus*) from them to pray and to think of God. These allusive remarks do not tell us to what extent these men were involved in Augustine's official enrolment in the Church, but they hint at the fact that Augustine was taught in some way about Christianity, again as a *puer*.²⁰ A few paragraphs later, he then provides the most precise reference in all his works about his initiation:

When I was still a boy (*adhuc puer*), I had heard (*audieram*) about eternal life promised to us through the humility of our Lord God, coming down to our pride, and I was already signed with the sign of the cross and seasoned with salt from the time I came from my mother's womb (*inde ab utero matris meae*) who greatly put her trust in you. You saw, Lord, how one day, when I was still a boy (*adhuc puer*), pressure on the chest suddenly made me hot with fever and almost at death's door. You saw, my God, because you were already my guardian, with what fervour of mind and with what faith (*qua fide*) I then begged for the baptism of your Christ, my God and Lord, urging it on the devotion of my mother and of the mother of us all, your Church. My physical mother was distraught. With a pure heart and faith in you she even more lovingly travailed in labour (*parturiebat*) for my eternal salvation. She hastily made arrangements for me to be initiated and washed in the protective rites (*sacramentis salutaribus initiarer et abluerer*), confessing you, Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins. But suddenly I recovered. My cleansing was deferred [...]. So I already believed (*credebam*), as did my mother and the entire household except for my father alone. Though he had not yet believed (*crediderat*), he did not obstruct my right to follow my mother's devotion, so as to prevent me believing in Christ (*crederem*). She anxiously laboured to convince me that you, my God, were my father rather than he.²¹

The first sentence cannot be interpreted, as Dölger suggested, as a reference to private rituals of incorporation held by Monica shortly after his birth, nor is it simply a blessing with salt against the devil as stated by Brown and recently Lane Fox.²² The references to the cross and salt are clear allusions to the rite of making new catechumens, which involved, as is known from Augustine himself in other instances – and from other contemporary sources – the central rite of signing the newly enrolled convert with the cross on the forehead and the

¹⁹ The word is commonly used in *Conf. I* to refer to Augustine's *entourage*; O'Donnell, J. J., (1992), *Confessions*, 3 volumes: I. *Introduction and text*; II. *Commentary on books 1-8*; III. *Commentary on books 8-13* (Oxford), II, 62 notes that he may have simply observed others praying.

²⁰ For considerations on the nature and extent of this oral instruction see Lane Fox (2015), 46-47.

²¹ Augustine, *Conf. I*, 11.17 (Chadwick (1991), 13-14 adapted).

²² Dölger, F. J., (1965-1966), 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens VIII', *JbAC* 8/9, 7-52, at 45; Brown (2000), 30; Lane Fox (2015), 38. For a well-argued refutation of Dölger see van Oort (1991), 28-30.

giving of salt.²³ Busch shrewdly remarked that Augustine’s use of the imperfect tense (*signabar*) may point to the regular repetition of the rite for catechumens, as I shall highlight in more detail in the next chapter.²⁴ The fact that Augustine had learnt about eternal life relates well with the previous mention of men teaching him about God and Augustine links it here with falling ill, twice situating the action when he was *adhuc puer*. The reference to God as a guardian (*custos*) recalls Augustine’s preaching to catechumens about the cross received on their foreheads as a sign of protection.²⁵ Augustine here clearly refers to his own trust (*qua fide*) and knowledge of God and eternal life, which he links to his initiative to be initiated because he feared death. His mother is distressed and makes sure that he is initiated, before he recovers.²⁶ Finally, Augustine presents himself as a believer in the Christian family, with only his father still not believing. The reference to faith (*credere*), which he shares with his family, is not casual as suggested by O’Donnell, but highlights his status as a catechumen during his youth.²⁷

The most puzzling element in this description of boyhood is that Augustine situates the rites of the catechumenate “at the time I came from my mother’s womb”, which, if taken literally, would mean right after birth. Most scholars indeed conclude that Augustine was initiated as a baby and that the mention of the rites is out of place in the narrative of boyhood.²⁸ O’Donnell follows this assumption both in his detailed commentary of the *Confessiones* and in his biography of Augustine, as Busch and Van Oort similarly do in their

²³ See chapter 3. Jerome may have had a similar experience, as he describes his Christian youth with a similar reference to the cross, see *Prologus in libro Iob*.

²⁴ Busch (1938), 386. Later, van der Meer (1961), 356; O’Donnell (1992), II, 67; Harmless (2014), 91; Clark, G., (2015), *Monica: An Ordinary Saint* (Oxford), 132.

²⁵ Augustine, *S.* 32, 12-13; *In. Ps.* 143, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 7, 7; see chapter 4.

²⁶ For BeDuhn (2009), 23 n.3, this postponement may result from Monica’s background as a Donatist; I see no reason, however, to link Donatism to the postponement of baptism.

²⁷ O’Donnell (1992), II, 69.

²⁸ Several studies note that Augustine was initiated into the catechumenate as an infant: Monachino (1947), 165; Botte, B., (1963), ‘Sacramentum catechumenorum’, *QL* 43, 322-330 at 324-325; Mandouze (1968), 84-85; De Latte (1976), 41; Nagel (1980), 114-118; Finn (1997), 215; Finn (1998), 151; Bonner (2002), 38; Pasquato (2006), 954; Chadwick (2009), 7; Wills (2012), 85; Harmless (2014), 91. van der Meer (1961), 357 also implies it.

studies of Augustine's catechumenate.²⁹ According to this view, after his initiation rapidly following birth, Augustine was instructed in Christianity during boyhood and then fell ill. A passage in the sixth book of *Confessiones* where Augustine also recalls his initiation as a catechumen, saying that he received the name of Christ as an infant (*infans*) in the womb of the Church, would support such conclusions.³⁰ However, the ambiguity of the passages and other decisive clues favour an alternative scenario.

First, it is important to consider that the *Confessiones* are not intended to furnish a literal and descriptive account of his initiation. The passages quoted are clearly shaped by a figurative reading of the family: in the first book, the figures of the mother and of the Church are very closely linked, at times merging when they are the target of Augustine's request to be baptised and when Monica labours to initiate him into Christianity. In the afore-mentioned passage of the sixth book, Augustine discusses infancy in the Church with similar images to describe his "childish" anthropomorphic conceptions of Christ. He uses the language of birth to refer to his incorporation into the Church and the efforts of his mother in bringing him to initiation. One cannot fail to recognise Augustine's common resort to the imagery of pregnancy and birth with reference to the process of conversion through the catechumenate and baptism.³¹ A figurative reading would better suit the passages, especially because Augustine situates the whole scene when he was a *puer*.

This provides clues to situate Augustine's initiation: indeed, he commonly followed the Roman traditional division in five ages (*infantia, pueritia, adolescentia, iuventus, gravitas*), while referring to the six ages of mankind corresponding to the six days of creation in a number of works, starting from the *De vera religione*.³² This discrepancy, however, does not directly affect

²⁹ O'Donnell (1992), II, 67; O'Donnell (2005), 53; Busch (1938), 386 and Van Oort (1991), 27-28.

³⁰ Augustine, *Conf.* VI, 4.5.

³¹ See for instance a close association of mothers and the Church in Augustine, *S.* 293, 10; in *S.* 352A (=Dolbeau 14), 4. More in chapter 3.

³² Augustine, *Vera rel.* 26, 48 (*infantia, pueritia, adolescentia, iuventus, senior pax, deterior aetas*).

the issue here, since the uncertainty concerned the division of old age into two categories.³³ In the first book of the *Confessiones*, he first discusses his *infantia*, which for him ended when children acquire speech, then the *pueritia* immediately following;³⁴ he later relates the beginning of *adulescentia* to puberty,³⁵ and finally notes at the beginning of the seventh book that, at thirty, he had just left *adulescentia* behind.³⁶ This corresponds to the Roman tradition, both legal and literary, for which *infantia* ended at seven, when children lost their primary teeth and were considered old enough to speak for themselves, while *adulescentia*, associated to sexual maturity, started at around fifteen and lasted often until thirty.³⁷

Moreover, a closer exploration of Augustine's references to the admission process show that they all point to *pueritia*. In the general allusions explored earlier, often overlooked, Augustine says that he was incorporated into the Church as a *puer*, during his *pueritia* and as a *puerulus*.³⁸ The mention of a step (*gradus*) where he was placed as a *puer* in the sixth book of the *Confessiones*³⁹ clearly corresponds to the entrance into the catechumenate, as highlighted by the similar use of the term in the *De fide et operibus* to refer to the catechumens' stage of initiation.⁴⁰ Augustine himself refers to the initiation of other boys: his own son Adeodatus was baptised at around fifteen and presented as a *puer*,⁴¹ while he imagines Dinocrates, from the *Passio Perpetuae*, reciting the creed by himself at the age of seven.⁴² Similarly, Augustine's mention of his fear of death and personal request to be baptised suggest that he was able to conceptualise such things. Therefore, it is most probable that Augustine's initiation took place during

³³ See Eyben, E., (1973), 'Die Einteilung des menschlichen Lebens in römisches Altertum', *RhM* 116 (1973), 150-190, at 169 and O'Donnell (1992) II, 52-56 with other references and bibliography on Augustine's theory of ages.

³⁴ Augustine, *Conf.* I, 8.13; a similar description of *infantes* in *Ep.* 187, 13-15.

³⁵ Augustine, *Conf.* II, 1.1 and 3.6: "inquieta indutum adulescentia" (Verheijen, L., (ed.), *CCSL* 27 (1981), 20).

³⁶ Augustine, *Conf.* VII, 1.1.

³⁷ Eyben (1973), 150-190 for a synthesis, underlining that the frontier between *adulescentia* and *iuventus* is often imprecise.

³⁸ Augustine, *Acad.* II, 2.5; *Duab. an.* 1.1; *Util. cred.* 1.2.

³⁹ Augustine, *Conf.* VI, 11.18.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *F. et op.* 6.9.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 6.14.

⁴² Augustine, *An. or.* I, 10.12; III, 9.12.

boyhood, which he situated between seven and puberty, around fifteen. Supplementary information to narrow the range is found in the second book of the *Confessiones*, where Augustine describes himself as a catechumen, now *adulescens*, at sixteen, his father Patricius having recently become a catechumen.⁴³ It is unlikely that Augustine and Patricius became catechumens together because Augustine clearly says that he was already initiated when his father was not.⁴⁴ Thus, he became a catechumen before he was sixteen and before his father, and likely before he went to Madaura to study grammar at twelve. All this evidence best places his initiation as a *puer* probably between the age of seven and twelve, thus around between 361 and 366.

The precise sequence of events leading Augustine to enter the catechumenate and learn about Christianity is more difficult to establish. If we were to follow exactly the order of the *Confessiones* and to recognise the links in the imagery between the entrance into the catechumenate and the initiation during the illness it would mean that Augustine first received instruction on Christianity, then entered the catechumenate, perhaps when he fell ill. This scenario, which has received some support, is plausible, not least because it follows the chronology of the *Confessiones*.⁴⁵ However, it fails to explain the close links established between the knowledge acquired on Christianity and the initiation into the catechumenate. It seems more likely that his ritual initiation either preceded or corresponded to the time when he learnt about Christianity. According to Augustine's writings – particularly the *De catechizandis rudibus* – candidates, except those who were already learned, would hear the most about Christianity precisely when they entered the catechumenate, while the initiative to become a catechumen would have often been triggered by friends or relatives. Thus, Busch, although situating the initiation into the catechumenate shortly after birth, rightly compares Augustine's mention of instruction received as a boy with the process described in the *De catechizandis*

⁴³ Augustine, *Conf.* II, 3.6.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Conf.* I, 11.17.

⁴⁵ Cf. Rietschel, G., (1909), *Lehrbuch der Liturgik* (Berlin), II, 8 quoted in Busch (1938), 386 n.6.

rudibus.⁴⁶ Consequently, I would argue that Augustine learnt about Christianity when he was made a catechumen and only fell ill later, still as a *puer*.⁴⁷ He maybe started to undergo rites which would have initiated him from the status of *catechumenus* to that of *fidelis*. These could be the protective rites (*sacramenta salutaria*) that were actively sought by his mother before he recovered. Strikingly again, at the end of the passage, the analogy between the physical parents and God and the Church is emphasised: Monica joins the Church in an effort to bring Patricius to Christianity, and her son to have God as his true father.⁴⁸ This effort seems to hint at the wish that he be fully initiated, since the imagery of the catechumenate precisely describes catechumens as potential sons of God, a status achieved with baptism.⁴⁹ The importance of baptism is indeed particularly underlined a few lines later, as the bishop deplores the decision to postpone his baptism in terms largely echoing his calls to baptism, particularly in sermons.⁵⁰

The references analysed demonstrate the relevance of his Christian upbringing and at the same time Augustine's need to emphasise it from his earliest preserved works to the *Confessiones*. A number of reasons for this particular concentration may be evoked. The most compelling interpretation is to read these references within Augustine's use of his past as a protreptic: presenting his own past and conversion provides a plausible course of action for his Manichaean friends and readers that had still not converted.⁵¹ Augustine aims to show how few excuses he had for not converting until his thirties, and, at the same time, to make clear to everyone that despite his hesitations and sins, he was compelled to return to "true" Christianity. Theologically, for his baptised readers particularly, this insistence could be

⁴⁶ Busch (1938), 386.

⁴⁷ For this sequence of events, Madec (2001), 22-23 although situating the initiation during early childhood.

⁴⁸ For more on such aspects in Augustine, *Conf.* I, see Schultheiss, J., (2011), *Generationenbeziehungen in den Confessiones des Augustinus* (Stuttgart), 105-125.

⁴⁹ For instance Augustine, *S.* 97A (=Bibl. cas. II, 114-115), 2-3 and *S.* 56, 5 on the Lord's Prayer.

⁵⁰ Augustine, *Conf.* I, 11.18. See chapter 3 part II.

⁵¹ On this see for instance: Feldmann (1994), 1157-1164; Feldmann, E., (1998), 'Das literarische Genus und das Gesamtkonzept der *Confessiones*', in Mayer, C., Fischer, N., (eds.), (1998), *Die Confessiones des Augustinus von Hippo. Einführung und Interpretation zu den dreizehn Bücher* (Freiburg), 11-59; Kotzé, A., (2004), *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden), esp. 52-66 and 117-216.

intended as a further tool to show that God, with the particular agency of his family, was guiding his life and would bring him to conversion. Thus, the images used convey the idea that Augustine's involvement in the Christian community of his town as a young boy had a fundamental impact on his later attraction to Manichaeism and then his return to Catholic Christianity in Milan. This heritage was quoted by Augustine as a young catechumen in Italy, and then became fundamental as a priest and bishop of Hippo both to refute accusers who doubted his Catholic Christian commitment and inform and convince others to follow the path he traced. This analysis of references to Augustine's initiation as a boy shows continuity, starting from 386 to the *Confessiones*, with progressively more emphasis on linking the initiations in Africa and Italy in the *De utilitate credendi* and particularly in the *Confessiones*, which serve as the culminating last words on his catechumenate in Africa. Donatists do not appear directly relevant, although Augustine's insistence on his African roots could echo accusations against his lack of ties with the African churches.⁵² The polemical context behind these references is often elusive but seems to be mostly that of the fight against the Manichaeans: his incorporation into Christianity serves as the background to explain his later adhesion. This polemical context becomes much more apparent in Augustine's discussion of his time as a catechumen after this first initiation and later when he adhered to Manichaeism in Carthage.

II. Superstition, deception and failures: falling into Manichaeism

Four sources inform us about Augustine's recollections of his *adulescentia*, before and after he became a Manichee, again covering the same three key moments highlighted earlier: the *De beata vita* written in Cassiciacum; the *De utilitate credendi* (391-392), the *Confessiones* (397-

⁵² For an overview of the Donatist schism and its controversies see Frend, W. H. C., (1985), *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford); Lancel (1999), 233-248; Shaw, B., *Sacred violence: African Christians and sectarian hatred in the age of Augustine* (Cambridge, 2011), 162-194. On its origins: Perrin, M.-Y., (2013), 'Costantino e la crisi donatista', in Melloni, A., (ed.), *Costantino I. Enciclopedia costantiniana sulla figura e l'immagine dell'imperatore del cosiddetto editto di Milano, 312-2013*, volume 1 (Rome), 278-284.

403) and Sermon 51 (403). The *De beata vita* provides a first retrospective view on Augustine's adhesion to Manichaeism resulting from his dissatisfaction with the Christianity of his youth, the *De utilitate credendi* and the sermon developing the same ideas further. The *Confessiones*, on the other hand, present a more nuanced picture of Augustine's religious status before and at the time of adhesion to Manichaeism. I argue that his status of catechumen implied a certain degree of familiarity, albeit somewhat superficial, with Christianity and the practice of Christian rites until his conversion to Manichaeism. Moreover, his status as a catechumen in Africa is viewed more negatively in Cassiciacum than in his writings as a cleric. This seems thus to suggest that he progressively presented it differently. I then address Augustine's appraisal of his attitude towards the Christianity of his youth during his time as a Manichee and the links between Christian catechumens and Manichaean hearers, arguing that concerns resulting from the context of writing may shed new light on his account and illustrate that community boundaries were more fluid than generally thought.

The adhesion to Manichaeism was viewed by Augustine as a way to go beyond the religious experience of his early youth but still remain faithful to Christ, the Manichaeans presenting themselves as his true followers.⁵³ In 386, in the *De beata vita*, Augustine the catechumen at Cassiciacum depicts himself, the young catechumen converting in Carthage in the 370s, as weak and strongly dissatisfied.⁵⁴ Augustine recalls that his adhesion to Manichaeism happened because his quest for truth was hindered by a wrong and childish *superstitio*. He therefore preferred to hear the Manicheans rationally discussing what to believe rather than simply accepting the religion of his youth as a command.⁵⁵ This *superstitio* abandoned in Carthage is, interestingly, the counterpart of the *religio* of his youth rediscovered

⁵³ Cf. Augustine, *Conf.* III, 6.10; *C. Faust.* XIII, 6; Decret (1978), I, esp. 270-273; Madec (2001), 28-31. See for a recent overview with bibliography on Manichaeism and Augustine, and its links to Christianity: van Oort (2011). Besides the detailed studies of BeDuhn (2009, 2003), see more generally: Brown, P., (1969), 'The Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire', *JRS* 59, 92-103; Decret, F., (1970), *Aspects du manichéisme dans l'Afrique romaine. Les controverses de Fortunatus, Faustus et Felix avec saint Augustin* (Paris), esp. 272-300; Oort, J. van, 'Mani(cheus)', *AL* 3, fasc. 7/8 (2010), 1121-1132; Drecoll, V. H., (2010a), 'Manichei', *AL* 3, fasc. 7/8, 1132-1159.

⁵⁴ On this: Courcelle (1968), 65.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *Beata v.* 1.4.

in Milan, to which he alludes in the *Contra academicos* also written in Cassiciacum.⁵⁶ This suggests that for the catechumen in Cassiciacum, his Christian upbringing was of little value and actually caused him to fall into Manichaeism before he reclaimed and reconsidered it in a new light through the reading of the Platonic books. Augustine's strong statement is interesting since it does not fully match the milder appreciation of his Christian upbringing in later works. References to his weakness and lack of expertise obviously can be interpreted as a justification for his conversion in his refutation of Manichaeism, but it can be fairly assumed that they reflect true concerns and feelings of the young catechumen both in Carthage and in Cassiciacum.

Later in Africa, as a priest, at the beginning of the *De utilitate credendi* in the early 390s, Augustine points out that Manichees imposed on him the need to reject superstition and adhere to beliefs and religious practices which are grounded in good reasoning.⁵⁷ Augustine does not say anymore that his understanding was superstitious but that the Manicheans pretended that it was and deceived him.⁵⁸ This is a telling change of perspective. In the *De duabus animabus* written at the same period Augustine recalls how, after becoming a Manichee, he developed the habit of conducting religious debates which he particularly enjoyed winning, wrongly attributing his success to Manichaeism.⁵⁹ Resorting to his own experience to convince his friend Honoratus in the *De utilitate credendi*,⁶⁰ he particularly presents himself with criticism addressed not so much at his conceptions as at his attitude:

A young man yearning for the truth and made proud and outspoken by the debates in the classes of certain scholars. That is how they found me at that time, scornful of the "old wives tales" (*aniles fabulas*) and keen to have and to imbibe the open, uncontaminated truth that they promised. What considerations held me back, and kept me from fully committing myself to them, and made me stay at the stage (*illo gradu*)

⁵⁶ Compare Augustine *Beata* v. 1.4 and *Acad.* II, 2.4. On the opposition between *superstitio* and *religio* see Kahlos (2007), 92-112.

⁵⁷ On this argument and the Manichaeans see Hoffmann, A., (2001), 'Erst einsehen, dann glauben. Die nordafrikanischen Manichäer zwischen Erkenntnisanspruch, Glaubensforderung und Glaubenskritik', in Oort, J. van, Wermelinger, O., Wurst, G., (eds.), (2001), *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West* (Leiden-Boston-Cologne), 67-112.

⁵⁸ Augustine, *Util. cred.* 1.2; also noted by Courcelle (1968), 65 n. 1.

⁵⁹ Augustine, *Duab. an.* 9, 11.

⁶⁰ On Honoratus: Decret (1978), 368-369. On his relationship with Augustine: Hoffman (1997), 24-35.

they called hearer, not yet putting aside the hopes and concerns of this world [...]? What can I say about myself, already a Catholic Christian (*catholicus Christianus*) as I was at the time? That parched and almost overcome by prolonged thirst, crying and groaning I shook off those things and pushed them away, and that I have now returned avidly to that breast?⁶¹

The *aniles fabulae* are best interpreted as a first echo to the education received from his mother and more generally to the critiques of the Manichaeans against Augustine in Carthage. This passage could be read as a defence against accusations of his deep involvement in the Manichaean community and it certainly is a polemical remark meant to question the truth offered by the Manichaeans. However, it also reproduces, by taking himself as an example, Augustine's negative appraisal of catechumens in general who fail to progress – both Christian catechumens and Manichean hearers. Indeed, in the last part of the passage Augustine remarkably calls himself a *catholicus Christianus* to refer to his status as a Christian catechumen, probably to better contrast it with a generic use of *Christianus* which could have been used to define him as a Manichee, as it would have been the case with the term *catechumenus*. Indeed, in the Latin Manichaean *codex* from Tebessa, written in Africa in the fifth or sixth century, *catechumenus* is frequently used to refer to Manichaean hearers.⁶² Augustine is writing to a Manichee and is therefore very careful to avoid the generic use of *catechumenus*. He presents himself in contrast with Honoratus whom he perhaps met in Carthage during his studies: contrary to him, Augustine was already a Catholic Christian – catechumen – when he became a Manichee and this is seen as the reason for his final renunciation of Manichaeism; he did not find the truth that he was looking for in Manichaeism and returned to the breast of the Church of his youth. In this description, Augustine, as a priest, rejects the idea that Christians follow superstitions and claims that the Manichaeans deceived him and would have easily

⁶¹ Augustine, *Util. cred.* 1.2 (Kearney, R., (transl.), *WSA* I/8 (2005), 117).

⁶² Decret, F., (1989), 'Aspects de l'Eglise Manichéenne. Remarques sur le Manuscrit de Tébéssa', in Zumkeller, A., (ed.), (1989), *Signum Pietatis. Festgabe für Cornelius Petrus Mayer OSA zum 60. Geburtstag* (Würzburg), 123-151; BeDuhn, J. and Harrison, G., (1997), 'The Thebessa Codex: A Manichaean Treatise on Biblical Exegesis and Church Order', in Mirecki, P., and BeDuhn, J., (eds.), (1997), *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources* (Leiden), 33-87; Stein, M., (2004), (ed.), *Manichaica Latina 3/1: Codex Thevestinus* (Paderborn).

deceived any other unexperienced young man looking for truth. He uses a clear and careful Church terminology (*catholicus, gradus, Christianus*) which again is closer to his developments in the *Confessiones* and aims at emphasising the limits of Manichaeism and the inevitable return to the Church of his youth.

Strikingly, as Courcelle noted, Augustine mentioned his conversion to Manichaeism, again insisting on the fact that he had been deceived (*aliquando deceptus*), in Sermon 51 probably preached in Carthage at the end of 403, therefore close to the completion of the *Confessiones*, and clearly to an audience that included catechumens.⁶³ Referring in particular to the two genealogies of Christ in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, he contrasted his much more fortunate audience, progressively taught about Christianity by the bishop, and his own proud and deceptive critical discussion of the Scriptures as a young man (*acumen discutiendi*) which brought him to Manichaeism.⁶⁴ Thus, he was now particularly attentive to teach catechumens what they needed to overcome such difficulties and avoid Manichaeism, precisely on the basis of his own negative experience as a catechumen.

The *Confessiones* offer a more detailed and constructed narrative of his transition towards Manichaeism. They do not only inform us, as other works, on his situation at the time but make it possible to follow Augustine's appraisal of his links with the Church of his youth both before and after adhering to Manichaeism. There are four main episodes referring to initiation and his attachment to Christianity: his return home at sixteen, his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*; the baptism and death of his Manichean friend and his illness in Rome. These episodes are described as lost opportunities, failures of the young catechumen and then the Manichaean hearer unable to stay faithful to his Christian upbringing.

Returning home at sixteen after the grammar school in Madaura, Augustine describes his family's religious belonging:

⁶³ Courcelle (1968), 60-67; Augustine, *S.* 51, 4.5 (for the dating and localisation see Hombert (2000), 82 and 102).

⁶⁴ Augustine, *S.* 51, 4.5.

But in my mother's heart you had already begun (*inchoaveras*) your temple and the beginning of your holy habitation (cf. Eccles. 24, 14). My father was still a catechumen (*catechuminus*) and had become that only recently. So she shook with a pious trepidation and a holy fear (2 Cor. 7, 15). For, although I had not yet become a faithful (*quamvis mihi nondum fidei*), she feared the twisted paths along which walk those who turn their backs and not their face towards you (Jer. 2: 27).⁶⁵

This passage contrasts Patricius, Monica and Augustine in interesting ways. Monica could have been only recently baptised, as the insistence on the beginning of her commitment would show.⁶⁶ Indeed, in the next paragraph, Monica is described as a *fidelis* for the first time.⁶⁷ Her commitment would interestingly correspond to Patricius' entrance into the catechumenate. In this picture, Augustine, a catechumen, sees himself as leaning towards his father's inclinations. Postponing Monica's baptism until Augustine was already a boy would match very well with Augustine's admission into the catechumenate during boyhood.⁶⁸ The *parcours* of Augustine's family should therefore be reconsidered: in this new picture, Patricius does not represent anymore, as strongly as in the first book of *Confessiones*, the pagan in a Christian family. Rather, we may imagine Monica, a catechumen, and Patricius, a pagan, progressively adhering to Christianity, the mother receiving baptism and the father and son becoming catechumens, Patricius's initiation probably only happening a few years after Augustine's. Monica, on the other hand, must have become a catechumen earlier than Augustine, maybe in her youth in the Donatist community, before converting to the Catholics.⁶⁹ The contrast between Monica's fears and Augustine's status as a catechumen

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Conf.* II, 3.6 (Chadwick (1991), 27 adapted).

⁶⁶ Despite Wright (1998), 9-12 who detaches Monica's baptism from the commitment of her son and husband, and situates it earlier during adulthood, without evidence however.

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Conf.* II, 3.7. See O'Donnell (1992), II, 121-122 for the suggestion that Augustine is referring to Monica's baptism. Clark (2015) provides a recent overview on Monica, esp. on religion 116-144; at 131 it is noted that Monica may have been baptised older in age on the basis of *Conf.* IX, 9.13 where Augustine tells that she sinned after baptism. For a critique of scholarly accounts of Monica's baptism and a discussion comparing Monica, Augustine and Patricius see Wright (1998).

⁶⁸ In Augustine, *Conf.* II, 3.6, Augustine also refers to his entrance into *adulescentia* after leaving *pueritia* with the verb *induere*, maybe also to be related and opposed here to the conversion of the *juvenis* Augustine in the garden and the baptismal imagery of putting on Christ. Cf. Wills (2012), 110-111.

⁶⁹ Frend (1985), 184 is against this hypothesis but notes that members of her family may have been Donatists; O'Donnell (2005), 56 and 212-213 however argued that she might have been Donatist and notes that Augustine exchanged letters with a Donatist relative (*Ep.* 52). Also Clark (2015), 137-139; Lane Fox (2015), 43. This hypothesis is plausible because of the Donatist background of Thagaste, see *Ep.* 93, 5.17.

(*quamvis mihi nondum fidei*) also suggests that he and his family did not expect from him a full commitment to Christian habits.⁷⁰ As in the *De utilitate credendi*, Augustine says a little later in the *Confessiones* that he had no wish to hear the advice of his mother (*monitus muliebres*) who, for the bishop, was speaking with God's voice.⁷¹ The critique reflects the emphasis of the bishop on the necessity for catechumens to commit to Christianity by following rules of behaviour, a major concern of Augustine when teaching catechumens, as I shall show in the next chapters.

Augustine's early adolescence was shaped by the belonging of his family to Christianity, as partial and distant as his personal commitment may have been. In Carthage, as he explains in the *Confessiones*, Augustine regularly went to church, even if only to flirt with women.⁷² This behaviour is described shortly before the discovery of the *Hortensius*, which aroused Augustine's interest in wisdom. The episode tells us more about his own perspective on his time as a catechumen in Carthage and the steps leading to the adhesion to Manichaeism. For Augustine, the reading changed his prayers, however the name of Christ was missing:

This name, by your mercy Lord (Ps. 24, 7), this name of my Saviour your Son, my infant heart had piously drunk in with my mother's milk, and at a deep level I retained the memory (*pie biberat et alte retinebat*). Any book which lacked this name, however well written or polished or true, could not entirely grip me.⁷³

Again, Augustine describes his youth, now at nineteen, as shaped by his Christian belonging: he prays and trusts Christ's name above any other. This emphasis on infancy recalls the description of his Christian childhood in the first book, again to show his strong attachment to Christ. Augustine's depiction of himself very closely resembles how he portrays catechumens in his preaching, trusting and strongly revering the name of Christ above anything else.⁷⁴ Augustine's focus on his attachment to Christ is a powerful way to make his

⁷⁰ Augustine, *Conf.* II, 3.7-3.8.

⁷¹ Augustine, *Conf.* II, 3.7.

⁷² Augustine, *Conf.* III, 3.5; this is even more explicit in *S.* 359B (=Dolbeau 2), 5 noting that a separation of men and women has since been enforced.

⁷³ Augustine, *Conf.* III, 4.8.

⁷⁴ See, for instance *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3. See chapter 3 part II.

own story correspond to what should be the concerns of catechumens potentially reading his work. The reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* and the need to find a way to combine his reverence for Christ with his quest for truth is related to the subsequent examination of the Bible.⁷⁵ This very fact shows that Augustine probably only had a superficial knowledge of it. However, this should not mean, as Beduhn suggests, that his Christian upbringing "made little impression on him".⁷⁶ On the contrary, it should be underlined that in his quest for truth, he would only adhere to books discussing truth and Christ together and therefore he naturally read the Bible for this purpose. Although, as a catechumen, he had concerned himself only marginally with the Bible, his resort to it suggests that any of his intellectual developments were taking place within Christianity. At least, Augustine knew that in the Bible Christ was central and the source of truth for Christians. It could also be argued that this reading was recommended to him directly by some other Christians or that he simply followed their example. There is no reason to mistrust Augustine's statement that he tried to read the Bible after a desire to combine his devotion for Christ with his quest for truth: his status as a catechumen and his attendance to Church would have naturally brought him to do so.⁷⁷

Retrospectively, the bishop is well aware of the limits of the biblical text when it is read without help and he advises humility and guidance from trustworthy clerics.⁷⁸ In the *De utilitate credendi* already, Augustine precisely criticises reading without a skilled adviser, something which nobody would do when reading poetry, he argues. To Honoratus, with a clear reference to Ambrose, Augustine recommends looking for a master, even if it requires crossing the sea: again his own experience is an example for others.⁷⁹ The unadvised reading of the young catechumen in Carthage led him to dismiss the Bible and adhere to Manichaeism

⁷⁵ Augustine, *Conf.* III, 5.9.

⁷⁶ Beduhn (2009), 25. Against this view: van Oort (1991), 25-30; Madec (2001), 23-32.

⁷⁷ On this, Madec (2001), 23-32 against BeDuhn (2009), 33 who reads it as a purely retrospective reconstruction.

⁷⁸ Augustine, *Conf.* III, 5.9. In *Conf.* III, 12.21, in contrast, Augustine recalls how an African bishop foretold Monica that Augustine would abandon Manichaeism after reading on his own. But this was not referring to the Scriptures but to Manichaean books.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Util. cred.* 7.17.

to satisfy his desire for truth instead.⁸⁰ The *Confessiones* present Augustine's attitude in Carthage and his adhesion to Manichaeism in a more nuanced light compared to the *De beata vita*, matching and maybe even exceeding the mildness of the *De utilitate credendi*. Although he criticises his behaviour, Augustine prefers to insist, not on his *superstitio* and lack of understanding, but on the fact that he was deceived and lost the opportunity of confirming and reinforcing the Christianity of his youth after reading the *Hortensius*. He firmly relates his search for truth with Christian devotion as a catechumen and presents the resort to the Bible as natural. Even the adhesion to Manichaeism is the result of his longing for Christ.

Two other episodes in the *Confessiones* that have not been explored in scholarship on Augustine's catechumenate deserve particular attention, as they present Augustine's views on Christian initiation as a Manichee. First, the baptism of his dying friend is seen by the young Augustine as a farce which only touched the body but not the soul. His friend, after temporarily recovering, took baptism very seriously but Augustine hoped to convince him to reject it, since he had converted him to Manichaeism in the first place.⁸¹ The baptism of Augustine's friend most likely implies that he shared Augustine's upbringing in the local Catholic Church and was probably a catechumen when he adhered to Manichaeism, as it was the case of Cornelius, Augustine's friend who may be identified with Romanianus and who also received baptism in emergency – Honoratus is probably also a catechumen when Augustine sends him the *Liber de gratia novi testamenti* (=Ep. 140).⁸² While Augustine probably did not intend to highlight this fact, it shows how porous religious affiliations were for these men, and Augustine likely saw himself in his dying friend. Their membership as catechumens in the Catholic Church and the role of the family in asking for baptism makes clear that they were still able to easily complete their initiation in the Church of their youth even after converting to Manichaeism. The same could have indeed happened to Augustine.

⁸⁰ Augustine, *Conf.* III, 5.9-6.10.

⁸¹ Augustine, *Conf.* IV, 4.8.

⁸² Augustine, *Ep.* 259, 3, see Gabillon, A., (1978), 'Romanianus alias Cornelius: Du nouveau sur le bienfaiteur et l'ami de saint Augustin', *REAug* 24, 58-70; *Ep.* 140, 19. 48.

The second baptismal episode takes place in Rome when Augustine, after leaving his mother behind, fell severely ill. The description of Augustine's state of mind is revealing of how he considered himself, both at the time of the illness and at the moment of recalling the episode. Augustine did not ask for baptism. For the bishop his rejection means that he would have gone into fire and torments after death. The description is particularly interesting because it contains the bishop's appreciation of his Christian background as a Manichee. Augustine compares his past experiences with these words: "I did better as a boy when I begged for it from my devout mother".⁸³ In the same passage, Augustine alludes to the fact that he had not yet been forgiven for any of his sins because he had not been baptised ("*non enim quicquam eorum mihi donaveras*") but adds that even the cross had not freed him from the enmity (*inimicitia*) of God.⁸⁴ This could well refer to the cross put on the forehead of catechumens when they enter the catechumenate and which is seen as a powerful apotropaic rite. As we shall see in Chapter Four, Augustine's preaching often refers to the power of the cross on the forehead and to its significance especially at the time of death, to protect Christians. Therefore, Augustine means that he had lost the only protection and blessing he had received by becoming a catechumen. This is related to faith (*credideram*) as it had been the case when Augustine asked for baptism as a boy: now he could not adhere to the incarnation and crucifixion and therefore the cross was of no help to him. He incurred the *inimicitia* of God because he was a Manichee. His reaction corresponds to his rejection of his dying friend's baptism.⁸⁵ According to these two episodes on baptism, therefore, Augustine suggests that, as a Manichee, he had fully renounced his status as a catechumen in the Catholic Church. The bishop underlines that this was a regression from childhood and that his friend was better than him.

⁸³ Augustine, *Conf.* V, 9.16 (transl. Chadwick (1991), 83).

⁸⁴ Augustine *Conf.* V, 9.16 (Verheijen, L., (ed.), *CCSL* 27 (1981), 66). For this language of forgiving see *S.* 216, 5.5 quoted by O'Donnell (1992), II, 311.

⁸⁵ Mandouze (1968), 85 n.3.

The three sources explored in this section show that Augustine progressively reassessed his Christian *adulescentia* and adhesion to Manichaeism. In the *De beata vita*, he emphasised the weakness of his understanding of Christianity in Carthage and his logical adhesion to Manicheism. In the *De utilitate credendi*, he had a milder appreciation, accusing the Manichaeans of deceiving him instead. The precision of vocabulary in terms of Church hierarchy well exemplifies Augustine's transition from his time in Cassiciacum: now as a priest he would use his own past in anti-Manichaean polemics aimed at refuting Manichaeism and converting his friend. The *Confessiones* similarly use Augustine's past to refute opponents and exhort them to conversion, however it uses a more elaborate narrative offering a peculiar picture of the young Augustine's attachment to his Christian initiation before and after adhering to Manichaeism. The Christian background is strongly emphasised: Augustine is a young catechumen in a Christian family where initiation becomes increasingly relevant, his parents both taking steps to integrate more fully into the local Christian community. Beyond his retrospective critiques, evidence suggests that he followed their path. In Carthage, Augustine goes to church and, when reading the *Hortensius*, turns to the Bible for answers. The *Confessiones* thus offer the most reconciled view on Augustine's Christian upbringing.

Similar leniency is displayed in the *Contra Cresconium*, written against the Donatist grammarian probably between 405 and 407 after the laws of Honorius against rebaptism, when Augustine notes that he converted to Manichaeism as an "*adulescens laicus catechumenus*", which he sees as much less condemnable than a Catholic bishop becoming a Donatist.⁸⁶ Such a change results from the different genre of the works and shows the evolving uses of his past as a catechumen, which follow his new concerns as a cleric in Hippo. The three texts, however, have in common the use of his past to exhort readers to follow him in his journey towards the truth. Augustine is convinced that his example can be fruitfully exploited to

⁸⁶ Augustine, *C. Cresc.* IV, 64.79 (Petchenig, M., (ed.), *CSEL* 52/2 (1909), 578). Augustine refutes Cresconius' reply to his first book against the letters of Petilianus. See Veer, A. C. de, (not.), *BA* 31 (1968), 9-67 and 741-830; Moreau, M., (1996), 'Cresconius grammaticum partis Donati (Ad -)', *AL* 2, fasc. 1/2, 131-137; Lancel (1999), 395-397.

persuade friends, many of whom shared his background. The real break happens with the description of his attitude toward the religion of his youth during his time as a Manichee, an aspect only considered in the *Confessiones*, which focus on his lack of involvement. As a Manichee, he failed twice to reclaim his youth through baptism, remaining instead fully committed to Manichaeism. Augustine's presentation both shows that he remained within range of coming back to the Christianity of his youth and that, as a Manichee, he failed to reconnect with it.

Behind these contrasting descriptions, however, some concrete ground seems to emerge: he was involved in Christian communities both in Thagaste and in Carthage and tried to perfect his knowledge through the reading of the Bible, although this remained superficial; then he was attracted to Manichaeism and committed to it seriously. As a hearer, it is likely that he read Manichaean books widely and was involved in regular religious meetings.⁸⁷ The evidence about his friend suggests that, despite this commitment, receiving baptism was probably not a completely remote possibility, although more likely in Africa than in Rome, far from his mother and the rest of his family. Moreover, the distance shown from Catholic Christianity as a Manichee has also to be related to the polemical tone used against Manichaeans in describing his Roman illness. Augustine generally wanted to emphasise the distance between Manichaeans and Christians. This is made particularly clear in a passage of the *Contra litteras Petilianus*, a work made of three books, the first refuting a first version of a letter of the Donatist Petilianus of Cirta, the second a more detailed refutation of the letter in the form of a dialogue, before the final refutation of Petilianus' reply to Augustine's first

⁸⁷ Cf. O'Donnell (2005), 49. On Augustine's readings as a hearer I agree with Oort, van J., (2008), 'The young Augustine's knowledge of Manichaeism', *VChr* 62/5, 441-466; *Id.*, (2012), 'Augustine and the Books of the Manichaeans', in Vessey-Reid (2012), 188-199. Others have argued that Augustine mostly read such books only later, see for instance Coyle, J. K., (2001), 'What Did Augustine Know about Manichaeism When He Wrote His Two Treatises "De moribus"?', in van Oort-Wermelinger-Wurst (2001), 43-56 reprinted in Coyle, J. K., (2009), *Manichaeism and Its Legacy* (Leiden-Boston), 251-263; BeDuhn (2009), 42-105.

refutation, probably finished between 402 and 405.⁸⁸ In the third book, Augustine responds to accusations against himself and other converts to Manichaeism suggesting that he was baptised as a Manichee by underlining that Manichean hearers are never supposed to receive baptism.⁸⁹ Indeed, baptism was already rejected in early Manichean sources and Augustine's emphasis on his refusal of baptism in the *Confessiones* may have been intended to show that baptism had nothing to do with Manichaeism, where the sacred seals provided an alternative means of purification.⁹⁰ Presenting himself renouncing baptism as a Manichee in Africa and in Rome refuted the Donatists who accused him of having been baptised in Italy as a Manichee.

More broadly, it was certainly important for Augustine to distinguish between Christian catechumens and Manichaean hearers – since they shared many features – as the porous religious affiliations of his friends show, and contrary to the rigid distinctions of the *Confessiones*. Christians and Manicheans similarly distinguished two stages of initiation, sharing the same vocabulary of *catechumenus* for the first stage, while for the second stage they used *fidelis* and *electus* respectively. *Electus* however, was used by Christians in Italy – as it is attested in Ambrose and Leo the Great – to refer to the catechumens preparing for baptism.⁹¹ Revealingly, Augustine never used such a term, preferring *competens* instead.⁹² Both Christians and Manichaeans employed the term *gradus* to refer to these stages – the codex of Tebessa, like Augustine's *De fide et operibus*, refers to the *gradus catechumenorum*.⁹³ Although Manichaean initiation rites remain very little known for now it is very likely that the session to make new

⁸⁸ See Lancel (1999), 393; Hombert (2000), 189-193; Dodaro, R., 'Litteras Petilianus (Contra –)', *AL* 3, fasc. 7/8 (2010), 1030-1035.

⁸⁹ Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* III, 17.20.

⁹⁰ See Stroumsa, G., (2011), 'Purification and its Discontents. Mani's Rejection of Baptism', in North, J. A., and Price, S. R. F., (eds.), (2011), *The Religious History of the Roman Empire. Pagans, Jews and Christians* (Oxford), 460-478.

⁹¹ Ambrose, *De Helia et ieiunio* 10.34; Leo the Great, *Ep.* 16, 6.

⁹² For instance Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9; *S.* 392, 2. See also, for the use of *competentes*, amongst others, Chromatius of Aquileia (?), *S.* 18, l. 168.

⁹³ Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9; for the Tebessa codex see Decret (1989), 37-38. *Gradus* is also employed in Augustine, *Mor.* II, 18.65 written in 388 to refer to the Manichaean hearers. On the two stages in Manichaeism: BeDuhn, J., (2000), *The Manichaean Body. In Discipline and Ritual* (Baltimore), 25-68. The category of the God-fearers in Judaism may perhaps as well be profitably compared to these two-fold divisions, see for epigraphical evidence from the third century: Feldman, L. H., (1989), 'Proselytes and "sympathizers" in the light of the new inscriptions from Aphrodisias', *REJ* 148, 265-305; Murphy-O'Connor, J., (1992), 'Lots of God-fearers?: theosebeis in the Aphrodisias inscription', *Rbi* 99, 418-424.

catechumens in Augustine's community and the rite to make new hearers in Manichean communities both involved specific questions to the candidate and a catechesis on the core principles of the religion to which the candidate had to agree, ending with a ritual of consignation of the candidates.⁹⁴ A more thorough comparison of their practices on a larger scale could yield important results. Christians and Manichaeans shared a similar approach to religious initiation, with the development – for converts – of a peculiar religious posture of distant and partial adherence, temporary and intermediary belonging. It may be an overstatement to state with Ferrari that Augustine could not abandon the religion of his youth and would have necessarily kept attending Christian churches and presenting himself as a catechumen while he was a Manichee.⁹⁵ However, his religious belonging certainly implied flexibility and meant that change was easier, as it was the case twice for Augustine, first when he became a Manichee, and then when he renounced it.

III. The return: Milan and Cassiciacum

After the Roman illness, Augustine's appraisal of the Catholic Church and of his involvement in it is only known to us through his recollections of his stay in Milan. At some point difficult to determine, after arriving in Milan in 384, Augustine reintegrated the rank of catechumens. This period ends with his famous conversion and the decision to leave for Cassiciacum at the end of the summer 386. While his experience during these years is best known through the *Confessiones*, he also recalled it in a number of other sources: first in the *Contra academicos* written in Cassiciacum, then in the *De utilitate credendi* (391-392) and finally in two letters, uncertainly dated respectively to 395-397 and 400. Again, most recollections

⁹⁴ BeDuhn (2009), 36-42 offers an number of hypotheses. New evidence on Manichean catechesis in the Chester Beatty Kephalaia codex is being edited. See BeDuhn, J. D., Dilley, P., and Gardner, I., (eds.), (2015), *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex* (Leiden-Boston) for preliminary studies.

⁹⁵ Ferrari, L. C., (1995), 'Young Augustine: Both Catholic and Manichee [sic]', *AugStud* 26, 109-128. Also: Chadwick, H., (2003), 'Self-justification in Augustine's Confessions', *EHR* 118, 1160-1175, at 1163. I thank Robin Lane Fox for this reference.

precede the climax of the narrative reached in the *Confessiones*. I argue that in these key texts Augustine is consistent in connecting his initiation in Africa to his reintegration in the Church of Milan, while when he writes as a priest and bishop he sets this process more specifically in a liturgical context. Although employed to demonstrate the inevitability of his conversion, this evidence corroborates the continuity of Augustine's experience, the progress towards baptism being intimately connected to his time as a catechumen in Africa.

The passages of the *Contra academicos*, the *De utilitate credendi* and the *Confessiones* generically describing his initiation into Christianity in his youth through his parents are closely related to his new experiences in Milan. In the *Contra academicos*, Augustine explains that after reading the Platonic books he looked “in passing (*de itinere*)” at the religion of his youth, which attracted him, and as a result decided to read Paul to find answers.⁹⁶ Although scholarship has often dwelled on his lack of interest in Christianity, it is remarkable that in 386 Augustine the catechumen in Cassiciacum, recalling events happening only a few months earlier, already presented his conversion as a return, with new insights, to the religion of his youth. The later similar recollections in the *De utilitate credendi* and in the *Confessiones* are not therefore mere retrospective reconstructions of events long gone. At the very least, they are consistent with Augustine's position at the end of 386.⁹⁷ This said, these later works display a change of emphasis with the use of much more specific Church terminology to refer to his youth as a catechumen, corresponding to specific aims.

In the *De utilitate credendi* Augustine provides the first autobiographical account, from his adhesion to Manichaeism to his conversion in Milan, making of his journey an example to be imitated by Honoratus. Upon his arrival in Italy Augustine was undecided and favoured the scepticism of Academics, before gaining some new hope as he heard the preaching of

⁹⁶ Augustine, *C. acad.* II, 2.5. See the discussion of this passage in Harrison (2006), 23-27. For a philological analysis of the passage see Courcelle, P., (1948), *Les lettres grecques en Occident de Macrobe à Cassiodore* (Paris), 179-181 Führer, T., (1997), *Augustin 'Contra Academicos' (vel 'De Academicis') Bücher 2 und 3, Einleitung und Kommentar* (Berlin-New York), 93-94.

⁹⁷ See the overviews of the debate on the contrast between the dialogues and the *Confessiones* in Madec (1989); Ries (2005).

Ambrose in Milan. He therefore decided to be a catechumen (*catechumenus*) in the Church of Milan, which he identifies with the Church of his youth, waiting to find the truth.⁹⁸ Augustine seems therefore to recommend to Honoratus to become a catechumen in the Catholic Church, where he would be able to hear preaching and progressively integrate Christianity more fully. For the first time, Augustine referred to his initiation with the technical term of *catechumenus* and fully associated his status as catechumen in Milan with his initiation in Africa before he adhered to Manichaeism. A very similar view is held against Fortunatus in the summer of 392, where Augustine, as Van Oort has pointed out, explicitly says that he “returned” to the Catholic faith after abandoning Manichaeism.⁹⁹ Therefore, in contrast to the *Contra academicos*, and again because of the new concerns of the cleric, Augustine aimed to show to readers that the religion of his youth was in no way different from the Church of Ambrose and that he was able to easily reintegrate into it in Milan. In doing so, he opened the door for individuals like him. At the same time, he presented continuity in his Church membership against Africans who might have failed to see how to become a catechumen in Thagaste as a boy and in Ambrose’s Church in his thirties could have been the same. These Africans could be the Donatists, but also, more broadly Christians who questioned his religious background.

The *Confessiones* offer a very similar picture, although much more elaborated. In his account, Augustine takes the same elements of the *De utilitate credendi* but sketches a more progressive transformation of his own self, from the crossing of the sea to reach Rome to his arrival in Milan. In the fifth book, the illness in Rome is presented as the weakest moment of his search for truth. In figurative terms, the bishop describes the crossing of the sea and the parting with Monica using clear baptismal imagery: the waters of the sea on which he carries his sins are opposed to the water of grace which will purify him in Italy, Monica figuring

⁹⁸ Augustine, *Util. cred.* 8.20.

⁹⁹ Augustine, *C. Fort.* 37; van Oort (1991), 25-30.

again, with images of pregnancy, his future spiritual birth in the Church.¹⁰⁰ Thus Augustine already tells God and the reader that this journey had the purpose of fulfilling the initiation into Christianity and baptism so desired by his mother. This thread is followed at the end of the fifth book, when Augustine recalls his doubts in Italy after losing interest in Manichaeism and falling into scepticism, and refers, as in the *De utilitate credendi*, to the decision to become a catechumen in the Church of Milan after hearing the preaching of Ambrose, again using the technical term of *catechumenus*.¹⁰¹ At the beginning of the sixth book, consequently, Augustine is presented attending church regularly and starting to reconsider Christianity.¹⁰² Church terminology is again used in the middle of the sixth book to state in a somewhat anachronistic way that he decided to be a catechumen (*gradus; positus*).¹⁰³ Augustine's choice to become a catechumen is a decisive moment in the *Confessiones*: it stresses Augustine's return, reducing his Manichean past to a parenthesis. This narrative, already integrated in the *De utilitate credendi*, is more structured and detailed in the *Confessiones*, where it shares the likely targeted audience of Manichaeans and of Christians sceptical of Augustine's initiation in Italy. It had, as BeDuhn rightly suggests, the purpose of addressing issues which particularly challenged converts to Manichaeism in order to bring them to Christianity.¹⁰⁴ Concretely, however, it remains difficult to situate Augustine's decision. While Brown conjectured that it coincided with the arrival of his mother in Milan, it may more generally relate to his regular attendance to hear Ambrose's preaching between the end of 384 and 386.¹⁰⁵ It remains possible that the decision was taken late.

The *Confessiones* and two letters are, then, the only sources to follow Augustine's experience in Milan beyond the mention of his decision to become a catechumen. The letters,

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *Conf.* V, 8.15-9.17.

¹⁰¹ *Conf.* V, 14.24-25. On his relationship with Ambrose: Biffi, G., (1987), 'Conversione di Agostino e vita di una chiesa', in Caprioli, A., and Vaccaro, L., (eds.), (1987), *Agostino e la conversione cristiana* (Palermo), 23-34.

¹⁰² Augustine, *Conf.* VI, 4.

¹⁰³ Augustine, *Conf.* VI, 11.18.

¹⁰⁴ BeDuhn (2009), 28.

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 4.8 (*catechumenus* in Cassiciacum).

written respectively to Casulanus and Ianuarius perhaps around 395-396 and 400,¹⁰⁶ refer to Ambrose's advice given to Augustine for Monica who doubted the correct practice of fasting on Saturdays. It is difficult to situate these questions: it has been argued that they were asked close to Augustine's baptism.¹⁰⁷ Augustine recalls twice that, as a catechumen, he did not share his mothers' concerns over fasting.¹⁰⁸ However, it should be noted that Augustine is sufficiently involved in the Church to ask for advice in matters of Christian behaviour to Ambrose personally. In the *Confessiones*, Augustine depicts himself in Milan as becoming increasingly close to Ambrose's Christian community, often referring to his recovering and increasing faith.¹⁰⁹ There are indeed hints to the fact that he attended church regularly to hear Ambrose's preaching every Sunday.¹¹⁰ A further remark in the seventh book, when Augustine describes his first Platonic ascent, is relevant to understand Augustine's position as a catechumen and his recollections of it. The excessive light of the One and the weakness of the observer prevent him from completing the ascent and lead him into the "region of dissimilarity" where he hears a voice speaking: "I am the food of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me".¹¹¹ Madec has shown that this passage may refer, not only to the Eucharist, but to the opposition between Christ the word made flesh and Christ the word-God being respectively the milk of the little ones and the bread of angels.¹¹² The passage relates well with Augustine's descriptions of catechumens, notably in a homily on the Gospel

¹⁰⁶ Augustine, *Ep.* 36 is uncertainly dated: see Divjak, J., (2001), 'Epistulae', *AL* 2, fasc. 5/6, 893-1057, at 952. Dulaey, M., (2000), 'A quelle date Augustin a-t-il pris ses distances vis-à-vis du millénarisme ?' *REAug* 46, 31-60, at 48 n. 87 and 88 notes that Ambrose is referred to as still alive and that a peculiar quotation from Is. 26, 20 is used, both suggesting an early dating around 395-397. *Ep.* 54 is not formally a letter but is part of a set of replies to questions of Ianuarius, written after Ambrose's death, around 400 (see Divjak (2001), 956).

¹⁰⁷ Biffi (1987).

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, *Ep.* 36, 14.32; *Ep.* 54, 2.3.

¹⁰⁹ For instance *Conf.* VII, 5.7. See on this process: Mathon, G., (1955), 'Quand faut-il placer le retour d'Augustin à la foi catholique?', *REAug* 1, 107-27.

¹¹⁰ Augustine, *Conf.* VI, 3.4.

¹¹¹ Augustine, *Conf.* VII, 10.16.

¹¹² Madec (2001), 51-52, 135-139, 158. On ascents in Augustine: Madec, G., (1988), 'Ascensio-ascensus', *AL* 1, fasc. 3/4, 465-75, esp. 469-470.

of John, where catechumens are said to hear that Christ is the word made flesh but cannot understand and experience it as they have not been baptised and have not professed their faith.¹¹³ In these passages of the *Confessiones* and in the two letters, Augustine presents his time as a catechumen in the same way that he describes any other catechumen in his preaching: attending church, hearing the preaching and discussing with clerics, but having an imperfect faith in Christ and lacking of full participation into the church mysteries.

In the *Confessiones*, the conversion of Victorinus, whom Augustine says he was eager to imitate after hearing about it, helps to illustrate Augustine's position towards the decisive moments of 386.¹¹⁴ For O'Donnell, the eighth book of the *Confessiones* where the conversion of Victorinus is told, precisely narrates about Augustine preparing himself for a new commitment, even before starting the proper baptismal preparation.¹¹⁵ The story, referring back to events in Rome in the 350s, is narrated by Simplicianus just before other exemplary conversion narratives which end with the famous scene of the garden when Augustine's conversion is described.¹¹⁶ Augustine, like Victorinus, spent much time reading and considered himself Christian, even though he had not undergone full initiation. The story of the pagan rhetorician who was finally convinced to ask for baptism served to illustrate the necessity to commit to the *ecclesia* beyond the catechumenate.¹¹⁷ Indeed, Augustine presents his conversion in close relation to what he depicts as a growing church practice and a desire for religious initiation, particularly triggered by Simplicianus.¹¹⁸ The narrative of his time as a catechumen in Milan in the *Confessiones* aims to demonstrate that his conversion took place after a long and progressive reintegration of the Catholic Church, offering a model of

¹¹³ Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2; also *S.* 132, 1.

¹¹⁴ Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 5.10. On Marius Victorinus: Drecoll, V.-H., (2010b), 'Marius Victorinus', *AL* 3, fasc. 7/8, 1181-1185.

¹¹⁵ O'Donnell (2005), 59-60; similarly Führer, T., (2013) 'The "Milan Narrative" in Augustine's *Confessions*: Intellectual and Material Spaces in Late Antique Milan', *Studia Patristica* 70, 17-36, at 28-30.

¹¹⁶ On this story see as well Courcelle, P., (1966), 'Parietes faciunt christianos?', in *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'épigraphie et d'histoire offerts à Jérôme Carcopino* (Paris), 241-248; Harmless (2014), 106-108. More broadly on the significance of *exempla* in *Conf.* see Ayres, L., (2009), 'Into the Poem of the Universe. *Exempla*, Conversion, and Church in Augustine's *Confessiones*', *ZAC* 13/2, 263-281.

¹¹⁷ Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.4.

¹¹⁸ Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 6.13.

conversion resulting from liturgical participation that Augustine would regularly employ in his sermons and letters inviting catechumens to baptism. Augustine also elaborated his narratives to fit the specific concerns of a cleric who was questioned about his Manichaean past and had to show the continuity of his commitment to the Catholic Church, relating his upbringing as a catechumen in Africa to his conversion and initiation in Milan. However, against BeDuhn, who assesses this narrative as a fully anachronistic recollection, it should be noted that nothing in the evidence is against the fact, already stated in the *Contra academicos*, and repeated in the *De utilitate credendi* and the *Confessiones*, that Augustine truly felt reconnected in Milan to his Christian upbringing. It was important to him, as O'Donnell underlines, to be initiated in the same Church to which he would return in his hometown.¹¹⁹

Retreat before baptism

Augustine, therefore, decided to be baptised by Ambrose in Milan after a progressive reintegration into his status as a catechumen. At the end of the summer of 386, he left his teaching post and retreated to Cassiciacum with his friends, students and family. All that is known about this period of his life is found in the dialogues he wrote there, in addition to the *Confessiones* and the *Retractationes* reviewing his works at the end of his life. However, the dialogues themselves do not contain any reference to his initiation. As shown, they are restricted to Augustine's rejection of his religious upbringing when converting to Manichaeism and then to his reclaiming of it in Milan. In general, they are mostly concerned with a discussion of philosophy and reveal an atmosphere of learned discussions and newly found peacefulness. Therefore, the *Confessiones* provide again the only comments on how he considered himself as a catechumen who was about to enter baptismal preparation.

Augustine recalls of this period in the ninth book: "I was but a beginner in authentic love of you, a catechumen (*catechumenus*) resting at a country villa with another catechumen,

¹¹⁹ BeDuhn (2009), 23; O'Donnell (2005), 212-213; also Brown (2000), 70-71.

Alypius”.¹²⁰ Augustine describes himself as still unlearned and unperfected, sharing with Alypius his status of catechumen and aiming at progressing in the love of God. This matches well the intense writing of *Cassiciacum*, with an emphasis, lacking in the dialogues, on the technical term of *catechumenus*. Moreover, in the same book, the bishop reflects quite severely on the production of the young Augustine in the villa and considers that he was not yet fully committed, dedicating all his works to God but still filling them with pride.¹²¹ Later, remembering how he recovered from a toothache, he notes his faith in God and the lack of forgiveness of his sins, using an opposition which is central to Augustine’s presentation of catechumens.¹²² The planning of baptism in the spring of 387 is again only recalled in the *Confessiones*: a letter was sent to Ambrose to ask for permission to receive baptism and for advice on reading to prepare for it. Ambrose recommended reading Isaiah, which Augustine failed to understand, because of his poor training.¹²³ Thus, the catechumen in the villa as depicted in the *Confessiones* is a candidate eager to learn and write about God but who is still not fully perfected in his approach and understanding of Christianity. The descriptions fit perfectly with Augustine’s more general thinking about catechumens, individuals having faith and desire of adhesion but lacking in fundamental understanding resulting from concretely experiencing the rites of initiation. This is not a coincidence: Augustine aims to show that a full grasp of Christianity is only possible through catechesis, baptism and deeper involvement in the Christian community. This view is carried on in the *Retractationes* thirty years later.¹²⁴

In terms of practice, the letter to Ambrose is an important clue in understanding Augustine’s initiation in Milan: it has remained unnoticed in scholarship that this letter was possibly intended to serve as a first formal abjuration and renunciation of Manichaeism, required from apostates to enter the baptismal preparation, when candidates would again

¹²⁰ Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 4.8.

¹²¹ Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 4.7.

¹²² Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 4.12.

¹²³ Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 5.13.

¹²⁴ Augustine, *Retr.* Prol. 3.

perform a rite of renunciation of the devil.¹²⁵ The late fifth- or early sixth-century Roman pseudo-epigraphic *Commonitorium Augustini quod fertur* (CPL 533) precisely recommends that a written renunciation should be sent to the bishop who in return should write a letter granting admission to prepare for baptism with the help of a sponsor.¹²⁶ In the *Confessiones* Augustine states to God that he “informed your bishop, the holy man Ambrose, of my past errors and my present desire” and received Ambrose’s positive reply.¹²⁷ It is quite unlikely, as it goes against the evidence provided by Augustine, that he became a catechumen only after sending the letter. Most probably, Augustine had already taken some action to reintegrate into the status of catechumen, between late 384 and 386, possibly with Monica as a sponsor, and was then required – in order to enter baptismal preparation – to write a further full renunciation of his past affiliation to Manichaeism. It remains unsure, however, when precisely he sent this letter, whether before leaving for Cassiciacum or, more likely, during his stay in the villa. It is also worth reflecting on possible links between Augustine’s dismissal of his concubine, his marriage prospects, and the decision to become a catechumen and later enter the baptismal preparation. Indeed, Augustine tells us that his marriage plans were favoured and supported by Monica as a plausible way to bring him to baptism.¹²⁸ As for Augustine’s dying friend, the family certainly had a prominent role in the decision, sponsoring the candidate in the preparation while marital status may have influenced the decision process.

¹²⁵ On apostates and abjuration from Manichaeism see with further references: Perrin, M.-Y., (2007), ‘Le témoignage des ralliés: une arme de la polémique doctrinale entre chrétiens dans l’antiquité tardive’, in Maraval, P., and Tollet, D., (eds.), (2007), *La religion que j’ai quittée* (Paris), 65-86.

¹²⁶ Zycha, J., (ed.), *CSEL* 25/2 (1892), 979-982. For the dating in Ostrogothic Rome and a detailed discussion see Villegas Marín, R., ‘Abjuring Manichaeism in Ostrogothic Rome and Provence: The *Commonitorium quomodo sit agendum cum Manichaeis* and the *Prosperi anathematismi*’, *Studia Patristica* (forthcoming). I thank R. Villegas Marín for sending me his paper.

¹²⁷ Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 5.13. For Trapè (1974), 8 this letter was the first “confession” rejecting Manichaeism.

¹²⁸ Augustine, *Conf.* VI, 13.23.

IV. A disciple of Ambrose

After the retreat at the villa, Augustine came back to Milan at the beginning of 387 to start the baptismal preparation.¹²⁹ Apart from brief mentions in the *Confessiones*, Augustine's preparation for baptism is mainly recalled during the Pelagian controversy. This is in sharp contrast to the rest of his recollections about his catechumenate, which mostly concentrated in earlier works, culminating in the *Confessiones*. I first analyse the account in the *Confessiones* and suggest reasons for its allusive description of the baptismal initiation, then explore Augustine's new attention for pre-baptismal catechesis in works from 412-414 and 421. I argue that Augustine focused his attention on his baptismal preparation because it demonstrated that he was a disciple of Ambrose. During the Pelagian controversy this was essential to reclaim the authority of the bishop against his opponents.

In the *Confessiones*, Augustine only mentions that he went to Milan with Alypius and Adeodatus to prepare for baptism, probably between the Epiphany and the beginning of Lent, when Ambrose called for new candidates.¹³⁰ He concentrates on Alypius walking barefoot to be initiated, and on a short presentation of Adeodatus.¹³¹ The only initiation practice attested is the *nomen dare* which refers to the widely attested custom of candidates giving their names to be written on a special register.¹³² From this time they were called *competentes* or *electi*. Augustine then simply states that they were all baptised, highlighting that initiation was a collective practice as much as an individual one. The simplicity and shortness of the account has often surprised scholars who have suggested various explanations. The attested practice of the so-called *disciplina arcani*, which meant that core parts of Christian rituals were hidden to unbelievers and uninitiated Christians has been evoked as a possible reason for the absence of

¹²⁹ Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 6.14.

¹³⁰ Ambrose, *De Helia et Ieiunio* 21, 79; *In Lucam* IV, 76; *De sacramentis* III, 12. Same practice in Turin: Maximus, *Sermones* 13, 1; 65, 1-3; 91, 2; 111, 3.

¹³¹ Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 6.14.

¹³² In Augustine see for instance *Conf.* VIII, 2.4; *F. et op.* 6.8; *S.* 132, 1.1; *S.* 229, 1; *Ep.* 258, 5. In Milan: Ambrose, *De sacramentis*. III, 12 (authorship doubtful); *De Helia et ieiunio* 21.79.

a more detailed account, since the *Confessiones* enjoyed a wide readership.¹³³ However, Augustine still refers in other works with similar wide diffusion to some practices of initiation like the handing over of the creed and the Lord's Prayer, exorcisms and penance: he could have done the same in the *Confessiones*.¹³⁴

It has also been suggested that Augustine's brief description may be due to his desire not to overemphasise the role of clerics in the administration of sacraments in the context of the Donatist controversy. Focusing on the agency of God in every aspect of his conversion without referring to the actions of priests could have been a powerful argument. Indeed, Donatists would have been most concerned about the minister of baptism, since they believed, contrary to Augustine, that the sins of the minister may affect the candidate to baptism. This would have been particularly relevant for Augustine, whom they thought to have been baptised as a Manichee and because the authority of Ambrose would not have been necessarily recognised by them.¹³⁵ This interpretation may be corroborated by a sermon preached in Carthage, probably dated to September 403 and addressed against Donatists, in which Augustine recalls their accusations: according to them, there was no proof or trace of the fact that he and his friends had been baptised, while they were aware of Augustine's past as a Manichee. In response, Augustine underlines that he returned from Italy fundamentally changed and that his own baptism in Italy was prepared in a collective effort, with many witnesses.¹³⁶ This recollection is therefore intended to defend Augustine and his fellows baptised in Italy against Donatists. However, the hypothetical anti-Donatist background of the passage in the *Confessiones* does not fully explain its silences: Augustine could also have described all the rituals of initiation to defend himself while explicitly conferring to God every

¹³³ Busch (1938), 389-390. See Paredi, A., (1966), 'Dove fu battezzato sant'Agostino', *RecAug* 4, 11-26 for the baptismal ceremony in the baptistery attached to the *basilica nova*. Wills (2012), 85-122 offers a recent but at times fictionalised synthesis.

¹³⁴ On these rites see particularly Augustine, *S.* 56-59; 212-216; *Symb. cat.*

¹³⁵ O'Donnell (1992), III, 108; Chadwick (2003), 1169.

¹³⁶ Augustine, *In Ps.* 36, III, 19. For the dating: Hombert (2000) 12-13, 191-193; Dulaey, M., (not.), *BA* 58B (2014), 397-401.

power and validity in their performance against Donatists. Augustine's reluctance to dwell on his baptismal preparation may also relate to the events of 386: his belated commitment in 387, a year after Ambrose's resistance during Easter time, was perhaps not worthy of attention and could have been better told in few and simple words.¹³⁷ It could also be suggested, with similar attention to the immediate context, that Augustine kept a low profile in 387 and when recalling it because he had only recently renounced Manichaeism, perhaps only officially with his letter to Ambrose.¹³⁸

The interpretation of Augustine's reluctance to include a fuller account ultimately depends on the way that the passage is read: emphasising immediate concerns of 386-387 suggests their lasting impact on the *Confessiones* while focusing on the bishop's perspective gives more ground to the polemic against Donatists. However, there is no need to read the passage as a reflection of an immediate and specific context: while BeDuhn probably has gone too far suggesting that Augustine simply had little interest in rituals throughout his life¹³⁹, it is likely that his narrative followed other aims. Reading the *Confessiones* as a work presenting Augustine's theological conceptions rather than the immediate concerns of Church politics and practices may give the key to understanding Augustine's brevity. Precise descriptions of the baptismal rite are not narrated in the *Confessiones* but the bath of baptism, particularly the grace associated with it, and the forgiveness of sins that it brings are very often alluded to.¹⁴⁰ This is certainly because they serve the aim of illustrating the condition of mankind and its relationship with God, so central to the work. Bochet has noted that both the *Confessiones* and Augustine's explanations of Psalms 1 to 32 composed at the same period emphasise the significance of Augustine's meditation of psalms during his conversion. The explanations in

¹³⁷ See McLynn, N., (1994), *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Los Angeles-Berkeley), esp. 181-252; on Augustine's silence concerning the events of 386: Führer (2013), 24-36.

¹³⁸ Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 4.12.

¹³⁹ BeDuhn (2009), 37. Augustine alludes very often to rituals in his works: as a cleric he had to develop his thinking on rituals and supervised them every year, while he also employed them in polemics. It is therefore an overstatement to say that he was not interested in this aspect.

¹⁴⁰ On this Madec (2001), 55-59.

particular contain several allusions to the baptismal liturgy, notably explanations on Psalms 22 and 26 which are known to have been chanted during the baptismal preparation and after baptism.¹⁴¹ Thus, although baptism is clearly significant in Augustine's conversion and in the *Confessiones*, the lack of concrete descriptions should not necessarily be related with immediate concerns of Augustine but rather be understood as a result of the genre and narrative choices made by the writer. The brief account of preparation and baptism has therefore to be complemented by his other works.

After the *Confessiones*, Augustine only recalled his baptismal preparation during the Pelagian controversy: first in 411-413 when he wrote to Fortunatian of Sicca (*Ep.* 148 perhaps in late 411) and Paulina (*Ep.* 147, in 412-413) and composed the *De fide et operibus* (412-413), then in the polemics with Julian of Aeclanum in the first books of the *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* (418-419) and *Contra Iulianum* (421). The focus on Ambrose's catechesis in 411-413, as noted by Courcelle, is no coincidence but a striking convergence.¹⁴² In particular, Hombert recently hypothesised that *Ep.* 147 may have been composed in connection to Augustine's stay in Carthage in the winter 412-413, noting striking commonalities with sermons preached there in January 413.¹⁴³ I shall also suggest in Chapter Four that the *De fide et operibus* was composed in the same context. The first passage, in the *De fide et operibus*, is found at the beginning of the work. The treatise, is intended to refute unidentified opponents who argued that a profession of faith was enough before baptism, and who questioned the need for a full initiation process, rules of admission based on behaviour, and rites of penance. Augustine argued that the catechumenate was an essential period of preparation and referred to his own experience, asking his readers whether "we repress the testimony of our own experience so far as to forget how intent and anxious we were over what the catechists taught

¹⁴¹ Bochet, I., (2000), 'L'expérience de la conversion selon les 32 premières *Enarrationes in Psalmos* d'Augustin', in *L'esegesi dei Padri latini. Dalle origini a Gregorio Magno* (Rome), 307-330. Augustine, *S.* 216 cites Psalm 26 to his *competentes*; for Psalm 22 see our discussion of anonymous sermons in chapter 5.

¹⁴² Courcelle (1968), 212 n.7.

¹⁴³ Augustine, *S.* 23, 57, 277. For this and the dating of *Ep.* 147 and 148 see Hombert (2000), 183-184.

us when we were petitioning for the sacrament, and for precisely this reason were called *competentes*?”¹⁴⁴ This is the only passage in Augustine’s treatises explicitly recalling the catechesis received as a *competens*.

The two letters written in 411-413 are closely related and try to resolve the opposition between John 1, 18 (“*Deus nemo vidit umquam*”) and the theophanies which are found in both the Old and New Testament. Augustine quotes from the exegesis of Ambrose on Luke and refers to his baptism.¹⁴⁵ Particularly, he concludes his letter 147, also known as the book *De videndo Deo*, explaining that the interpretations given are true since they were told to him by the mouth of Ambrose himself: “For I am not pleased with it just because the Lord set me free from error, especially through the words of that man, and granted me the grace of saving baptism through his ministry, as if I were favouring him too much as the one who planted and watered me”.¹⁴⁶ As I shall show in the next chapter, the image of planting and watering recalls other instances in Augustine, where the passage of 1 Cor 3, 6 (“*Ego plantavi, Apollo rigavit; sed Deus incrementum dedit*”) is used in connection with the catechumenate and baptismal preparation in controversies with Donatists over the role of the administrator of baptism. The reference to Paul shows that Augustine wanted to prevent his readers from thinking that he used Ambrose as an authority merely because he baptised him, perhaps reacting against the Donatists’ emphasis on the worthiness of the minister in baptism. Augustine’s position is ambiguous, both referring to Ambrose’s authority and minimising the role of the administrator of baptism. It is however quite a generic reference, that not necessarily points to the pre-baptismal catechesis mentioned in the *De fide et operibus* as Courcelle had suggested. It should be noted that the catechesis could have been given after baptism, or even some time before Augustine actually began his preparation, therefore not necessarily during Lent.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Augustine, *F. et op.* 6.9 (Liguori, M., (transl.), *FOC* 27 (1955), 230).

¹⁴⁵ Augustine, *Ep.* 147, 23.52 and *Ep.* 148, 2.6 and 3.12 (particularly *In Lucam* I, 24-27).

¹⁴⁶ Augustine, *Ep.* 147, 23.52.

¹⁴⁷ It is difficult to exactly match the exegeses quoted by Augustine with homilies actually preached by Ambrose and then even more difficult to try to date these homilies. For Courcelle (1968), 211-221 this

The first book against Julian in 421 similarly emphasises the role of Ambrose as a strong authority to refute the Italian bishop and refers to Augustine's initiation in Milan: "But listen again to another of God's excellent stewards, a man whom I revere as a father, for he gave me birth (*genuit*) in Christ through the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 4, 15) and by him as Christ's minister I received the bath of rebirth".¹⁴⁸ The reference to Ambrose giving birth (*genuit*) to Augustine in the Gospel is particularly interesting: it cannot mean baptism, which is mentioned later, but might well refer again to the preparation for baptism,¹⁴⁹ although it could allude to preaching in general. A similar reference to Ambrose as the administrator of his baptism, whose exegesis should be followed by Pelagius and Julian, is found in the first book of the *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, from 418-419.¹⁵⁰ It may similarly point out, without certainty, to elements of Augustine's preparation to baptism, particularly because of its reference to the book of Isaiah recommended to Augustine by Ambrose while he was in Cassiciacum.¹⁵¹ The last time Augustine referred to his time of preparation as a *competens* was at the end of his life, when he indicated in the *Retractationes* that he wrote the *De immortalitate animae*, the *De grammatica*, and the *De Musica* in Milan while preparing for baptism.¹⁵² These works, except a reference perhaps to Ambrose's teaching in the *De immortalitate animae*, do not contain any reference to his preparation.¹⁵³ Although this has been used as proof of his lack of interest in Christianity just before baptism,¹⁵⁴ this parallel literary activity only shows that Augustine pursued his work on liberal arts and philosophy begun at Cassiciacum. Such mixed interests

teaching on Luke was received in 387 and not earlier because in *Conf.* VII, 19, 25 he says that he has heard about the wrongs of Photinus only some time later.

¹⁴⁸ Augustine, *C. Iul.* I, 3.10. For the dating see Lancel (1999), 583.

¹⁴⁹ Courcelle (1968) 211-221.

¹⁵⁰ Augustine, *Nupt. et conc.* I, 35.40. For the dating: Lössl, J., (2012), 'Nuptiis et concupiscentia (De -)', *AL* 4, fasc. 1/2, 261-268, at 261-262.

¹⁵¹ Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 4.12.

¹⁵² Augustine, *Retr.* I, 5-6.

¹⁵³ Augustine, *An. quant.* 34, 77 speaks of the *doctrina* that has been taught to him. For Harmless (2014), 110-111 it may refer to Ambrose's explanation of the creed.

¹⁵⁴ See the overview in Madec (1989).

did not fail to meet with the strong disapproval of the old Augustine but most probably reflect how he experienced the process.¹⁵⁵

In summary, the account of the *Confessiones* is short and allusive regarding practice. While reasons for this shortness may be sought in the *disciplina arcani*, the polemics against Donatists or the position of Augustine in 386-387, it is more likely that it simply reflects the specific aims of the work, concentrating on the links between conversion, the power of baptism and God's grace rather than rituals. Beyond the *Confessiones*, Augustine employed his own lived experience as an argument against opponents: in a sermon against the Donatists, Augustine underlined the collective effort of preparation to reject accusations of being a Manichee; in the Pelagian controversy, first in 411-413, then in 418-421, he emphasised the catechesis received from Ambrose in Milan as a way to claim back Ambrose to his side. At the end of his life Augustine kept a critical eye on the constant interest in liberal arts of the young candidate to baptism.

Conclusion

In general, and in particular for the *Confessiones*, Augustine did not simply want to inform his audience about himself but used the narrative of his own catechumenate as a protreptic to bring others to conversion. His Christian upbringing, the following adhesion to Manichaeism and his return to the status of catechumen in Milan are recalled in the writings of Cassiciacum, at the time of his priesthood and in the *Confessiones* in similar terms, thus highlighting the continuity in Augustine's works from 386 to the *Confessiones*. However, a progressive change of focus and terminology is visible in the writings of the cleric: Augustine recalls his status of catechumen with the technical terminology of religious belonging and emphasises his involvement in the Church, both in Africa and in Milan, particularly in the *Confessiones*. The adhesion to Manichaeism is also reassessed with a milder view, to

¹⁵⁵ Augustine, *Retr.* I, 6.6.

demonstrate that for a young Christian in Africa falling into Manichaeism was both understandable and temporary. The *Confessiones*, the only source to follow Augustine's connections to Christianity after his conversion to Manichaeism, relate two baptismal episodes stressing the distance between Manichaeism and the Christianity of his youth, perhaps to demonstrate to his Christian opponents, particularly the Donatists, that he was not baptised as a Manichee. Indirectly, Augustine's aim to construct a rigid presentation of his adhesion to Manichaeism and rejection of Christian baptism shows that religious affiliation in his youth was porous and allowed flexibility. The initiation in Milan is consistently presented from 386 to the *Confessiones* as a return to the African catechumenate, while the writings of the cleric, and particularly the *Confessiones*, also aim to demonstrate the significance of the catechumenate for the conversion process, thus addressing potential converts. In the *Confessiones* Augustine resorted to his experience to present a model of conversion, based on a progressive perfection of the self, both in terms of doctrine and behaviour. The activities of the catechumen in Cassiciacum, carried on in Milan while preparing for baptism are criticised in the *Confessiones* and the *Retractationes*, depicting Augustine as partially integrated and in need of liturgical preparation, baptism and further training to get a better grasp of Christianity. The *Confessiones* only offer a brief description of his baptismal preparation, focusing rather on the theological implication of baptism; finally, during the Pelagian controversy, in 411-413 and 418-421 Augustine referred to the catechesis of Ambrose as an argument of authority.

Augustine's catechumenate is narrated in the context of religious controversies. The Donatist background appears intermittently, particularly through Augustine's rejection of baptism as a Manichee, the defence of his baptism outside Africa as a collective event, and the discretion displayed in describing his own baptism in the *Confessiones* and the correspondence of 411-413. Augustine's stress on the mediocrity of his Christian education before the adhesion to Manichaeism and the sharp distinctions drawn between Manichaean hearers and catechumens are to be understood in the context of polemics against Manicheans, which are

central to the works of the priesthood but tend to become less central in the *Confessiones* and later. It has been shown that there is a change of emphasis in Augustine's recollections of his catechumenate from the *Confessiones* onwards, with Augustine focusing on baptismal preparation rather than his time as a catechumen in Africa and Italy. Thus, in the context of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine, for reasons which should be explored further, insists on the significance of baptismal preparation. Augustine cleverly used his past to exhort readers to adhere to his views and wrote about his catechumenate for two main and specific goals: first, to show through his own life how the lives of other catechumens and baptised Christians could be perfected; second, to build a powerful tool in polemical writings which he could use not only to defend himself, but to obtain authoritative arguments against opponents.

I would argue that the growing interest for his African initiation up to the *Confessiones* and the change of emphasis in his later recollections are not the result of radically new developments of his thought but rather correspond to the adjustment to changing contexts and readerships as a cleric. As I shall show in the next two chapters, what Augustine said about himself often matches what he said in general in his preaching, as a result of the dialogue between the experiences of the young catechumen and the cleric presiding over the catechumenate. However, it appears that the early 400s are a turning point in Augustine's treatment of *catechumeni*: the *Confessiones* provide Augustine's last discussion of his African background as a catechumen. While Augustine turned to *catechumeni* starting from his own experience, he gradually developed broader lines of thought as an African cleric in charge of the initiation.

Despite the specific contexts and purposes of his recollections, this study also aimed to demonstrate that Augustine's account should not be entirely mistrusted. A concrete picture of Augustine as a catechumen emerges: he was born and raised in a Christian environment, then, contrary to what is generally stated in scholarship, he most likely became a catechumen as a boy, probably between seven and twelve years of age. He grew up praying, learning about

God and going to church, and his initiation probably took place close to the time of his mother's baptism and some time before the enrolment of his father as a catechumen. In Carthage, he attended church services and turned to the Bible for answers. As a Manichee, he was never as distant from Christianity as he emphasised. After abandoning Manichaeism in Italy, he aimed at reconnecting with his youth and chose therefore to adhere to the Church of Ambrose; he became progressively involved in the Christian community and wrote a letter intended as a formal renunciation of Manichaeism, opening the way for his baptismal preparation during which he received a special catechesis recalled years later. It is difficult to say whether Augustine's *parcours* was typical: while many features of his catechumenate can be found elsewhere, the sum of his experiences and the way they are told are unique. A broader study of the catechumenate in Africa, still largely depending on Augustine as our main source, shall help refine our understanding of this process of integration and demonstrate the variety of practices and the centrality of the catechumenate in Christian polemics.

CHAPTER 3.

Augustine and the *catechumeni*: practices and polemics

The study of Augustine's recollections about his own experience has offered first insights into the catechumenate of an exceptionally well-known individual. Beyond Augustine's own experience, *catechumeni* however remain a largely unknown group and category within late antique Christianity. This chapter therefore aims to study more broadly what it meant, for Augustine and his contemporaries, to be a catechumen in a Christian community. It focuses on the practicalities of the catechumenate witnessed by Augustine during his life as an influential cleric of North Africa between the 390s and 430. In the preceding chapter, it has been shown that Augustine's recollections of his time as a *catechumenus* are told in a context of religious polemics and culminate with the *Confessiones*. This chapter shall follow this thread and focus on how Augustine, progressively leaving his own past behind, started to provide broader guidance on how catechumens should be taught, particularly in the *De catechizandis rudibus* and the *Contra Faustum* written in the early 400s. Rather than only resorting to his personal trajectory, the priest and bishop also repeatedly employed the liturgy of initiation, which he witnessed and presided at, as an argument in polemics against Donatists and Pelagians.

Most of the available evidence on practices concerns the baptismal preparation, its special catechesis and rites in the weeks preceding Easter. Scholarship investigating Augustine as a source for the ancient catechumenate has therefore concentrated on this short and intensive preparation.¹ Augustine also constitutes a main source in early Christianity about the admission process into the catechumenate: his presentation of the admission, the rites and the first catechesis in the *De catechizandis rudibus* has thus attracted the interest of scholars.² Much

¹ See chapter 1 p. 20 n. 27.

² Roetzer (1930), 137-143; Busch (1938), 404-423; Folkemer (1946), 301-304; Monachino (1947), 165-173; Van der Meer (1961), 353-357; Maertens (1962), 114-115 and 122-125; Poque, S., (transl. not.), SC 116

less attention has been paid, however, to the practices of *catechumeni* more broadly beyond the admission process, for which Augustine is a rare source of information. Augustine reflected on the correct way of catechising and giving rites to catechumens, he addressed them in his preaching and used them as examples in several of his treatises. This chapter seeks to renew existing studies by adopting a historical approach, putting the evidence in its polemical context and focusing on the practices of *catechumeni* as a specific group, both at the enrolment and beyond.

In the first part of this chapter, starting from the admission process, its rites and teaching and the profiles of candidates, I highlight that most evidence relates to polemics against Donatists and Pelagians; I also suggest, extending earlier tentative hypotheses, that rites cannot be reduced to a single session of admission but may have been performed by ordinary catechumens after their admission.³ I then investigate the catechumens' special rites after the admission process, focusing on two main practices of the catechumens' membership: the signing of the forehead with the cross and the dismissal during mass related to the *disciplina arcani*, which underline respectively their inclusion and exclusion from the community.⁴ The study of practices shall therefore provide an accurate account of the liminality of the catechumens' status as evident from contrasting practices. This chapter opens new avenues of research on the significance of catechumens in late antique Christian communities. I argue that Augustine was well aware that catechumens constituted a crucial

(1966), 22-23; De Latte (1975), 178-191; Latham, J. E., (1982), *The religious symbolism of salt* (Paris), 98-103; Saxer (1988), 381-399; Cavallotto (1996), 164-194; Lamirande (1992a); Grossi (1993), 14-41 and 53-60; Gavriluk (2007), 278-287; Ferguson (2009), 779-780; Harmless (2014), 131-180; Jensen-Patout Burns (2015), 202-204.

³ The repetition of the giving of salt has been denied by Klöckener, M., (1998), 'Die Bedeutung der neu entdeckten Augustinus-Predigten (*Sermones Dolbeau*) für die liturgiegeschichtliche Forschung', in Madec (1998), 129-170 at 155-156. However the mention of the rite in canon 3 of the council of Hippo (on which see chapter 5) has led scholars to rightly argue that it was repeated after the admission: Dölger (1909), 99; van der Meer (1961), 356; Madec, G., (transl., not.), *BA* 11/1 (1991), 266-267; Gavriluk (2007), 287; Harmless (2014), 174 n. 157 and 224; Jensen-Patout Burns (2015), 202-203. Busch (1938), 386 suggested that Augustine received the sign of the cross repeatedly as a catechumen. Monachino (1947), 168 already noted, as I shall here suggest, that the rites of admission were regularly repeated, perhaps at the dismissal.

⁴ Harmless (2014), 184 noted that these two practices were often stressed in Augustine's turns to catechumens.

group in the fight against rival religious communities and for the negotiation of the identity and boundaries of his own community. I demonstrate that he paid careful attention to their initiation, and at the same time, used the rites performed on catechumens as a tool in controversies to prove theological points. Thus, investigating the practices of catechumens in Augustine more broadly offers a peculiar viewpoint to study Augustine's career and controversies.

I. Practices of admission into the catechumenate and their polemical background

In the *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, Augustine tells that the deacon of Carthage, Deogratias, wrote to ask him for help in dealing with candidates to the catechumenate, who are called *rudes* in reference to their being uninitiated.⁵ Augustine's reply is divided into two parts: first an answer to the doubts of Deogratias concerning the correct way of giving the *narratio* – presentation of Bible history – outlining general principles of catechesis, then two examples of speeches, one long and one short.⁶ Between the first and the second part, Augustine describes the solemn rite that, as I shall show, makes the candidate a member of the Church as a *catechumenus*. The treatise should be situated in the early 400s, perhaps in connection with Augustine's preaching campaign in Carthage in the winter 403-404, because of the parallel development of the new theme of the two cities in this treatise and in a series of sermons preached in Carthage in that period.⁷ It is clear that Augustine enjoyed a prominent position in the African churches, which explains why he was consulted.⁸ His involvement in the instruction of catechumens in Carthage, however, has been less noticed.⁹

The detailed exploration of Augustine's texts about catechumens shows that on several

⁵ Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 1, 1.

⁶ Respectively Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 15.23-25.49 and 26.51-27.55.

⁷ For this dating hypothesis: Hombert (2000), 41-44. The dating around 400 is unsure because of the position of the treatise in Augustine, *Retr.* is inconsistent. See Madec, G., (not.), *BA* 11/1 (1991), 233-237 and Mayer, C., (1992), 'Catechizandis rudibus (De -)', *AL* 1, fasc. 5/6, 794-805 at 795-796 for more discussion.

⁸ Deogratias asked at least another time for Augustine's help: Augustine, *Ep.* 102 replied to queries from a pagan sent by the deacon.

⁹ Scholars argue that Augustine only initiated catechumens in Hippo, see chapter 4 p. 123-124 n. 2.

occasions during his life he took special care of catechumens in Carthage. The *De catechizandis rudibus* is the first and most clear evidence about this involvement in the early 400s, going hand in hand with other interventions in Carthage that shall be explored in Chapter Four, first in several sermons on the rite of the cross on the forehead, then particularly in 412-413 when Augustine wrote about the catechumenate in the *De fide et operibus*. Moreover, in the late 420s, letters exchanged between Augustine and the Carthaginian aristocrat Firmus show that the bishop employed his letters and works to instruct catechumens in Carthage and bring them to baptism.¹⁰ In particular, the eighteenth book of the *De civitate Dei*, bearing striking similarities in structure and content to the *De catechizandis rudibus* was read for three afternoons to an audience comprising catechumens.¹¹ Firmus, an eager reader of Augustine's works – he had also read the *Contra Academicos* – requested and received copies of the *De civitate Dei*. Augustine asked him for feedback and even put him in charge of binding and spreading the work in Carthage among his catechumen and pagan friends.¹² Thus, despite first impressions, when writing the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine was not merely acting as a distant expert but was directly involved in the initiation of catechumens in Carthage.¹³

Seeing the need of local clerics like Deogratias to be trained in such a difficult task, Augustine took the opportunity to provide a rare synthesis on the first catechesis for newcomers that includes unique details about the admission process. Augustine's treatise revealing his concrete techniques of catechesis is a remarkably practical guide giving insights into the process of admission and the perspective of the catechist. The catechetical discourse, particularly its pedagogy, and the rites related to the catechesis have therefore been thoroughly

¹⁰ Augustine, *Ep.* 1A* and 2* (respectively around 426-427 and 427-428). See Divjak, J., (transl., not.), *BA* 46B (1987), 7-32 and 424-429, and a more detailed study of these and other letters to catechumens in my forthcoming article (2016): 'Questioning baptism: insights from Augustine's correspondence', *RHE* 111/3-4.

¹¹ On the catechetical purpose of the *De civitate Dei* in connection to the letter to Firmus see Schäublin, C., (1984), 'Zwei Bemerkungen über Literatur in den neuen Augustin-Briefen', *MH* 41, 54-61, at 55-57; van Oort (1991), 171-198; *Id.*, (1993), 'Augustine's letters to Firmus (1 A* and 2*) and the Purpose of the *De civitate Dei*', *Studia Patristica* 27, 417-423.

¹² Augustine, *Ep.* 1A*, 3; *Ep.* 2*, 3.

¹³ A hundred years later, Fulgentius acted as the expert on initiation solicited by the deacon of Carthage Ferrandus, remarkably mirroring Augustine's exchange with Deogratias. However, the perspective was different, as we shall see in chapter 6.

studied and analysed.¹⁴ I shall here only focus on the concrete practices of admission, looking at the way that this first session worked as a combination of catechesis and rites of incorporation, before complementing the analysis of the work with other lesser-known writings.

1. The first catechesis

The first contact between the catechist and newcomers starts with a dialogue, meant to build a relationship and adapt the catechesis: Augustine recommends that catechists – who seem to be clerics, although nothing is specified – should tailor the catechesis to the candidate's profile, if possible by asking others who know the candidate's motives to become a Christian, otherwise asking the candidate directly.¹⁵ This suggests that the candidate's decision to convert was often the result of interactions with other Christians and at the same time that these Christians acted as sponsors. Augustine insists that the catechesis should build on whatever the candidates say, even when candidates lie to hide shameful reasons for converting, thus bringing them to think differently about their move. Motives particularly included fear, dreams and miracles.¹⁶ It seems likely that catechists would frequently use such powerful motives to their advantage, building their teaching on manifestations of God's power. In the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine is reluctant to endorse such methods and notes that candidates should be led to focus on Scripture rather than miracles as proof of God's wonders.¹⁷ However, in later works from the 420s, the bishop devotes much more attention to dreams and miracles and frequently employs them as the basis to convince others

¹⁴ The bibliography is vast and cannot be presented here (on the admission process see note 2). On the treatise see for instance, with further bibliography: Christopher, J. P., (transl., not.), *ACW* 2 (1946), 91-419; Cordovani, R., (1966), 'Il *De catechizandis rudibus* di s. Agostino. Questioni di contenuto e di stile', *Augustinianum* 6, 489-527; Belche, J.-P., (1977, 1978, 1979, 1982), 'Die Bekehrung zum Christendium nach des hl. Augustinus Büchlein "De cat. rud."', *Augustiniana* 27, 26-69; 28, 255-287; 29, 247-279; 32, 42-87 and 282-311; Madec, G., (transl., not.), *BA* 11/1 (1991), 9-41 and 233-267; Mayer (1992); Pasquato (2006), 925-926.

¹⁵ Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 5, 9; 13, 19.

¹⁶ See Harmless (2014), 135-148.

¹⁷ Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 6, 10.

about the necessity and power of the rites of initiation, particularly of the necessity of baptism.¹⁸ This evolution perhaps shows the significance of these motives, Augustine progressively taking them more positively into account.¹⁹

According to the *De catechizandis rudibus*, the brief dialogue with the candidate is followed by a lecture on the history of salvation from creation to Augustine's time (*narratio*), which constitutes the main point of the catechesis and on which Deogratias expressed doubts. Augustine explains that the catechist should highlight that love is the common thread of this history and that its convergence and accomplishment is in the incarnation of Christ.²⁰ The catechesis also includes a discussion of important aspects that might be of a particularly sensitive nature for a newcomer, such as the Christian belief in the resurrection of the flesh and the need to follow strict rules of behaviour as a Christian. Augustine insists on the need to end the catechesis by making sure that the candidate is aware that the Church is made of good and bad and that it was foretold in the Bible. Thus the catechesis should present the rules of behaviour to be followed, warn the candidate about bad behaviour in the community and point to the virtuous example of good Christians.²¹ The whole lecture gives great weight to the typological reading of the Bible, presenting the history of mankind as the accomplishment of prophecies foretold in the sacred text.²² Further advice is provided by Augustine on how to deal with well-educated individuals, shortening the catechesis if

¹⁸ In 423, Augustine, *Cura mort.* 12, 15 narrates Curma's dreamt baptism, which triggers his decision to be truly baptised (see for the dating and a detailed analysis: Rose, P. J., (2013), *A commentary on Augustine's De cura pro mortuis gerenda* (Leiden)). In *Oct. quaest.* 7, 3 written in 424 to Dulcitius, Augustine tells about Celticius' decision to be baptised after a terrifying dream (on the work see Dulaey, M., (2012), 'Octo Dulcitii quaestionibus (De -)', *AL* 3, 7/8, 277-281). Finally, *Ciu.* XXII, 8.5, 8.6, 8.14.1 (completed in 426-427) narrates a series of miraculous healings resulting from baptism. See as well *Ep.* 227 praising the conversion and baptism of a reluctant pagan, Dioscorus, who fell ill several times because he refused to prepare for baptism and then failed to memorise the creed. I have carried a detailed study of these texts which however could not be included within the limits of this thesis. I discuss the letter in more detail in Pignot (2016).

¹⁹ The frequent reference to miracles in Augustine's later life, particularly after the introduction of the cult of Saint Stephen has been often noted by scholars, see Markus (1990), 149; Lancel (1999), 332-335 and 648-658; Brown (2000), 417-422; Roessli, J.-M., (2012), 'Mirabilia, miraculum', *AL* 3, 7/8, 25-29; Brown, P., (2015), *The Ransom of the Soul* (Cambridge MA), 57-65.

²⁰ Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 3, 6 – 5, 9. See Uhle, T., (2012), 'Narratio', *AL* 4, fasc. 1/2, 148-150.

²¹ Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 14, 21 and 25, 46-48.

²² See Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 3,6 and 4, 7-8 in particular.

necessary, and how to avoid boredom when instructing catechumens.²³ It has been shown that Augustine's principles of catechesis are set in the context of ancient rhetoric and the Ciceronian traditional set speech.²⁴ Augustine finally provides two models of catechesis, to be adapted to the audience.²⁵

While this practical guide has received considerable attention, it is remarkable that Augustine had already touched upon several aspects of the first catechesis in less known remarks of the *Contra Faustum* that call for comparison.²⁶ In this polemical dialogue, or *disputatio*, composed probably in the early 400s perhaps a few years before the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine systematically replies to statements from the *Capitula* written by the now-dead Manichean of Milevis.²⁷ He explains how newcomers are to be taught, suggests an example of first catechesis, and summarises how it should work. Significantly, before departing for Italy, Augustine had met Faustus in Carthage, expecting to receive guidance from him that would clear his doubts about Manichaeism.²⁸ Thus, Faustus was eagerly awaited by Augustine the hearer, in a way that may not be too distant from what would be expected from catechists in Carthage. Augustine's refutation of Faustus' views on catechesis is a rejection of the Manichee's authority as a teacher and the early development of Augustine's own principles of catechesis.

The *Contra Faustum* dismisses Faustus' distinction between the Old and the New Testament and his rejection of the Jewish roots of Christianity.²⁹ This debate, in the thirteenth

²³ Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 7, 11 – 10, 14.

²⁴ I shall not insist here on these aspects: see Harmless (2014), 149-164.

²⁵ Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 10.14-14.22. On these: Harmless (2014), 164-175.

²⁶ Augustine, *C. Faust.* XIII. It is not mentioned in the studies quoted in note 2, except in notes by Busch (1938), 407-408 n. 36 and Harmless (2014), 132 n. 4.

²⁷ The dating remains uncertain. Decret, F., (2003a), 'Faustus Manicheum (Contra –)', *AL* 2, fasc. 7-8, 1244-1252 at 1245 suggests 400-404. A good summary of hypotheses in Hombert (2000), 25-29 who favours 400-402.

²⁸ See Augustine, *Conf.* V, 11. On Faustus: Decret (1970), 56-70; Decret (1978), 361-363 and Decret, F., (2003b), 'Faustus Manichaeus', *AL* 2, fasc. 7-8, 1252-1255.

²⁹ On these *Capitula* and Manichaeans, see Monceaux, P., (1924), *Le Manichéen Faustus de Milev: Restitution de ses Capitula* (Paris); Decret (1970; 2003); Beduhn (2009), 106-134; Massie, A., (2011), *Peuple prophétique et nation témoin. Le peuple juif dans le Contra Faustum manichaeum de saint Augustin* (Paris).

book, comes to the question of the relevance of Jewish prophets for the first catechesis given to pagan candidates. Faustus pictures a fictive first session in which, as he aims to show, the catechist fails to convince a pagan to believe in Christ through the authority of Jewish prophets and suggests that pagans may more profitably adhere to Christianity after hearing pagan prophecies.³⁰ In his refutation, Augustine opposes Manichaean teaching on Christ and asserts that all converts from paganism are routinely introduced to Christianity through the prophecies of the Old Testament.³¹ Pagans are convinced not simply through the human reputation (*fama*) of prophets but through the authority of the canonical Christian books confirmed through the tradition of the Church. Augustine therefore presents his own fictive catechesis: books are used by the catechist to show passages of prophecies from the Old and New Testament that have been confirmed, notably the persecutions of Christians by Roman emperors and their laws, the present veneration of Christ by emperors and kings and the destruction of pagan idols.³² For Augustine the Jewish background of Christianity is essential to give credit to the ancient character of the prophecies presented to the candidate, who might otherwise question them.³³

Other difficulties should openly be addressed, such as the reasons why the Jews did not believe in the prophecies about Christ, why there are so many different heresies, and why the candidate should choose the “true” Church. Remarkably close to the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine argues that the catechesis is only convincing when the authority of the prophecies in the Bible is proved by first mentioning all the facts already predicted.³⁴ Similarly,

³⁰ Augustine, *C. Faust.* XIII, 1. This might also constitute a source to suggest that Manichaeans, as has been noted in chapter 2, had similar practices for making new members, starting with a first teaching, the content of which is here debated between Faustus and Augustine.

³¹ *Ibid.* XIII, 3. Augustine particularly emphasised this aspect throughout his life employing the rare pair “praedicta, impleta” as an apologetic argument: Dulaey, M., (2016), ‘Prophetiae, prophetia’, and ‘Praedicta – impleta’, *AL* 4, fasc. 5/6 (forthcoming).

³² *Ibid.* XIII, 5-9.

³³ *Ibid.* XIII, 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.* XIII, 11-14.

he also notes that after the catechesis is given, the candidate entering the Christian community receives moral instruction and learns that the Church is made of good and bad Christians.³⁵

Thus, the *De catechizandis rudibus* perhaps fulfilled the wish, already expressed in the *Contra Faustum*, of providing a clear presentation of catechesis for newcomers: Deogratias' initiative may have constituted the awaited opportunity to write such a synthesis.³⁶ If this is case, book XIII at least may be dated before the *De catechizandis rudibus*. Comparing the two works highlights, moreover, that the catechesis takes place in the context of interactions between rival religious groups of late antique Africa. Candidates were mainly confronted with explanations from the books of the Bible – maybe also concretely shown to them as it seems to be the case for Manichaeans³⁷ – as the primary material of catechesis, distinguished from other non-canonical writings. Moreover, the Jewish inheritance, underlined against Manichean objections, brings Augustine to express the relevance of a typological reading: the bishop not only builds his speech on a skilful reading of the Scriptures but also on a nuanced account of the state of his community. Triumphal views are counterbalanced by the attention given to the behaviour of good and bad Christians, with the development of the theme of the two cities in the *De catechizandis rudibus*.³⁸

It has to be particularly underlined that both treatises insist on the significance of moral teaching to be imparted to candidates, although without providing a detailed discussion of rules of behaviour and the requirements for the admission of newly enrolled *catechumeni*. The fact that rules are not clearly mentioned, however, should not lead to the conclusion that Augustine did not recommend an examination on behaviour: the treatises, which focus on

³⁵ Augustine, *C. Faust.* XIII, 16.

³⁶ The project is sketched in Augustine, *C. Faust.* XIII, 16.

³⁷ Augustine, *C. Faust.* XIII, 4: “Non, opinor, homines producet, sed libros aperiet. [...] Si autem alios, quos dicat apostolorum nostrorum, codices protulerit, quomodo eis ipse auctoritatem dabit [...]”; XIII, 6: “Haesitantibus vobis et quid respondeatis non invenientibus conspiciuntur tam multi et tam grandes et tam pretiosi codices vestri [...]” (ed. Zycha, J., *CSEL* 25 (1891), 381 and 384). See Decret (1970), 115-116.

³⁸ Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 19, 31 and in general chapters 19-21. On the development of the theme: Luras, A., and Rondet, H., (1953), ‘Le thème des deux cités dans l’oeuvre d’Augustin’, in Rondet, H., Landais, M. le, Luras, A., Couturier, C., (1953), *Études Augustiniennes* (Paris), 9-160; van Oort (1991), 108-123; Lancel (1999), 562-566.

catechesis, cannot be deemed to provide a complete overview of practices.³⁹ As I shall show in Chapter Four, Augustine was aware that individuals becoming catechumens may have expected their commitment to rules of behaviour not to be as strict as that of the baptised Christians, but he precisely attempted to bring them to follow the same rules. In his preaching, he repeatedly refers to the shared duties of the catechumens and the baptised in matters of behaviour, while the *De fide et operibus* provided a polemical synthesis of such views against opponents who applied more flexible admission rules. In the treatise Augustine argues that before being admitted individuals should abandon adulterous relationships, prostitution, or working for civic games, shows, and dancing. It seems likely that for Augustine these requirements should have been applied as well to the entrance into the catechumenate, particularly because of the significance taken by this aspect in Augustine's presentations of the first catechesis and more generally.⁴⁰ The debate clearly shows however that each Christian community in Africa could have set its own rules for admission, not necessarily corresponding to what the bishop of Hippo recommended.

Rules similar to Augustine's were set at the admission into the catechumenate in the famous *Apostolic Tradition*.⁴¹ However, in contrast to this normative document focusing on bringing catechumens to conform to an idealised community of baptised Christians fully committed to strict rules, in his treatises Augustine chose to highlight the wide range of behaviours found in his community. Augustine's presentation during the first catechesis of the divisions within Christianity, the Jews' rejection of Christianity and of the "good and bad

³⁹ Thus against Rebillard (2012a), 66-67 concluding from the lack of evidence in *Cat. rud.* that no rules were in place. The reference to *In Ps.* 61, 23 as proof of individuals continuing to practice astrology after baptism is misleading since it refers to a Christian who started to practice astrology after he became a *fidelis* ("seductus [...] cum esset fidelis", Dekkers, E., Fraipont, J. (eds.), *CCSL* 39 (1956), 792).

⁴⁰ Augustine, *F. et op.* 6.8; 15.24; 18.33; 19.35; 27.45; later: *Adult. coniug.* II, 16.16. For Harmless (2014), 295 n. 18 it is unclear if these requirements were applied at the admission. See however a demonstration of this point in chapter 4. Augustine judged a number of professions negatively in his preaching often in Carthage, particularly entertainment-related professions, precisely those to be abandoned before being admitted to baptism according to *F. et op.*, see Brabant, O., (1971), 'Classes et professions "maudites" chez saint Augustin d'après les *Enarrationes in Psalmos*', *REAug* 17, 69-81.

⁴¹ *Apostolic tradition* 16. The work is analysed for instance in Dujarier (1962a), 197-213; Saxer (1988), 109-120; Gavrilyuk (2007), 99-115; Ferguson (2009), 327-333.

Christians” is not simply a product of the post-Constantinian era but gives a better idea of the concrete situation that faced any Christian community receiving new converts. Clerics were required to deal with a variety of motives for becoming Christian that not necessarily matched Christian ideals, while they also had to clear possible doubts arising from the diversity of practices and ideas on the ground in contrast to a single idealised and impeccable Church.

2. Rites of incorporation and conflicts over members

According to the *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, when the candidate agreed to all points presented in the catechesis, he was ready to undergo a number of solemn rites:

You should of course sign him (*signandus*), with due ceremony, and deal with him in accordance with the custom of the Church (*ecclesiae more*). Certainly as to the rite (*de sacramento sane*) which he receives, when it has been well explained to him that the symbols of divine things are visible, but that invisible things are therein honoured, and this thing (*speciem*) when sanctified by the words of the blessing, is not to be regarded as it is in every-day use, he should likewise be told what is meant by the words (*sermo*) which he has heard, and what gives them taste (*condiat*), of which this thing is the symbol.⁴²

This rare description of the ritual actions performed to admit a new candidate remains very allusive. The other most famous passage about these entrance rites is in the *Confessiones*, in which Augustine refers to his own experience.⁴³ In the *Confessiones* the rite is performed at an undetermined time on a boy, most probably on his mother’s initiative, and includes a sign of the cross and a seasoning of salt. In the *De catechizandis rudibus*, it is an adult candidate who receives a *sacramentum* after his first catechesis, including a blessing formula (*sermo*), a marking and the giving of a *species* – some visible “thing”, difficult to translate. The marking clearly refers in both cases to the rite of signing the forehead with the cross, which I shall explore more in detail in the second part of this chapter. While the mention of a *species* that gives taste (*condiat*) seems to corroborate the passage from the *Confessiones* and indicate that salt was given

⁴² Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 26, 50 (Christopher, J. P., (transl., not.), *ACW* 2 (1946), 82 adapted ; comments on *sacramentum* at 108-109 note 87 with bibliography).

⁴³ Augustine, *Conf.* I, 11.17.

at the ceremony, the *sacramentum* mentioned should not necessarily only refer to the giving of salt. The English translation quoted for the *De catechizandis rudibus*, giving “sacrament of salt”, has been amended because it translates the conjecture “*de sacramento salis*”, based on the mention of salt in the *Confessiones*, which has found its way in most of the secondary literature, although the Latin text adopted in all editions following the unanimous reading of manuscripts states “*de sacramento sane*”.⁴⁴ This detail shows the extent to which scholars have attempted to harmonise the evidence to suggest the performance of a “sacrament of salt”. Beyond these two famous texts, studies have attempted to reconstruct a precise sequence of rites taking place at the admission into the catechumenate, debating in which order they were performed.⁴⁵

Exploring this evidence, I suggest, however, that in the case of the rites of the catechumenate Augustine makes a broader use of the word *sacramentum* – thus here better translated as “rite” – to refer to the performance of a set of rites through which the candidates demonstrated their commitment. I also argue that Augustine’s texts should not be overtly harmonised: while there is not enough evidence to reconstruct a fixed ritual sequence at the admission, some references indicate that catechumens may have performed rites not merely at the admission but more regularly during their time as catechumens. Moreover, while studies on the catechumenate have tended to ignore this aspect, it is essential to underline that all references besides the *De catechizandis rudibus*, the *Confessiones* and a few sermons, are found in a

⁴⁴ See Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 26, 50 (Bauer, J. B., (ed.), *CCSL* 46 (1969), 173). The reading “*sacramento salis*” is mentioned in *PL* 40 (1841), 345, n.1. The conjecture is followed for instance by Christopher, J. P., (transl., not.), *ACW* 2 (1946), 146 n. 315; van der Meer (1961), 354-356; Mandouze (1968), 84 n. 3; de Latte (1975), 188 n. 52. See however, Latham (1982), 99 and Madec, G., (transl., not.), *BA* 11/1 (1991), 265-267 who keep the original text but conclude that the *sacramentum* refers to salt. See as well Harmless (2014), 174 n. 157 underlining the lack of clarity of this reference to some *sacramentum*.

⁴⁵ Roetzer (1930), 139-143; Busch (1938), 412-423; Monachino (1947), 167; Dölger, F. J., (1961), ‘Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens IV’, *JbAC* 4, 5-17 at 12-13; van der Meer (1961), 354-356; de Latte (1975), 182-188; Righetti (1988), IV, 62-67; Grossi (1993), 20; Ferguson (2009), 779.

context of open polemics, almost exclusively against Donatists in the early 400s, with the exception of one early treatise against Pelagians.⁴⁶

Although the *De catechizandis rudibus* does not mention it clearly, Augustine's polemical references to the process of admission clearly show that the first catechesis and the associated rites gave to newcomers the new status of *catechumeni* in the Christian community. A passage of the third book of the *Contra Litteras Petiliani* contains little-noticed evidence about this process, almost contemporary to the *De catechizandis rudibus*.⁴⁷ In a complex passage debating 1 Cor 3, 6 ("Ego plantavi, Apollo rigavit; sed Deus incrementum dedit"), Augustine quotes Petilianus' interpretation stating that the verse means "I made (*fecit*) the man a catechumen (*catechumenum*) in Christ, Apollo baptised, God confirmed what we did"⁴⁸ and comments that Petilianus should have added the end of the Pauline quotation about the fact that it is God who gives the increase.⁴⁹ The same verse was already debated in Optatus of Milevis' tractate against Donatists in very similar terms, interpreting the quotation as a reference to the planting of a catechumen and then baptism, again to stress, however, that it is not the administrator but God who makes him grow.⁵⁰ Here, in a renewed debate over the role played by the administrator in baptism, Augustine, like Optatus, extends the controversy to include the admission into the catechumenate. Augustine quotes from Petilianus the expression "*catechumenum facere*" in correspondence with the idea of planting, while baptising corresponds to watering, and then specifies that the role of the minister is to administer the *sacramentum*.⁵¹

Thus, the action of "making a catechumen" mentioned by Petilianus was equivalent to the ritual admission and commitment described in *De Catechizandis Rudibus* as a *sacramentum*. Augustine's lengthy discussion of 1 Cor 3, 6 further shows this correspondence: after denying

⁴⁶ On the significance of baptism in these controversies see for instance Grossi, V., (1990), 'Baptismus', *AL* 1, fasc. 4, 583-591 and Bonner, G., (1990), 'Baptismus parvulorum', *ibid.*, 591-602; Ferguson (2009), 795-816.

⁴⁷ On Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* see chapter 2 p. 60 n. 88.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* III, 53.65 (my translation).

⁴⁹ Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* III, 53.65.

⁵⁰ Cf. Optatus of Milevis, *Contra Donatistas* 5, 7. The same verse was also commented by Augustine in *C. ep. Parm.* II, 14.32, without any allusion to the catechumenate.

⁵¹ Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* III, 54.66.

the interpretation of Petilianus, Augustine matches “making a catechumen” with evangelisation.⁵² Augustine would indeed use the same reference to Ambrose as the one who “planted” him, and thus initiated him through the catechumenate.⁵³ In a sermon preached on the 10th of August perhaps in the same period, Augustine even explicitly linked the sign of the cross put on the forehead with the action of “making a catechumen”.⁵⁴

Other anti-Donatist polemics from the 390s to the early 410s offer complementary evidence of rites for catechumens which may have been part of the admission process. In the footsteps of Optatus,⁵⁵ Augustine frequently accuses Donatists of denying the Christian background of converts adhering to their Church. He remarks that Donatists ask converts to state “that they are pagan”, thus requiring them to become Christian and undergo the full process of the catechumenate.⁵⁶ This is particularly clear in the small anti-Donatist treatise against Petilianus *De Unico baptismo*, probably written around 410-411, where Augustine deplores that Donatists “make catechumens” out of baptised Catholics, even when they are bishops.⁵⁷ Reacting against such practices in the *Contra Cresconium* between 405 and 407,⁵⁸ Augustine provides particularly rare references to rites for catechumens:

Already baptised amongst us, they tell him that he has never begun to be a Christian (*christianum*), when they blow on him (*exsufflant*) as a pagan, when they make him a catechumen (*catechumenum*) to prepare him to be dipped again (*retinguendum*), or I

⁵² Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* III, 55.67-56.68. See as well *F. et op.* 12, 18 where Augustine refers to the same action of “making a catechumen”.

⁵³ Augustine, *Ep.* 147, 23.52.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *S.* 302, 3 (for discussions of the dating see Pieri, B., (ed., transl., not.), (1998), *Aurelii Augustini Sermo CCCII* (Bologna), 32-35 suggesting 411-412 and Hombert (2000) arguing for 412 and presenting other hypotheses).

⁵⁵ Optatus, *Contra Donatistas* II, 24 (manuscript variant referring to Donatists making new catechumens out of Catholics mentioned in *PL* 43 (1841), 804); III, 11, V, 3 (Donatists say “be Christian” to baptised converts).

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Ep.* 35, 3: “Persuadetur eis, ut ad lavacrum alterum veniant atque, ut id accipere mereantur, paganos se esse respondeant” (Goldbacher, A., (ed.), *CSEL* 34 (1898), 29; from spring 396, see Perler, O., and Maier, J.-L., (1969), *Les voyages de saint Augustin* (Paris), 213 and 439; Divjak (2001), 952 and 1027). Other examples: *Bapt.* II, 7, 10 (404-405 see note 64); *In Ps.* 32, II, 2, 29 (autumn-winter 403: Hombert (2000), 13 n. 40 and Dulaey, M., (transl., not.), *BA* 58B (2014), 31-36); *In Ps.* 39, 1 and 26 (in 407: see Dulaey, M., (transl., not.), *BA* 59A (forthcoming)); *Io. eu. tr.* 5, 13 (perhaps winter 406-407 see chapter 4 note 3), etc. I thank Martine Dulaey for alerting me to this common theme.

⁵⁷ Augustine, *Un. bapt.* 11.19. See Veer, A. C. de, (not.), *BA* 31 (1968), 647-661 and 830-853; Tilley, M. A., (1999), ‘Unico baptismo contra Petilianum, De’, in Fitzgerald, A. D., (ed.), (1999a), *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids MI-Cambridge), 858-859.

⁵⁸ See chapter 2 p. 58 n. 86.

should say to be drowned (*exstinguendum*). [...] Why does one blow on (*exsufflatur*) what is the same? Why does one repeat what is not different?⁵⁹

This passage relates to a broader demonstration of the fact that Donatists share the same religion (*religio*) and the same rites (*sacramenta*) as an argument against rebaptism.⁶⁰ Therefore it seems that the rites for catechumens mentioned were familiar both to Augustine and to the Donatists. The *exsufflatio* was a rite meant to expel the devil from candidates but also from pagan shrines, apparently related here to the action of “making catechumens”, thus to the first rites given to the newcomer.⁶¹ This argument against rebaptism, extended to include references to the repetition of rites of the catechumenate, particularly the *exsufflatio*, was later used against Arians in Vandal Africa.⁶²

It is restrictive however to consider that catechumens only received such rites at the admission. While Augustine remains vague about the circumstances in which rites were performed, their significance may also have been due to their repetitive character, as other evidence shows. First, in a passage of the second book of the *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione* – the first refutation against of Pelagians written on the instigation of Marcellinus at the end of 411 after the condemnation in Carthage of Pelagius’ disciple Celestius – Augustine discusses the possibility of a sinless life and aims at showing that no man on earth is sinless, as even those staying free from personal sin carry the original sin transmitted through generations since Adam.⁶³ In the discussion, Augustine regularly states the necessity of infant

⁵⁹ Augustine, *Cresc.* II, 5.7 (my translation).

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Cresc.* II, 4.6-5.7. The same argument is used in Augustine, *Cresc.* IV, 11.13. In *Ibid.*, IV, 30.37 Augustine again mentions the *exsufflatio* and baptism. On shared practice see as well, in a polemical context: *In Ps.* 103, I, 9; *S.* 268, 2; *S. Caes. eccl.* 5-6. The Donatists’ practice here denounced was perhaps understood as an attempt to circumvent the laws against rebaptism (*Codex Theodosianus* XVI, 6, 1-6).

⁶¹ See the detailed study of Slyke, D. van, (2004), ‘Augustine and catechumenal “exsufflatio”: an integral element of Christian initiation’, *EphLit* 118, 175-208.

⁶² See Quodvultdeus (?), *Adversus quinque haereses* 7; *Contra Iudaeos* 19; *De accedentibus ad gratiam* 2, 12; *De symbolo* 1, 13; *De symbolo* 3, 13; *De ultima quarta feria* 6; Quodvultdeus, *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei, Dimidium temporis* VIII; Pseudo-Victor of Vita, *Passio septem monachorum* 3, 8; Fulgentius, *Psalmus abecedarius* 67-73 and perhaps 223 referring to unsalted Arians to hint at their inefficacious catechumenate; Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* II, 3. I owe some of these references to the informative study of Whelan, R., (2014), ‘African Controversy: The Inheritance of the Donatist Schism in Vandal Africa’, *JEH* 65/3, 504-521, at 516, n. 59-61.

⁶³ See Delaroche, B. (transl. not.), *BA* 20/A (2013), 7-57 and 419-559. For related events see for instance Lancel (1999), 457-489.

baptism, and comes to the debated quote from 1 Cor 7, 14 (“*Sanctificatur enim vir infidelis in uxore et sanctificatur mulier infidelis in fratre; alioquin filii vestri immundi essent, nunc autem sancti sunt*”).⁶⁴

To show that the sanctification mentioned is not to be confused with that of baptism and not to be used as a proof of the *impeccantia* of children born to Christian parents, Augustine stresses that catechumens have their own rites:

Sanctification is not all of one sort. I think, in fact, that even the catechumens (*catechumenos*) are sanctified in their own way by the sign of Christ (*signum Christi*) and prayer along with the imposition of hands (*orationem manus impositionis*). And though what they receive is not the body of Christ, it is nonetheless, holy and more holy than the foods by which we are nourished, because it is a sacrament (*sacramentum*).⁶⁵

This text is a turning point in Augustine’s use of the liturgy of initiation as an argument, applied for the first time against Pelagians. Augustine clearly describes rites given to catechumens which include a marking, a prayer with an imposition of hands, and the giving of some food which is referred to as a *sacramentum*. One might here, compare this allusion to food to the giving of salt, and similarly, the mention of a sign of Christ and a prayer, with the blessing and the marking of the forehead of candidates. Indeed, scholars have tended to relate this passage to the other evidence in Augustine of rites performed by catechumens to conclude that the *sacramentum* here refers to the reception of salt. Debates have particularly focused on whether this food was simply salt or exorcised bread, as a substitute to the Eucharist.⁶⁶ Although similarities are striking, there is no reason however to restrict the performance of these rites to the admission into the catechumenate since Augustine presents these actions as pertaining to catechumens in general.

The existence of special rites for catechumens is also generically mentioned in another polemical treatise, the *De baptismo contra Donatistas*, written around 404-405, refuting the Donatists’ practice of rebaptism and more broadly their ecclesiology, with a focus on the

⁶⁴ Augustine, *Pecc. mer.* II, 26.42.

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Pecc. mer.* II, 26.42 (Teske, R. J., (transl., not.), *WSA* I/23 (1997), 107-108).

⁶⁶ Bingham (1840), 290-293 (with several references to earlier studies); Dölger (1909), 88-89; Busch (1938), 419-423; Dölger (1961), 13, n. 48; van der Meer (1961), 354-356; Botte (1963), 322-330; De Latte (1975), 188; Latham (1982), 99-103; Pieri (1998), 136.

history of the schism and Cyprian's problematic position on baptism.⁶⁷ Augustine speaks of the *sacramentum* of baptism and of the *sacramentum* of catechumens, explaining that he is not diminishing the significance of baptism in favour of the catechumens' rites when he states that a good Catholic catechumen is better than a bad baptised Catholic.⁶⁸ Augustine argues against claims which he attributes to the Donatists: Church membership and the rite of baptism, only when performed by a worthy administrator, would be the core requirements to become a Christian, while it is always better to be baptised rather than a catechumen. Augustine instead argues that baptism is valid independently from the administrator, unique and unrepeatable, and that although initiation rites and belonging are important, they are not enough without true conversion and faith.⁶⁹ Thus, by nuancing his opponents' insistence on baptism, Augustine indirectly provides rare information on the fact that catechumens performed specific rites. These rites demonstrated their commitment and were markers of their peculiar kind of membership. To some extent, they were the counterpart of the rites of the faithful. Sermons also imply that *catechumeni* received special attention in terms of rituals, particularly because of their disputed status in polemics. They point, without further details, to a special *sacramentum* of catechumens, through which they are conceived in the womb of the Church but not yet born.⁷⁰

3. The catechumenate for children and the Pelagian controversy

With the development of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine transferred and refined the argumentative techniques based on the performance of rites of the catechumenate

⁶⁷ See Schindler, A., (1990), 'Baptismo (De -)', *AL* 1, fasc. 4, 574-582; Hombert (2000), 93-94.

⁶⁸ Augustine, *Bapt.* IV, 21.28: "Sed etiam in ipsa intus catholica bonum catechumenum malo baptizato anteposimus, nec ideo tamen sacramento baptismatis [...] facimus iniuriam, aut catechumeni sacramentum sacramento baptismi praeferendum putamus, cum aliquem catechumenum aliquo baptizato fidiorem melioremque cognoscimus" (Petschenig, M., (ed.), *CSEL* 51 (1908), 255).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Augustine, *In Ps.* 57, 5; *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2; *S.* 260C, 1 and *S.* 352A (=Dolbeau 14), 3. For Augustine, while catechumens are conceived, only the baptised are born and become sons of God (*S.* 56, 5 and *C. Iul.* VI, 16.49). For this imagery see note 81.

employed against the Donatists, this time to demonstrate the necessity of infant baptism for the forgiveness of sins.⁷¹ The *Confessiones* already imply that children too could receive the rites of admission into the catechumenate. This is not evoked in the *De catechizandis rudibus* perhaps because Deogratias' question about catechesis primarily implied an audience of individuals able to understand the instruction. All other references to the catechumenate for children are found in polemical writings in the context of the Pelagian controversy, starting in 418, in which the bishop repeatedly resorts to the rites of exorcism and exsufflation (*exsufflatio*) performed on infants as proof of the need for baptism.⁷² Although Augustine's objective was to promote the necessity of infant baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the emphasis on practices suggests that he based his argument on widely accepted rites rather than being himself, through his theological views, a promoter of a marginal custom.

Thus, Augustine's references to rites in polemics over infant baptism are precious evidence of the fact that there was no fixed norm regarding age for entering the catechumenate.⁷³ Augustine applies the same division between catechumens and faithful Christians to infants, suggesting that they were similarly initiated by first becoming catechumens, as it was the case for himself as a boy.⁷⁴ Augustine makes clear that infants and

⁷¹ For detailed explorations of the liturgical argument used by Augustine in the controversy over infant baptism, see particularly Vinel, A., (1986), *Le rôle de la liturgie dans la réflexion doctrinale de saint Augustin contre les Pélagiens* (Université Catholique de Louvain PhD. Thesis); Vinel, A., (1987), 'L'argument liturgique opposé par saint Augustin aux Pélagiens', *QL* 68, 209-241; van Slyke (2004), 197-207; Dupont, A., (2012), *Gratia in Augustine's Sermones ad Populum during the Pelagian controversy* (Leiden), 297-441 (on the use of prayer).

⁷² First in Augustine, *Gr. et pecc. or.* II, 40.45, then in several other instances during the controversy, Augustine uses the same phrases to designate pre-baptismal exorcisms and exsufflations performed on little children, often with reference to Colossians 1, 3 (see *Ep.* 194, 10.46; *Nupt. et conc.* II, 26, 50; *Symb. cat.* I, 2, and particularly *C. Iul.* I, 4.14, 5.19; III, 3.8, 3.9; III, 5.11; VI, 5.11; *C. Iul. imp.* I, 50, 117; II, 120, 181; III, 82, 182; IV, 7, 77; IV, 120; VI, 23). On exorcism alone and more generic references: Augustine, *C. Iul.* III, 9.18; *C. Iul. imp.* I, 56-57, 60; II, 135, 173, 224; III, 14, 52, 146, 164, 199, 208; IV, 108; V, 9.

⁷³ Generic references in sermons to candidates of all ages, may already hint at this aspect despite their stereotyped character (see Augustine, *S.* 49, 2 mentioning *pueri, adolescentuli, iuvenes, graviores, decrepiti* in connection to the parable of the workers in the vineyard in Mt 20, 1-16).

⁷⁴ Augustine, *S.* 294, 13.14: "Ubi ponis parvulos baptizatos? Profecto in numero credentium. Nam ideo et consuetudine Ecclesiae antiqua, canonica, fundatissima, parvuli baptizati fideles vocantur. Et sic de his quaerimus: Iste infans christianus est? Respondetur: Christianus. Catechumenus, an fidelis? Fidelis; utique a fide, fides a credendo" (*PL* 38 (1841), 1343; probably the 27/6/413 in Carthage see Verbraken (1976), 131; Hombert (2000), 385-386). Augustine, *S.* 324 tells of the emergency baptism of a "catechumenus infans"

children follow the same rites, with relevant adaptations for infants unable to speak. The rites of exorcism and exsufflation meant to purify candidates are evoked in a generic way or sometimes related to the baptismal preparation, while other texts concentrate on the profession of faith and renunciation that were part of this final process.⁷⁵ Augustine envisages the possibility for children to recite the creed on their own,⁷⁶ while a sermon preached on the creed during this preparation probably after 415 mentions the rituals of purification performed on infants as happening together with those of adults.⁷⁷ Thus, it seems that children of any age could routinely enter the catechumenate and then prepare for baptism during Lent and be baptised at Easter, while baptism administered in emergency cases was probably most common.⁷⁸ Although most of the evidence focuses on pre-baptismal rites, the previously quoted passage from the *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* referring to some rites of catechumens as a counterpart of baptism also suggests that the rites for infants and children

(*ibid.* 1447; probably 426 see Verbraken (1976), 140). The baptism of Augustine's son Adeodatus also offers evidence of the converts' practice of baptising together with their own children (Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 6.14).

⁷⁵ See Augustine, *Ep.* 98, 5-10; *Ep.* 194, 10.46; *Ep.* 5*, 1; *Gr. et pecc. or.* II, 40.45; *Lib. arb.* III, 23.67; *Pecc. mer.* I, 33.62 and 34.63; see as well references in note 72.

⁷⁶ Augustine, *An. et or.* I, 10.12 and III, 9.12 (about Dinocrates aged seven, completed in 420). On the other hand, he notes that infants are unable to know the creed (Augustine, *Gest. Pel.* 2, 4 written in 417).

⁷⁷ Augustine, *Symb. cat.* I, 2: "Ideo sicut vidistis hodie, sicut nostis, et parvuli exsufflantur et exorcizantur" (ed. Vander Plaetse, R., *CCSL* 46 (1969), 183). On this sermon, its uncertain dating after 415 and in favour of the attribution despite doubts expressed by some scholars see with bibliography: Rodomonti (1995); Dolbeau, F., 'De symbolo ad catechumenos, (De -)', *AL* (forthcoming). I thank François Dolbeau for sending me his article. Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/10 (1995), 455 n. 1 suggested 425 without convincing arguments (variations in the creed and references to Arians). It may be compared to the series of Augustine, *S.* 212-215. Rebillard (2012a), 65 (who takes this view from Augustine's sermons) states that infant baptism only happened in emergency without mentioning these key passages.

⁷⁸ Infant mortality was high and parents or others were eager to baptise dying babies: Augustine often refers to this fact – still in a context of polemics against Pelagians. He also mentions unbelievers who bring their infants to baptism, noting that often they die before receiving it (see Augustine, *Ep.* 217, 6.19; *Io. eu. tr.* 38, 6; *Lib. arb.* III, 23.67; *Perseu.* 12.31). Strangers and nuns might bring infants to baptism, in cases of orphans or abandoned children (Augustine, *Ep.* 98, 6). Council proceedings, notably the *Breviarium Hipponense* provide parallel evidence (see canon 5). I am not focusing in this thesis on Augustine's discussion of infant baptism in general: the bibliography is vast, see good summaries with bibliography in Latte, R. de, (1976), 'Saint Augustin et le baptême. Étude liturgico-historique du rituel baptismal des enfants chez saint Augustin', *QL* 57/1, 41-55; Harmless, W., (1997), 'Christ the Pediatrician: Infant Baptism and Christological Imagery in the Pelagian Controversy', *AugStud* 28, 7-34; Ferguson (2009), 803-816; Dupont, A., (2010), 'John 3,5 and the topic of infant baptism in Augustine', *VetChr* 47, 41-62. On infant baptism more broadly, emphasising its progressive development as a normative practice, see Wright (2007).

mentioned could have been practised since the admission into the catechumenate and during the catechumenate more generally.⁷⁹

The admission into the catechumenate was conceived as a progressive ritual integration into the community. The only source clearly illustrating how the process of admission worked is the *De Catechizandis Rudibus*; however it does not precisely describe the actions performed, simply referring to a marking, a blessing, a reception of some *species*, calling the ceremony a *sacramentum*, without explaining the meaning of each action. A comparison with other passages shows that newcomers acquired the status of *catechumenus* during this first session and that it included, but not only, a giving of salt, and a sign of the cross on the candidate and perhaps an *exsufflatio*. I have also suggested that catechumens may have received rites of initiation regularly beyond the admission, as a way to take part actively in religious life and to confirm their commitment. Augustine almost systematically mentioned such practices in the context of polemical controversies. This corroborates the studies of Vinel and van Slyke who have shown that Augustine's use of rites against Donatists and Pelagians was a common tool of polemics over the course of his life.⁸⁰ Augustine accused Donatists of illegitimately repeat the rites on baptised Catholics passing to their side. He claimed that Catholics practiced the same rites of initiation as the Donatists to reject rebaptism and prevent the conversion of members of his community to the opponents' side. His objective when discussing the rites of initiation performed by catechumens was to reclaim such rites from the Donatist's sphere. Later, during the Pelagian controversy, in a similar manner, Augustine used the rites of the catechumens and in particular pre-baptismal rites performed

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Pecc. mer.* II, 26.42.

⁸⁰ Vinel (1986); van Slyke (2004), see as well note 71. In a recent article (Merdinger, J., (2015), 'In league with the devil? Donatist and Catholic perspectives on pre-baptismal exsufflation', in Dupont, A., Gaumer, M. A., and Lamberigts, M. (eds.), (2015), *The Uniquely African Controversy: studies on Donatist Christianity*, 153-177), Merdinger expands on van Slyke's study – which detected that Augustine's accusations concentrated on the *exsufflatio* while his predecessor Optatus had accused Donatists of performing exorcism as well – to suggest that Donatists had widely divergent practices. However, the distinction between exorcism and *exsufflatio* is a subtle one not always easily detectable in the sources – the first designating words spoken, the second ritual gestures – both being part of the same process. Using Augustine to reconstruct the Donatist's practices perhaps gives too much credit to his accusations and would require further demonstration.

on infants to demonstrate the necessity of infant baptism. These polemics provide indirect evidence about the wide range of candidates entering into the catechumenate, be they infants, children or adults. The emphasis on rites in polemics is further proof for the regular involvement of catechumens in Christian communities and the role that they played as a disputed group.

II. Being a *catechumenus*: the main practices of Christians in the grey area

Preaching against Donatists in Carthage in the *Basilica Restituta* probably in the aftermath of the council of August 403 – thus close to the *De catechizandis rudibus* – Augustine noted that *catechumeni* are born in the womb as they have received the name of Christ – perhaps a reference to the admission process – but should be patient and wait to be fully instructed to prevent miscarriage.⁸¹ Augustine meant that catechumens had to be progressively initiated and made firmly adherent to the Catholic party. Refusing to go through the whole process of the catechumenate, accepting the views of rival groups, or even maybe attending their congregations, may result in a premature abortion.

This sermon sharply illustrates that stakes were high for the integration of *catechumeni*, particularly in a context of competition with Donatists and other rival groups.⁸² The significance of catechumens in polemics suggests that special attention was devoted to their ritual initiation. Trying to describe practices of *catechumeni* beyond generic references to their *sacramentum* is a worthwhile but difficult task. Scholars studying initiation in Augustine

⁸¹ Augustine, *In Ps. 57*, 5 (for the dating, see Müller, H., (2001), ‘Enarrationes in Psalmos. A. Philologische Aspekte’, *AL* 2, fasc. 5/6, 804-838, at 816 and 828). In the Donatist polemic, Augustine stresses that all are born of the Church and that as a mother can only give birth to her child once, the Church can give birth in baptism only once, while Donatists adore the same father but refuse to adore a single mother, see Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 12, 2; *S.* 359, 4; *S. Caes. eccl.* 5. This was part of a wider theme, very common in the early Church, particularly in Africa: the Church is identified as the mother and Christians as her sons. See Lamirande, E., (2001), ‘Ecclesia’, *AL* 2, fasc. 5/6, 687-720, esp. 703-705; Dassmann, E., (2004), ‘Kirche II (bildersprachlich)’, *RAC* 20, 966-1022, at 984-988.

⁸² Indeed, the next thoughts of Augustine in the sermon (*In Ps. 57*, 6) are for the abortions caused by Donatists: this could be a reference to candidates leaving his Church to be prepared in the Donatist community.

generally neglected the activities of catechumens because of the paucity of sources and the concentration of their interest in the admission process and the intensive few weeks of preparation before baptism. The most obvious and known involvement of catechumens in Augustine's community was their presence as hearers in the audience of his sermons, as a clearly identifiable body.⁸³ Harmless has listed twenty-nine addresses to catechumens by the bishop.⁸⁴ Obviously, as Harmless noted, catechumens were often present without being mentioned. Attendance at regular Christian services and other gatherings therefore constitutes the clearest evidence of the catechumens' involvement in Christian communities. A passage of the *De fide et operibus*, in which Augustine employs the practices of the catechumenate to demonstrate the necessity of pre-baptismal discipline, contains evidence perhaps even hinting at special instruction received by the *catechumeni*:

What is all that time (*tempus*) for, when they hold the name and place of catechumen (*nomen et locum catechumenorum*), if it is not for them to hear (*audiant*) what the faith (*fides*) and pattern of Christian life (*vita*) so that, when they have proved themselves, they may then eat from the Lord's table and drink from his cup? This is because all *who eat and drink unworthily, eat and drink judgment for themselves* (1 Cor. 11, 29). This is done for all the time (*quod autem fit per omne tempus*) beneficially appointed by the Church, so that the grade of the catechumens (*catechumenorum gradus*) receives those who are gaining access (*accedentes*) to the name of Christ; this is done (*hoc fit*) much more earnestly and frequently during the days when they are called *competentes*, that is, when they have already given in their names for the reception of baptism".⁸⁵

The bishop draws a parallel between his presentation of the first stage of the catechumenate, a *tempus* regulated by the Church for those who become Christians in the *gradus* of *catechumeni* and what happens next, more intensively, when candidates are called *competentes*: "*quod autem fit [...] hoc fit*". Thus he establishes an equivalence between the two stages. Augustine explains that *catechumeni* essentially prepare for the reception of the Eucharist by hearing some teaching about faith and morals, and then that *competentes* also receive some, though much more

⁸³ For example Augustine, *S.* 392, 6. On the initiation as an oral process bringing candidates from hearing to believing and adhering to the community, see Harrison, C., (2013), *The Art of Listening in the early Church* (Oxford), chapter 4.

⁸⁴ Harmless (2014), 184 and 229-234 (charts 4 and 7)

⁸⁵ Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9 (Kearney, R., (transl.), *WSA* I/8 (2005), 232 and Liguori, M., (transl.), *FOC* 27 (1955), 231 adapted).

intensive, instruction. This passage may be understood as a reference to the ordinary preaching in the church, which would have been heard by individuals as *catechumeni* and then as *competentes*. Most scholars indeed generally state that catechumens did not receive specific instruction.⁸⁶ However, Augustine may here well refer to some training both for *catechumeni* and then more intensively for *competentes*, in which case this text would be the only clear attestation of teaching specifically imparted to *catechumeni* after the admission catechesis. At least the passage throws new light on the significance, for Augustine, of the division between specific groups within his community, where individuals who have become catechumens are assigned a peculiar position. This is expressed by a specific *nomen*, *locus*, and *gradus*. The latter particularly refers both to the bottom position in the Church hierarchy and to a specific status, while the use of special names (*catechumeni*, *competentes*) and the allusion to an exclusive *locus* where they stand – either physically, hierarchically, or both – all make patent that a specific organisation existed.⁸⁷ Beyond these allusive references, it is thus worth exploring further how *catechumeni* were both ritually integrated and singled-out in the community.

1. Practices of inclusion: the sign of the cross

As seen in the first part, the catechumen's adhesion to the catechesis and the rites of admission manifested their inclusion into the community. Among these rites, it is the signing of the cross on the forehead which is almost systematically mentioned and commented on by Augustine when he refers to catechumens as Christians. For Augustine the sign of the cross put on their forehead is shared with the baptised and makes them belong to the Christian

⁸⁶ von Zezschwitz (1863), 118; Busch (1938), 425; de Latte (1975), 181 and 190; Lynch (1986), 94-95; Harmless, W., (2004), 'The Voice and the Word: Augustine's Catechumenate in Light of the Dolbeau Sermons', *AugStud* 35/1, 17-42, at 24; Pasquato (2006), 926; Gavrilyuk (2007), 288; Rebillard (2012a), 66. Harmless (2014), 27 generally followed this assumption but at 182 left the door open to the hypothesis of some peculiar instruction, although not of the same kind as that of the *competentes*.

⁸⁷ There is no clear evidence besides this passage in African sources about a specific *locus* for catechumens; Augustine notably also speaks of *locus paenitentiae/paenitentium* (*Ep.* 153, 3.7; *S.* 232, 8). *Gradus* is employed in *Conf.* VI, 11.18 to recall Augustine's status as a catechumen in Milan and by Manichaeans for hearers. In *Praed. Sanct.* 14, 27, Augustine refers to *catechumeni* as a grade distinguished from the faithful and the penitents.

community. Because Augustine particularly insists on the inclusiveness of the rite, a more thorough exploration of his references to the rite in general helps to get a better sense of its significance. However, Augustine mostly discusses the related imagery and the theological interpretations of the gesture, dedicating less attention to the concrete practice. I shall here concentrate on Augustine's few descriptions of the practice, particularly focusing on the concrete significance of the rite for the catechumens' involvement in the community, while devoting a detailed analysis of Augustine's use of the rite in his moral preaching for defining Christian membership in the next chapter.

In the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine does not provide us with a detailed explanation of the concrete practice for new catechumens. The bishop only alludes to the fact that the sign was made on candidates when they entered the catechumenate.⁸⁸ A more comprehensive study of all references to the rite of the cross made on the forehead in Augustine shows that it was practised both by catechumens and baptised Christians: there is no remarkable difference between references aimed at the broader audience including baptised Christians and addresses to catechumens specifically. The act of signing oneself with the cross particularly during services is clearly parallel to the rite of initiation and mentioned a number of times by Augustine.⁸⁹ This practice was most likely initiated and authorised by the fact that the sign had first been put on the forehead of the candidate. As for the Lord's Prayer and the creed which were first handed out to *competentes* and only then could be recited by candidates,⁹⁰ placing the cross on the forehead of the catechumen manifested the membership of catechumens and enabled them, in turn, to show their Christian membership and veneration of God by signing themselves. Thus Augustine did not always make the distinction

⁸⁸ See Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 20, 34 and 26, 50.

⁸⁹ See for instance for the practice of signing oneself, generically: Augustine, *Ep. Io. tr.* 5, 7; *In Ps.* 91, 7; *S.* 110a, 4; 285, 2. On the forehead: Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 4; *Io. eu. tr.* 55, 1; *In Ps.* 50, 1; *S.* 32, 13. Augustine, *In Ps.* 68, I, 2 speaks of "arm (*armare*)" oneself with the cross on the forehead, perhaps again pointing to signing oneself.

⁹⁰ See Augustine, *S.* 56-59; *S.* 212-215; *Symb. cat.* Augustine, *S.* 59, 4.7 to *competentes* even makes a clear distinction between "*reddere*" and "*orare*": candidates, before baptism, only learn to say the prayer, but they are allowed to truly pray it only after they are reborn as sons of God.

between the sign performed on catechumens by clerics and the practice of signing oneself. What mattered for him was that the sign was placed on the forehead, thus visible to everyone, serving as a powerful way of asserting one's religious belonging.

Augustine employs a quite consistent vocabulary, which however remains generic and does not provide clear evidence on how the rite was performed. The cross is generally referred as the "*signum crucis*", "*signum Christi*", or simply the cross ("*crux*", "*lignum*") or a sign ("*signum*"), sometimes characterising it as the sign of the Passion, or the blood of Christ linked with the exegesis of Exodus 12, 22-23.⁹¹ Some exceptions are noticeable, such as the unique "*signum gratiae*", "*sacramentum fidei*" used to refer to the rite in a description of the initiation of catechumens, and "*character*" applied to the sign of the cross – while it generally points to baptism, particularly in the controversy against Donatists – in two sermons.⁹² Augustine often describes the sign as being carried on the forehead (*portare*) in the active and passive forms,⁹³ sometimes using verbs referring to the same idea (*habere*, *gestare*, *gerere*) conveying a sense of a mark that was permanently part of the individual's identity.⁹⁴ Augustine also employs verbs to describe the performance of the rite, often considering that it belongs to, and is thus conferred by, Christ. About the gesture, he most frequently employs, either in the active or

⁹¹ Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.3 (about Victorinus' conversion); *C. Faust.* VI, 9.2; *In Ps.* 32, II, 2, 13; *In Ps.* 34, II, 8; *In Ps.* 36, II, 4; *In Ps.* 41, 2; *In Ps.* 46, 2; *In Ps.* 48, II, 2; *In Ps.* 54, 12; *In Ps.* 56, 3; *In Ps.* 59, 9; *In Ps.* 68, I, 12; *In Ps.* 69, 2; *In Ps.* 73, 6; *In Ps.* 75, 10; *In Ps.* 85, 14; *In Ps.* 95, 2; *In Ps.* 141, 9; *In Ps.* 143, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 3, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3 (about catechumens); *Io. eu. tr.* 36, 4; *Io. eu. tr.* 43, 9; *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 53, 13; *Io. eu. tr.* 55, 1; *Io. eu. tr.* 118, 5 (about catechumens); *S.* 27, 6; *S.* 32, 12; *S.* 51, 1.2; *S.* 88, 9.8; *S.* 97A (=Bibl. cas. II, 114-115), 3 (about catechumens); *S.* 107, 6.7; *S.* 160, 5-6; *S.* 174, 3; *S.* 215, 5 (to candidates for baptism); *S.* 218C (=Morin Guelf. 3), 4; *S.* 272A (fragment), 1; *S.* 301A (=Denis 17), 8 (to catechumens); *S.* 302, 3 (to catechumens); *S.* 335D (=Lambot 6), 3; *S.* 342, 1; *S.* 360B (=Dolbeau 25), 24. Passion: *Cat. rud.* 20, 34 (to catechumens); *C. Faust.* XII, 30; *In Ps.* 86, 6; *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2.

⁹² Respectively Augustine, *S.* 335K (=Lambot 21), 5; *S.* 352A (=Dolbeau 14), 3; *S.* 302, 3 (for *character* see Pieri (1998), 131) and *S.* 317, 4.5. *S.* 352A, 3 probably dates from 413 and is part of the debate about moral requirements for candidates to baptism further developed in *F. et op.*, see chapter 4.

⁹³ Augustine, *In Ps.* 32, II, 2, 13; *In Ps.* 41, 2; *In Ps.* 48, II, 2; *In Ps.* 59, 9; *In Ps.* 69, 2; *In Ps.* 73, 6; *In Ps.* 85, 14; *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3 (about catechumens); *S.* 27, 6; *S.* 32, 12; *S.* 88, 9.8; *S.* 107, 6.7; *S.* 160, 5-6; *S.* 302, 3 (to catechumens).

⁹⁴ *Habere*: Augustine, *In Ps.* 86, 6; *In Ps.* 143, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 7, 7; *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2; *S.* 32, 12; *S.* 335K (=Lambot 21), 5. *Gestare*: Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 3, 2; *S.* 342, 1. *Gerere*: Augustine, *S.* 97A (=Bibl. cas. II 114-115), 3 (about catechumens).

passive voice, “*signare*” – and the noun “*signatio*” –⁹⁵ and “*figere*”,⁹⁶ the latter perhaps because of its meaning of “fastening” and “attaching” that both well convey the idea of Christian belonging and the natural connection with the cross and crucifixion – originally “*crux figere*”. Other verbs refer to Christ’s action but without a specific technical meaning,⁹⁷ while in a number of cases, Augustine seems to describe the passive reception of the rite (“*accipere*”, “*adhibere*”, “*collocare*”), particularly in sermons focusing on the initiation process.⁹⁸ The rare “*depingere*” (“to draw”) is even used once about the rite made on catechumens, emphasising the visibility of the mark.⁹⁹

The emphasis on the visible impact of the rite has led a number of scholars to suggest that the cross could have been painted or even tattooed on the forehead.¹⁰⁰ While broader comparisons can be made with the practice of signing soldiers or branding slaves to mark ownership, and with pre-Christian religious practices particularly amongst Jews, parallels for the signing of the forehead amongst Christians are available in earlier and later evidence in Africa and elsewhere: all this evidence clearly points to the rite as a widespread and significant marker of belonging.¹⁰¹ Concerning Augustine’s Africa, Busch, Mandouze and Berrouard have

⁹⁵ *Signare*: *Cat. rud.* 20, 34; *C. Faust.* XII, 30; *In Ps.* 46, 2; *In Ps.* 69, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2; *S.* 107, 6.7; *S.* 272A (fragment), 1; *S.* 335D (=Lambot 6), 3; *S.* 352A (=Dolbeau 14), 3 (about catechumens).

⁹⁶ *Figere*: Augustine, *C. Faust.* VI, 9.2; *In Ps.* 34, II, 8; *In Ps.* 54, 12; *In Ps.* 75, 10; *In Ps.* 95, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 43, 9; *Io. eu. tr.* 53, 13; *S.* 174, 3; *S.* 301A (= Denis 17), 8 (to catechumens).

⁹⁷ *Constituere*: Augustine, *In Ps.* 141, 9; *Ponere*: *Io. eu. tr.* 36, 4; *S.* 317, 4.5.

⁹⁸ *Accipere*: *S.* 160, 5-6; *S.* 215, 5 (to candidates preparing for baptism); *S.* 301A (=Denis 17), 8 (to catechumens); *Adhibere*: *Io. eu. tr.* 118, 5 (about catechumens); *Collocare*: *S.* 218C (= Morin Guelf. 3), 4.

⁹⁹ Augustine, *S.* 301A (=Denis 17), 8 (to catechumens).

¹⁰⁰ Dölger, F. J., (1929), ‘Kreuz-Tätowierung im christlichen Altertum’, *JbAC* 1, 202-211 at 208 and Morin, G., (ed.), *MA* (1930), I, 89 n. 6 both relate early Christian evidence with modern accounts of Western travellers witnessing cross-shaped tattoos put on the forehead by locals in Algeria. See as well, in favour of a visible sign in Augustine: Pontet, M., (1945), *L’Exégèse de saint Augustin prédicateur* (Paris) 366-367 n. 204, Rondet, H., (1954), ‘*Miscellanea Augustiniana*. La croix sur le front’, *RecSR* (1954), 388-394 at 390-393; Dölger (1961), 12; Maertens (1962), 122. Rondet (1954), 392 evokes Augustine, *In Ps.* 147, 8 where it is mentioned that pagans recognise Christians by their *frons* as proof for a visible sign; however the passage may simply mean that they recognise them because their face is known to them. Dölger, F. J., (1930b), ‘Die antiken Köpfe mit dem stehenden und liegenden Kreuz’, *JbAC* 2, 281-296 even studied a number of statues bearing crosses on the forehead. There is little evidence however to clearly relate these markings to specific religious rituals. Crosses were put on the foreheads of ancient statues in later times, perhaps to christianise them, especially emperors: Saradi, H., (1997), ‘The Use of Ancient Spolia in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence’, *IJCT* 3/4, 395-423, at 403-404.

¹⁰¹ On parallels with soldiers and slaves see Dölger, F. J., (1911), *Sphragis: eine altchristliche Taufbezeichnung in ihren Beziehungen zur profanen und religiösen Kultur des Altertums* (Paderborn), 23-37; *Id.*, (1930a) ‘*Sacramentum militiae*. Das Kennmal der Soldaten, Waffenschmiede und Wasserwächter nach

however rejected the idea that the sign was permanent, while Poque similarly noted that the emphasis on the concrete gesture and the interpretations playing on the outwardness and inwardness of the sign do not imply that it left a visible, permanent sign.¹⁰² The possibility that the mark was visible needs to be taken into account despite the fact that there is no clear evidence in Augustine regarding the concrete way the sign was put on the forehead – whether it was with clean hands, oil, or anything else.¹⁰³ In any case, the repetition of the rite would have certainly provided a way to assert membership, almost as powerful as a permanent sign that was therefore often employed in Augustine’s preaching to foster a sense of Christian belonging amongst catechumens, as I shall show in chapter Four.

As has already been underlined for the rites of admission, Augustine’s emphasis on the signing of the forehead seems to suggest that it may have been repeated during the catechumenate, perhaps together with other rites. A number of sermons often mentioning the rite also offer a synthetic presentation of the catechumens’ involvement and contain allusions

Texten frühchristlicher Literatur’, *JbAC* 2, 268-280; Jones, C. P., (1987), ‘Stigma: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity’, *JRS* 77 (1987), 139-155, esp. 147-150. On Jewish cross-shaped signation see Dinkler, E., (1967), *Signum Crucis: Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament und zur Christlichen Archäologie* (Tübingen), 27-35. Concerning Christians in North Africa, Rondet (1954), 391 noted that signing the forehead with a cross is attested already in Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* III, 22; see also Rebillard (2012a), 18 for evidence in Tertullian about using the sign of the cross in daily behaviour as a positive display of Christian identity. According to Dölger (1930), 271 Tertullian perhaps refers to the practice among followers of Mithras in *De praescriptione haereticorum* 40. Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* II, 16 similarly mentions the cross put on the forehead as a protection against the devil. Later western sources clearly point to the use of the cross to mark catechumens, without evidence for the concrete gesture however: Ambrose, *De Mysteriis* IV, 20; Severus of Minorca, *Epistula* 17; Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 121, 8; (Quodvultdeus), *De symbolo* 1, 1 and 3, 1. Other contemporaries corroborate Augustine’s mention of the fact that individuals signed themselves on the forehead for the recitation of the creed: Ambrose, *Explanatio symboli* 3; Rufinus, *Apologia contra Hieronymum* I, 5; Peter Chrysologus, *Sermones* 56, 5; 57, 16; 58, 2; 59, 18; 61, 2; 62, 3. For broader surveys with bibliography on signation with the cross in the early church see Dinkler (1967), 26-75; Heinz, A., (1997), ‘Kreuzzeichen’, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 6, 468-469; Heid, S., (2006), ‘Kreuz’, *RAC* 21, 1099-1148 at 1126-1128 and 1137-1139. More broadly: Andreopoulos, A., (2006), *The Sign of the Cross: the Gesture, the Mystery, the History* (Orleans MA).

¹⁰² Busch (1938), 417-418; Poque, S., (transl., not.), *SC* 116 (1966), 22 n. 4; Mandouze (1968), 84 n. 3; Berrouard, M.-F., (transl., not.), *BA* 71 (1969), 210 n. 2. See as well: Madec (2001), 29; Hammerstaedt, J., (1996), ‘Crux’, *AL* 2, fasc. 1/2, 146-152 at 147-148.

¹⁰³ In the third century, Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 31, 8 rejects the practice of tattooing the body with the cross. However, Jerome, *In Esaiam* XV, 55, 12.13 clearly relates the rite with slave branding, telling that Christians are branded with the sign of the cross (“crucis eius inurantur cauterio”, Morin, G., Adriaen, M., (eds.), *CCSL* 73A (1963), 629); in Mark the Deacon, *Vita Porphyrii* 82 the painting of a visible but not permanent mark is mentioned as a protective sign painted on the middle of foreheads, the right hand and the right shoulder of three boys aged around seven who miraculously survived falling in a well (see further references in Dölger (1929), 204-208 and in Heid (2006), 1136-1139).

to their inclusion in the community in terms of beliefs and rituals. Perhaps in the early 400s, preaching on Psalm 141 and referring to the rite of the cross on the forehead, Augustine speaks of many rites received, some in the mouth, others in the whole body, perhaps hinting at the variety of ritual practices that catechumens could have undergone.¹⁰⁴ Addressing catechumens in Bulla Regia, Augustine mentions the sign of the cross on the forehead alongside invocations made on catechumens,¹⁰⁵ while in an undated cento composed of various sermons,¹⁰⁶ he remarks that catechumens go to church and invoke the name of God.¹⁰⁷ In a homily on the Gospel of John, part of a series preached over winter and spring, perhaps in 406-407, often pointing to catechumens in the audience, and traditionally situated in Hippo – but perhaps in Carthage? – the bishop presents catechumens as believers in Christ: they sign themselves when they state their belief (“*credo*”) and carry the cross on their forehead.¹⁰⁸ This shows an interesting connection between the rite and the display of one’s religious affiliation.

Similar descriptions are found in sermons preached on John 9, 1-41 about the healing of the man born blind, as Augustine notes that catechumens have heard Christ’s name and believe in him.¹⁰⁹ As the anointed blind man, catechumens can preach about Jesus.¹¹⁰ In his letters to catechumens Augustine also emphasises the inclusion of catechumens into the

¹⁰⁴ Augustine, *In Ps.* 141, 9 (perhaps in Hippo, see Müller (2001), 824; for the dating Hombert (2000), 344 n. 8).

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, *S.* 301A (=Denis 17), 8 (scholars have suggested a dating before 400 but evidence is scarce: see hypotheses in Verbraken (1976), 163).

¹⁰⁶ Augustine, *S.* 97A (=Bibl. cas. II, 114-115); a section of the text is extracted from *S.* 360B (=Dolbeau 25) 18, 20, 21; see Gryson (2007), I, 237. For hypotheses favouring an early dating before 400 see Verbraken (1976), 158.

¹⁰⁷ Augustine, *S.* 97A (=Bibl. cas. II, 114-115), 3.

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3. For the texts belonging to the series, its dating and location of preaching, see more details in chapter 4 p. 123-124 n. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, *S.* 136A (=Mai 130), 1 (undated); 136B (=Lambot 10), 1 (undated, see Verbraken (1976), 169); *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2 (this sermon is part of a series including *Io. eu. tr.* 17-19 and 24-54 situated in Hippo with little evidence, and dated from 414-415 probably 414, see Berrouard, M.-F., (1971), ‘La date des *Tractatus I-LIV in Iohannis Evangelium* de saint Augustin’, *RecAug* 7, 105-168, at 121-168; *Id.*, (transl., not.), *BA* 72 (1977), 26-41 reprinted in Berrouard, M.-F., (2004), *Introduction aux homélies de saint Augustin sur l’Évangile de saint Jean* (Paris), 90-99; *Id.*, (transl., not.), *BA* 73A (1988), 9-15. The remarks about the uncertain localisation of the preaching series discussed more in detail in chapter 4, p. 123-124 n. 2 apply to this one as well).

¹¹⁰ Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 8.

community: Marcianus is a believer and a “brother in Christ”, while Firmus has a good knowledge of Christianity and is a keen reader of Augustine’s works.¹¹¹ These allusive references give some clues about the practices of catechumens and the significance of their liminal status. They hint at the possibility that they were included in the community through more frequent ritual activities than generally assumed. The sign of the cross is thus perhaps only the most visible element of the catechumen’s participation in religious activities.

In all the sermons and letters quoted above, however, Augustine employed the partial inclusion of catechumens as the starting point to invite them to baptism. These sermons were often preached during Lent, when Augustine called for catechumens to enrol to prepare for baptism.¹¹² Thus, Augustine compared them to the blind man, the eyes covered with mud but yet unhealed, and to slaves in the house of God.¹¹³ Catechumens were on the threshold: Augustine expected them to complete a transformation process which involved changing one’s body, perspectives and status. He particularly emphasised that they could become full members only by asking for baptism and entering the intensive preparation in the weeks preceding Easter. In the meantime, their partial integration was concretely experienced through rites of exclusion.

2. Leaving catechumens behind: the *disciplina arcani* and the dismissal

Augustine’s sermons provide consistent evidence of the exclusion of catechumens from the core celebrations of the liturgy through the practice of the dismissal. Hiding the core mysteries of Christianity to those who were not initiated was a widespread practice in early

¹¹¹ Augustine, *Ep.* 258, 4-5; *Ep.* 2*, 4-5.

¹¹² Thus *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3 on Sunday, perhaps the first of Lent see Poque (1971), 76; Harmless (2014), 279; *S.* 97A (=Bibl. Cas. 114-115), dated to Lent by Poque (1966), 23 and 352-53 and Poque (1971), 178, on the basis of similarities with *Io. eu. tr.* 11 and *S.* 132. Similarly, *S.* 136A (=Mai 130), 136B (=Lambot 10) and *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2 were probably preached during Lent when John 9, 1-41 was commonly read, see Margoni-Kögler, M., (2010), *Die Perikopen im Gottesdienst bei Augustinus* (Vienna), 87-90.

¹¹³ Augustine, *S.* 135, 1 and 5-6; *S.* 136B (=Lambot 10), 1-3; *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2 and 8 (blind with eyes covered). *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 4 and *S.* 97A (Bibl. Cas. 114-115), 3 (slaves).

Christianity, noticed by scholars since the early modern period and called the *disciplina arcani*.¹¹⁴ This practice is well attested in Augustine where it is often the Eucharist, as the rite of the faithful (*sacramentum fidelium*), which is said to be unknown and not open to the catechumens.¹¹⁵ Augustine also underlined that only the baptised knew that the names of martyrs were mentioned at the altar, thus probably alluding to parts of the Eucharistic liturgy from which catechumens were excluded.¹¹⁶ Avoiding talking in great detail about the Eucharist and how it was performed, Augustine often distinguished the baptised from the catechumens by stating that they could not know what the faithful celebrated, or emphasising that only the baptised knew what he was referring too, most often when discussing the Eucharist and with the objective to trigger the wish of catechumens to prepare for baptism.¹¹⁷

This contrasts quite sharply with all the evidence about the catechumens' inclusion in the community. While catechumens were never considered on the same level as pagans or any other category of people external to Christianity, they were still strikingly excluded from the core rites of the *fideles* which, according to Augustine, would grant them the hope of eternal life. In his treatise on baptism against Donatists, Augustine explained that he would prefer a good Catholic catechumen over a baptised heretic; however, he added that none of them would be saved.¹¹⁸ When discussing the rites of catechumens in *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* written in the winter 411-412, Augustine again asserted that without baptism their rites were

¹¹⁴ On the *disciplina arcani* and the historiographical developments of the concept, with bibliography, see Perrin, M.-Y., (2008), 'Arcana mysteria ou ce que cache la religion. De certaines pratiques de l'arcane dans le christianisme antique', in Riedl, M., Schabert, T., (eds.), (2008), *Die religiöse Erfahrung. Religions – The Religious Experience* (Würzburg), 119-141 and *Id.*, (2009), 'Norunt fideles. Silence et eucharistie dans l'orbis christianus antique', in Bériou, N., Caseau, B., Rigaux, D., (eds.), (2009), *Pratiques de l'Eucharistie dans les Églises d'Orient et d'Occident*, 2 volumes (Paris), II, 737-763.

¹¹⁵ Augustine, *S.* 131, 1.

¹¹⁶ Augustine, *S.* 159,1; *S.* 297, 2.3; *S.* 306E (=Dolbeau 18), 1.

¹¹⁷ See for instance: Augustine, *Ep.* 140, 19.48; *In Ps.* 80, 8-11; *In Ps.* 103, I, 14 (baptism and Eucharist hidden), *In Ps.* 109, 17; *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 4 and 12, 2-3; *S.* 28A (=Dolbeau 9), 4; *S.* 132, 1; *S.* 198aug (=Dolbeau 26), 12; *S.* 235, 3; *S.* 232, 7; *S.* 307, 2.3; *S.* 374aug (=Dolbeau 23), 19. Outside sermons see for example Augustine, *Trin.* III, 10.21 and about mysteries in general *Ep.* 2*, 4. For a discussion of some of the sermons see Busch (1938), 426-428; Perrin (2008); Harmless (2014), 197-200 and 276-280.

¹¹⁸ Augustine, *Bapt.* IV, 20.28.

useless to enter the kingdom of heaven.¹¹⁹ In sermons of invitation to baptism, Augustine similarly stressed that catechumens had not been forgiven for their sins and could not enter the kingdom of heaven.¹²⁰ The lack of full ritual integration of catechumens, made explicit in every celebration through their dismissal, concretely represented a separation that would endure in the afterlife. This was employed as a powerful argument against the postponement of baptism.

The rite of dismissal is known to have been practiced in several places in late Antiquity,¹²¹ however, particular attention should be paid to its function in Augustine's texts. Amongst the sermons referring to it, a particularly striking example, often quoted by scholars, well illustrates the objectives of such practices of exclusion and some issues of interpretation. Perhaps at the beginning of Lent, probably in Hippo, Augustine explains the reading of the day containing an important passage about the Eucharist and the distinction between the catechumens and the baptised, John 6, 56-57 ("*Caro mea vere esca est, et sanguis meus vere potus est. Qui manducat meam carnem*" etc.).¹²² The bishop remarks that the baptised could easily follow what was implied, while the *catechumeni* or *audientes* (hearers) "may have been hearing (*audientes*) what was being read, but could they also have been understanding (*intellegentes*)?"¹²³ He therefore invited catechumens to start the baptismal preparation in order to be fully initiated. Van der Meer took Augustine's remarks literally to argue that catechumens did not understand the sermons of Augustine and, consequently, that the catechumenate was in complete decline at his time.¹²⁴ Harmless has since underlined that such conclusions are based on the wrong

¹¹⁹ Augustine, *Pecc. mer.* II, 26.42. In *C. Iul.* III, 26.62 Augustine states that catechumens are not freed from sin. Dölger (1961), 11 rightly points here to the parallel found in Ambrose, *De mysteriis* 4.20: "Credit autem etiam catechumenus in crucem domini Iesu qua et ipse signatur, sed nisi baptizatus fuerit [...] remissionem non potest accipere" (Faller, O., (ed.), *CSEL* 73 (1955), 97).

¹²⁰ For instance: Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 1-5, *S.* 97A (Bibl. Cas. 114-115); *S.* 132, 1.

¹²¹ See Borella (1939), 64-65 for Augustine and see below note 133.

¹²² Augustine, *S.* 132. The year of preaching is unknown; Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/4 (1992), 328 n. 1 suggests 420 without evidence and believes that the sermon was preached close to Easter because it states that Easter is coming. For the dating at the beginning of Lent see Poque, S., (transl., not.), *SC* 116 (1966), 22 and 352; Poque (1971), 177. Margoni-Kögler (2010), 86-87 rather situates it during Lent.

¹²³ Augustine, *S.* 132, 1 (my translation). A similar distinction in Augustine, *In Ps.* 109, 17.

¹²⁴ van der Meer (1961), 356-357 followed by Jensen-Patout Burns (2015), 203 n. 206.

assumption that only special instruction to catechumens could lead them to understanding and that sermons did not match such requirements. For Harmless, however, Augustine's preaching was an essential tool of communication used by the bishop to teach his audience.¹²⁵ Besides the fact, as I have underlined, that catechumens may have received special instruction, the sermon was intended to distinguishing catechumens as an excluded group to bring them to enrol for baptism as Lent had begun.¹²⁶ Not all sermons referring to this practice were preached during Lent. More generally, in a great variety of contexts, whether sermons, letters, or works – notably resorting to his own experience, as shown in Chapter 2 – Augustine constantly emphasised the need for baptism. He thus particularly focused on the catechumens' imperfect status and their lack of participation in the Eucharist, often rhetorically playing on their ignorance to exhort them to baptism.¹²⁷

The discussion about knowledge, I argue, perhaps misses the point of Augustine's references. Indeed, this restricted understanding of the *disciplina arcani* has led scholars like Kretschmar to conclude that hiding rituals had become a "fiction" in the fourth and fifth centuries: the creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Eucharist were not hidden but often explained in texts with a potentially wide circulation.¹²⁸ The *disciplina arcani* was not merely aimed at preventing individuals from knowing about the rites of initiation and gaining the intellectual capacity to comprehend the teaching on the Eucharist, but it kept the concrete knowledge of rituals and their true significance hidden by preventing catechumens from performing them.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Harmless (2014), 82-183.

¹²⁶ Other examples are Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 10-11-12; *S.* 97A (=Bibl. Cas. 114-115); *S.* 392.

¹²⁷ First in sermons outside Lent: Augustine, *In Ps.* 80, 8-11 (end of 403 see chapter 4 p. 157 n. 122); *Io. eu. tr.* 4, 13 and 13, 6 (respectively perhaps end of December and close to Ascension according to la Bonnardière (1965), 46-53); *S.* 198aug, 12 (1st of January); *S.* 260C, 1 (Good Friday). Then in letters to catechumens: *Ep.* 151, 258 and 2*; finally through exemplary stories ending with baptism. Besides his own experience, in his later works, Augustine narrated stories in which baptism was triggered by extraordinary events (see note 18).

¹²⁸ Kretschmar (1970), 157-158; similar although more nuanced views in Stenzel (1958), 147-153.

¹²⁹ This is noted in Perrin (2008), 124-125 referring to the conclusions of de Roten (2005), 421-430 for John Chrysostom's sermons. John argued that it does not matter whether one hears or sees the mysteries: only experiencing the power of the initiation truly gives knowledge about the mysteries. This applies to a great extent to Augustine as well, although he seems to have more emphasised the concrete separation of catechumens and baptised Christians.

Indeed, sermons refer to the celebration of the Eucharist and explain it, however underlining that the rite can only be apprehended by those who see and experience it concretely: “Some of you who heard this already do it, others not yet”.¹³⁰ Beyond a discussion about knowledge and understanding, I argue that the concrete implications of the *disciplina arcani* are particularly important for the status of catechumens: the dismissal enforced a strict division between groups within the community and the physical space of the church, corresponding to Augustine’s mention of a specific *locus* for catechumens. Catechumens were treated as a separate category in the church and were not fully integrated because some key mysteries – and in particular the celebration of the Eucharist – were not opened to them, and by this I mean physically accessible, not more than they were to pagans. What matters for Augustine is that some liturgical performances should not to be witnessed by catechumens in order to trigger their desire to be more fully included in the rituals. A detailed study of Augustine’s references to the practice of dismissing catechumens should better demonstrate this point.

Although the practice was clearly important, Augustine refers to it only in passing, focusing instead on the implications of the ritual separation. In the context of an incident, the newly discovered sermon 359B (=Dolbeau 2), probably preached the 23rd of January 404 in Carthage,¹³¹ provides the first evidence of the dismissal and of the use of specific terms to designate it. Augustine preached that day to call for more obedience in the audience: the day before, part of the crowd was upset because it could not hear Augustine speaking from the apse and wanted him to preach from the centre of the basilica. As Augustine refused and left the pulpit, the crowd angrily called for the dismissal – and thus for the liturgy to proceed without the sermon – by shouting “*missa fiant*” and “*missa fac*”.¹³² From Sermon 49, preached

¹³⁰ Augustine, *S.* 132, 1 (Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/4 (1992), 325).

¹³¹ Dolbeau (2009), 315-327 (commentary), 331 (text).

¹³² Augustine, *S.* 359B (=Dolbeau 2), 6, 20, 23. As Dolbeau (2009), 632 has noted, the use of the neutral cannot be held for a corruption of the text, but is already attested in liturgical manuscripts from Campania. “Missa” could designate other parts of the liturgy and especially oblation prayers, leading to the broader use of the term to refer to the Eucharistic celebration. See Mohrmann, C., (1958), ‘Missa’, *VChr* 12, 67-92 reprinted in *Id.*, (1965), *Études sur le latin des chrétiens*, volume 3 (Rome), 351-376; Gamber, K., (1968b),

again in Carthage at the *mensa Cypriani* perhaps in 418,¹³³ it can be inferred that the “*missa*” concerned catechumens in particular. Augustine preached on justice that day, and his developments exhorting the audience to work for justice led him to comment on the Lord’s Prayer. But before discussing the prayer he explained:

Look—after the sermon there’s the dismissal of the catechumens (*catechumeni*). The faithful (*fideles*) will stay behind. We shall come to the place in the service for prayer. You know what it is we are going to draw near to. What are we going to say to God first? *Forgive us our debts, just as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6, 12).¹³⁴

In a letter written in spring 411, narrating to Albina the visit to Hippo of her son Pinianus with his wife Melania, Augustine explains that the crowd tried to force him to ordain Pinianus a priest just before he “dismissed the catechumens (*dimisimus catechumenos*)”.¹³⁵ These passages, mentioning by chance what was clearly a widespread practice, make clear that catechumens were physically excluded from the church. Sermon 49 also shows that the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer constituted another portion of the liturgy from which catechumens were excluded that triggered Augustine’s interest, although less frequently than the Eucharist. Apart from the sermon just quoted, Augustine always stressed this practice in polemics against Pelagians: in the final part of the *De sancta virginitate* and in two anti-Pelagian sermons, Augustine explains that the Lord’s Prayer is for the *fideles* and should only be pronounced by them because it cleanses daily sins committed after baptism rather than sins forgiven through the rites of initiation. He links the fact that the verses from Mt 6, 12 are pronounced by baptised people to prove that even they sin – a way of arguing that is very close to his emphasis on rites of purifications performed on infants to justify the performance of infant

‘Missa. Von der dreifachen Bedeutung des Wortes’, *RQA* 63, 170-184; Griffe, E., (1974), ‘La Signification du mot “Missa”’, *BLE* 75, 133-138; more bibliography in Sieben, H. J., (1979), *Voces* (Berlin), 334-335 and Klöckener (1998), 155 n. 82.

¹³³ The sermon is preached on a Sunday after S. 48 (the preceding Sunday), shortly after Pentecost 418 (see Verbraken (1976), 64).

¹³⁴ Augustine, S. 49, 8 (Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/2 (1990), 338 adapted).

¹³⁵ Augustine, *Ep.* 126, 5 (Goldbacher, A., (ed.), *CSEL* 44 (1904), 11). On the episode see Lancel (1999), 437-442.

baptism for the forgiveness of sins.¹³⁶ Augustine, by resorting to the liturgy in controversies, again reflected on particular distinctions in place in his community between catechumens and baptised Christians.

The clear line drawn in clerical discourse was concretely enforced through the practice of the dismissal. It should not simply be understood as an exclusion from understanding: Augustine never says that the catechumens do not know the prayer – in contrast to what he may say about the Eucharist – but the crucial point is that they have no right to say it as a prayer. This link between the dismissal and the Lord’s Prayer sheds light on the primary function of the dismissal. It was not only a rite emerging from the custom of keeping secrets away from the uninitiated. It clearly separated groups, not on the ground of their knowledge of rites but of their concrete place within the physical space of the church and their rights in the community. The dismissal prevented them from actively taking part in, or even simply being present during, the core liturgical celebrations. This is particularly obvious in the case of the Lord’s Prayer because it is found in the Gospel of Matthew, but such a conclusion could be extended. Thus, more than a requisite of the *disciplina arcani*, the dismissal distinguished catechumens from the baptised, by emphasising their peculiar status.

In a dictated explanation on the Gospel of John to be sent to Carthage, commenting on John 16, 12-13 (“*Adbuc multa habeo vobis dicere, sed non potestis portare modo. Cum autem venerit ille Spiritus veritatis, docebit vos omnem veritatem*”), Augustine noted that catechumens could be well educated in the Scriptures, as were some *fideles*, and able to read, hear, and understand them, “although not in the proper way” without the Spirit.¹³⁷ He noted that catechumens do not receive the rites of the faithful (*fidelium sacramenta*) in order to lead them to desire baptism, and

¹³⁶ Augustine, *Uirg.* 48.48. Hombert (2000), 110-136 has argued for dating the chapters starting at 37 from 412. The two sermons are: *In Ps.* 142, 6 (uncertainly dated, hypotheses ranging between 411 and 418 see Müller (2001), 824; Hombert (2000), 621-625 argues for the fifteenth of September 412); *S.* 181, 5.7 (perhaps preached in 416-417, see hypotheses in Verbraken (1976), 97). See Dupont (2012), 297-441 on the use of prayer in the controversy with more bibliography.

¹³⁷ Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 96, 3 (my translation). The sermon has been dated to Lent 420, see Berrouard, M.-F., *BA* 74A (1993), 9-49 reprinted in Berrouard (2004), 177-194. On the attraction for secrets, for instance Augustine, *S.* 51, 4.5 mentioned by Berrouard, M.-F., *BA* 74B (1998), 284-285 n. 22.

not because they would be unable to understand them. This is an important nuance showing that for Augustine, although complete understanding only came with the ritual transformation enacted through the initiation at baptism, the dismissal was primarily intended as a ritual barrier between distinctive groups.

This refined understanding of the function of the dismissal fits particularly well with Augustine's remarks found in two sermons from the 400s. First, preaching on ministers against Donatists perhaps in 407-408, Augustine notes that foreigners are questioned about their religious status when they come to church to avoid that *catechumeni* "press into the *sacramenta*" reserved for the *fideles*.¹³⁸ The newly discovered Sermon 142aug contains similar views about the distinction between *catechumeni* and *fideles*. It was probably preached in 404 or 406,¹³⁹ as a kind of postscript after the sermon of the local bishop of an unknown community who invited Augustine to say a few words about the burial of catechumens. A young catechumen had just died and his family was putting pressure on the local bishop to grant him a burial among the *fideles*. Augustine explained that the discipline of the church was clear and forbade such burials where the *sacramenta* were celebrated.¹⁴⁰ The rule well corresponds to the practice of dismissing catechumens from churches before the core part of the liturgy was celebrated, as noted by Dolbeau.¹⁴¹ Thus, the ban against the burial of catechumens in churches was linked to their customary exclusion from places where liturgy was performed, even after their death.

Both sermons show that the dismissal was a matter of rights – depending on status (*gradus*) – to take part physically, dead or alive, to the liturgy following the sermon, because of

¹³⁸ Augustine, *S.* 46, 31: "Quaeris ne forte catechuminus sit, et irruat sacramentis. Respondet: 'Fidelis'" (Lambot, C., (ed.), *CCSL* 41 (1961), 557). For the dating see Hombert (2000), 553-554 arguing against the traditional dating to 409-410).

¹³⁹ From evidence of one of the two manuscripts available Dolbeau concludes that it follows *S.* 142 (Dolbeau (2009), 297). Because of the old collection of Lorsch in which *S.* 142 is found, the *post tractatum* was either preached in 404, on the journey back from Carthage to Hippo, or in 406 when Augustine visited Sinita, 50 miles south of Hippo (Dolbeau (2009), 298). Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/11 (1997), 133-134 preferred 406.

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, *S.* 142aug (=Dolbeau 7).

¹⁴¹ Dolbeau (2009), 299; also Harmless (2004), 21 and Harmless (2014), 225 n. 166.

the specific *locus* reserved for *catechumeni*. Augustine wanted to enforce the conviction that catechumens would not enjoy the hopes of the baptised after death. His refusal shows the significance of the distinction while clear-cut divisions, as the family's request suggests, may have not been accepted or followed by everyone. The distinction in terms of ritual integration between catechumens and baptised Christians deeply concerned Augustine, who aimed at enforcing it as an important rule.

The rite of the dismissal, as an integral part of the catechumens' experience, may have also been part of a broader ritual during Christian services meant to single out catechumens. While scholars have often referred to the repeated reception of salt by catechumens and hypothesised that it may have been linked to the dismissal, I would argue that the dismissal may have constituted the final part of a broader series of rites performed on catechumens.¹⁴² There is little evidence in Augustine about the concrete way of organising the dismissal, but hypotheses can be put forward. Dolbeau, followed by Klöckener and Harmless, has shown that the dismissal in Sermon 359B took place after the preacher said the prayer “*Conversi ad Dominum*”, which was simply the customary prayer ending each sermon, to be distinguished from the prayer of the faithful.¹⁴³ Klöckener added that the dismissal of catechumens immediately followed with a short formula, “*missa fiant*”, without any special rites or prayers.¹⁴⁴ However, distinguishing the *Conversi* prayer from the formal prayer of the faithful should not lead us to conclude that there were no additional prayers for catechumens. Klöckener's conclusions are influenced by the request of the crowd to quickly proceed with the dismissal. There is no reason to imply that the ritual and formula of the dismissal corresponded to the shouts of the crowd, which only allude to the process in a generic way (“*missa facere*”). Thanks to Sermon 360B (=Dolbeau 25) perhaps preached in December 403, we know that pagans

¹⁴² See note 3.

¹⁴³ Dolbeau, F., (2009), 171-175; then Klöckener (1998), 154-157 and Harmless (2004), 27-28. See also Klöckener, M., (1994), ‘*Conversi ad dominum*’, *AL* 1, fasc. 7/8, 1280-1282.

¹⁴⁴ Klöckener (1998), 155-157.

were also formally dismissed.¹⁴⁵ Penitents should also be added to the picture: as noted by Harmless, Augustine tells of penitents who queued to receive a blessing before their dismissal.¹⁴⁶ In view of the evidence, it remains entirely plausible that after the *Conversi* prayer, pagans, catechumens and penitents were successively dismissed with special prayers, before the prayer of the faithful.¹⁴⁷ I would argue that Sermon 359B only shows that the crowd wanted to proceed with the impatiently awaited and perhaps lengthy dismissal, “*missa*” in the plural referring to a number of special prayers pronounced at the dismissal.¹⁴⁸ It is worth hypothesising that when catechumens were dismissed they may have queued to receive some specific rites evoked in the first part of this chapter, as the sign of the cross on the forehead, the giving of salt, the blessing and exorcisms. Thus, along with the ceremonies of dismissal for pagans and penitents, the catechumens’ status could have been particularly well highlighted, as they were progressively included through the prayer and some special rites and at the same time excluded by being forced to leave the building with the other excluded categories in the audience.

Conclusion

While most scholarship has focused on the admission process and has only taken notice of the dismissal of catechumens and the *disciplina arcana*, I have argued that, for Augustine, the catechumens’ membership may have entailed a more complex set of rites meant to single them out as a specific group within the community. All began at the admission into the catechumenate: a comparison of the *De catechizandis rudibus* with the *Contra Faustum* has shown that the first session included catechesis based on Bible history, perhaps

¹⁴⁵ Augustine, *S.* 360B (=Dolbeau 25), 28: “Et postquam pagani egressi sunt [...]” (Dolbeau (2009), 244; dating *ibid.* 626).

¹⁴⁶ Harmless (2014), 224 (see Augustine, *S.* 232, 8), who also hypothesised that catechumens may have received salt at their dismissal.

¹⁴⁷ Augustine, *Ep.* 217, 1.2 referring to distinctive prayers for pagans, catechumens and faithful at the altar – most probably pronounced during the Eucharistic service – may also hint at the fact that other special prayers took place at the dismissal.

¹⁴⁸ See note 133 for *missa* that could both refer to the dismissal and prayers.

with the physical display of books, as Augustine particularly emphasised against Manichaeans the importance of the prophecies on Christianity, but also more generally the need to teach new recruits about Christian behaviour. A number of rites complemented the catechesis to incorporate candidates as *catechumeni* in the community – a blessing, a marking of the cross on the forehead, a giving of salt, and most likely the *exsufflatio*. There seem to have been no restriction in terms of age to enter the catechumenate, Augustine clearly referring to catechumens of a very young age and to their involvement in the subsequent baptismal preparation.

The admission into the catechumenate, however, was not an isolated moment. I have shown that Augustine often employs the term *sacramentum* when presenting the ritual initiation of converts, not with the restrictive meaning of “sacrament” but to refer to a set of rites performed by the candidate as proof of his initiation and commitment to his status of catechumen.¹⁴⁹ The *sacramentum* of catechumens in Augustine more broadly encompasses all ritual actions of initiation performed by, and on, catechumens.¹⁵⁰ Thus, against common assumptions, allusions to rites for catechumens do not necessarily pertain to a well-ordained single ritual session at the admission, as if catechumens would only perform rites on that occasion. While Canon 3 of the council of Hippo already makes clear that salt was given frequently, Augustine’s writings seem to lead to the same conclusion: catechumens had a *sacramentum* of their own, received some food – perhaps only salt – together with the laying of

¹⁴⁹ Mohrmann, C., (1954), ‘*Sacramentum* dans les plus anciens textes chrétiens’, in *HThR* 47, 141-152 reprinted in Mohrmann, C., (1958b), *Études sur le latin des Chrétiens*, volume 1 (Rome), 233-244, at 237-238 suggested that *sacramentum* often refers to a combination of legal and sacred aspects of a commitment, a definition which is quite close to Augustine’s understanding. *Sacramentum* was also employed for military oaths, see Dölger (1930); for the early middle ages: Esders, S., (2009), *Sacramentum fidelitatis. Treueidleistung, Militärorganisation und Formierung mittelalterlicher Staatlichkeit*, 2nd edition (Berlin).

¹⁵⁰ Several studies of *sacramentum* in Augustine have demonstrated the wide range of meanings that can be associated with the word. *Sacramentum* as a rite or series of rites appears to be one of the most commonly attested meanings. See in particular Couturier, M., (1953), “‘*Sacramentum*’ et ‘*mysterium*’ dans l’oeuvre de saint Augustin”, in Rondet-Le Landais-Lauras-Couturier (1953), 161-274; Mandouze, A., (1963), ‘A propos de “*Sacramentum*” chez S. Augustin. Polyvalence lexicologique et foisonnement théologique’, in *Mélanges offerts à Mademoiselle Christine Mohrmann* (Utrecht-Antwerpen), 222-232; Studer, B., (1975), “‘*Sacramentum* et exemplum’ chez saint Augustin”, *RecAug* 10, 87-141. For a survey on the term *sacramentum* with more bibliography: Phelan, O. M., (2014), *The Formation of Christian Europe. The Carolingians, Baptism, and the Imperium Christianum* (Oxford), 8-47.

hands and the marking of candidates. Such rites may have been performed on a regular basis and served as a way to confirm the catechumens' commitment. They may also have been accompanied – as suggested thanks to an illuminating passage of the *De fide et operibus* – by a special instruction reserved for *catechumeni*, which however has left no clear traces in preserved sermons.

The rites of *catechumeni* had both the function to emphasise their inclusion into the community and the extent to which they were barred from sharing the rites of the baptised. For Augustine, besides regular attendance at church services, the rite of signing the forehead with the cross in particular was essential for showing their inclusion and belonging to the community. Repeated throughout the initiation process, it illustrated the progressive incorporation of catechumens. The rite may also have been part of a number of other actions performed on catechumens, like prayers and invocations, which may have taken place at the time of the dismissal from the church, thus simultaneously highlighting their gradual and incomplete inclusion. The dismissal and the *disciplina arcani* stressed the limits of their rights in terms of physically taking part in the rites of the baptised. The objective was to trigger the catechumens' decision to enter the baptismal preparation and thus bring them to fuller ritual inclusion.

The existence of rites for catechumens may also explain why Augustine particularly mentioned them in polemics. I have shown that most references to the catechesis, the rites of admission into the catechumenate and other rites are found in polemical writings, first against Manichaeans, then against Donatists, and finally during the Pelagian controversy. Augustine debated how catechesis should be given against Faustus; his insistence on the unacceptable repetition of the catechumenate for baptised Christians became an important polemical tool often employed against rebaptism – following a tradition already established in Optatus and carried on in Vandal Africa. Later, Augustine frequently pointed to the rites performed on infants before baptism to argue for the necessity of infant baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

He also employed the exclusion of catechumens from the recitation of the Lord's prayer as proof that it was meant for cleansing the daily sins of the baptised, and similarly referred to the existence of special prayers for catechumens and baptised Christians as evidence for the necessity of God's grace.

Thus, despite mostly allusive evidence, Augustine devoted special attention to the rites of catechumens. The vigorous anti-Donatist polemic in particular makes patent that Augustine operated in a context of rivalry over catechumens as much as over baptised Christians. He took every opportunity to deliver catecheses aimed at providing a solid teaching against his opponents, while he strove to bring catechumens to baptism on the basis of their partial ritual inclusion. Catechumens were a particularly contested category, because of their peculiar liminal status in the community. The next chapter shall go beyond evidence about practices, sharpening our understanding of what it meant to be a catechumen for Augustine and how he attempted to shape practices and ideas. Thus, catechumens, their rites and their training were always a concern of Augustine, particularly at turning points of his life. Writers and preachers, particularly bearers of clerical authority like Augustine, did not simply present the catechumenate as it happened, but instead used their skills to suggest a set of norms to be followed in a world where the frontiers of Christian membership were a matter of debate.

CHAPTER 4

Thinking with *catechumeni*: negotiating the boundaries of Christian membership in Augustine's pastoral care

Catechumens were a significant group within Christian communities in Augustine's Africa. As shown in the preceding chapter, they were singled out through ritual practices and particularly disputed in polemics. Their liminal position at the margins of Christianity also constituted an opportunity for Augustine to rethink the boundaries of his community. In this chapter, through two case studies, I explore how Augustine aimed at including catechumens in his pastoral care and employed their initiation as a tool to develop normative views on Christian membership and behaviour and create cohesion in a context of religious plurality and polemical debates.

I first focus on a detailed study of Augustine's discussion, mainly in sermons, of the main marker of Christian membership since the beginning of the catechumenate, the cross put on the forehead. Without limiting the enquiry to explicit references to catechumens but investigating Augustine's thinking about the rite in general, I show how he exploited this foundational marker to set rules of behaviour for the whole community. For Augustine the sign of the cross highlighted the visibility of Christian belonging and required in turn a strong commitment. All Christians without distinction are asked to conform their lifestyle, beliefs and attitude to Augustine's recommendations. Augustine also relates the significance of the rite to its protective power against the devil, fighting however against the assumption that the rite offered protection whatever one's behaviour. Augustine's recourse to the rite to foster unity in matters of rules of behaviour was particularly directed against the catechumens' expectations of being treated with more leniency.

I then explore the treatise *De fide et operibus*, a remarkable example of Augustine's interest in Christian initiation for dictating rules of behaviour and defining Christian membership. Written at a turning point in Augustine's life (412-413), this treatise aimed at

enforcing strict rules of admission for converts and catechumens, establishing norms based on a detailed exegesis of authoritative passages, against unnamed opponents who questioned the necessity of pre-baptismal discipline. Instead of assuming that the work was composed as a one-off reaction to a marginal problem, I set this treatise in continuity with Augustine's broader emphasis on rules of behaviour negotiated with catechumens and baptised Christians. I suggest that the work was probably written in Carthage in connection to Augustine's regular participation in the teaching of catechumens in the city. Expanding on what Augustine had progressively taught in his sermons and earlier works, this treatise, that shapes how the catechumenate should be organised and understood in late antique Africa, provides a striking synthesis of Augustine's thinking.

Chronologically, Augustine's views often transcend specific periods of his life: while most evidence is found in sermons, which are often difficult to date, a detailed analysis of the dating hypotheses of all texts explored demonstrates that Augustine referred to the catechumens' membership frequently over many years. However, it is possible to highlight the concentration of ideas at specific occasions. In particular, the traditional picture of Augustine's involvement in the teaching of catechumens outside Hippo should be reconsidered. Although largely left unnoticed, I shall demonstrate that several – perhaps even the majority – of Augustine's conceptions about the sign of the cross on the forehead were developed in the city of Carthage, where Augustine clearly played an essential role as a preacher and writer. The exploration of the context of composition of the *De fide et operibus* particularly reinforces this point, since I suggest that the treatise was probably composed in close connection to Augustine's travels to the city.

I. Christian foreheads: the privileges and duties of religious belonging

Augustine often emphasised that the rite of the cross put on the forehead was shared by all Christians and defined the catechumens' Christian membership, as much as that of baptised Christians. In a sermon preached the 10th of August, perhaps in Carthage, Augustine noted:

[...] when we became Christians, we gave our name to Christ and submitted our foreheads to such a sign [...]. You're a Christian, you carry on your forehead the cross of Christ. [...] from this sign, from this stamp which Christians receive as well when they become catechumens, here is to be understood why we are Christians.¹

To be a catechumen was truly to be a Christian and the main rite and distinctive feature of this membership was to receive the cross on the forehead. However, the rite was also at the core of the preparation for baptism: in the quoted passage, the connection of the cross with the giving of one's name to Christ most probably refers to the process of admission of candidates as *competentes*. As Augustine tells to catechumens in a sermon preached probably in 406-407, either in Hippo or perhaps in Carthage, the sign of the cross on the forehead concretely showed one's belonging to the Christian community.² Later, dictating a homily on

¹ Augustine, *S.* 302, 3 (Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/8 (1994), 301-302 adapted). Perhaps dating from 411-412 see chapter 3 p. 93 n. 54. See as well *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2 (around 414-415 see chapter 3 p. 107 n. 109). Augustine however sometimes employed *christianus* only for the baptised (*Io. eu. tr.* 11, 4), see Lamirande (1963; 1992a; 1992b).

² Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 3, 2. This homily is part of a series alternating the first sixteen homilies on John (*Io. eu. tr.* 1-12) with *In Ps.* 119-133, *In Ps.* 95 and 20, II, shortly followed by *Ep. Io. tr.* and *Io. eu. tr.* 13-16. Most scholars agree that the series should be situated between 405-411 (see Müller (2001), 825), particularly because of intense polemics against Donatists. For the identification of the series and the hypothesis of dating in 406-407 with diverging views on the dating of each sermon: Landais, M. le, (1953), 'Deux années de prédication de saint Augustin. Introduction à la lecture de l'*In Ioannem*', in Rondet-Le Landais-Lauras-Couturier (1953), 7-95 (identified the series and suggested 414-415, situating it in Hippo); Bonnardière, A.-M. la, (1965) *Recherches de chronologie augustiniennne* (Paris), 19-62 (first suggested 406-407); Berrouard, M.-F. (transl., not.), *BA* 71 (1969), 29-36 and 78-113 reprinted in Berrouard (2004), 22-27 and 55-78; Berrouard (1971); Poque (1971) refining the dates of *Io. eu. tr.* 7-12. For a study: Harmless (2014), 235-283. For a summary of scholarship on the whole series of *Io. eu. tr.* see Milewski, D. J., (2002), 'Augustine's 124 Tractates on the Gospel of John: The *Status Quaestionis* and the State of Neglect', *AugStud* 33/1, 61-77. Although outside of the scope of this thesis, the significant amount of sermons preached in Carthage discussed in this chapter suggests that studies which situate this and similar series in Hippo may need to be reconsidered in detail to determine whether they could have been preached in Carthage. Augustine is known to have been in Carthage in 406 and 407, see Perler-Maier (1969), 260-66; moreover, he was outside Hippo during Lent perhaps in 404 addressing *competentes* (see *S.* 352, 1.6 and note 117), while he may have at least once preached at Easter in Carthage (*S.* 258 see hypotheses for the location of preaching in Verbraken (1976), 120). Scholars have extensively discussed the chronology but devoted much less attention to the

the Gospel of John around 420 to be sent to Carthage, Augustine summarised the central role played by the cross, stating that the sign is first put on the forehead of catechumens, and then performed during their initiation, more generally making all rites efficient.³ Thus, over the whole course of his life Augustine repeatedly emphasised the significance of the rite of the cross for Christian membership.

Almost all of the numerous descriptions or allusions to the rite are found in Augustine's preaching, mostly to the people, in Hippo, Carthage and elsewhere, with the exception of a few references in the *De catechizandis rudibus* and the *Contra Faustum*, and one allusion in the *Confessiones* – the works that are most informative about the process of admission. Almost systematically, except when the rite is directly related to the liturgical context and ritual practice, references to the sign of the cross on the forehead arise when Augustine comments on a biblical passage. More precisely, this occurs generally when commenting on passages which can be figuratively understood as referring to the cross and, most often, the reference to the cross leads to a commentary on the Passion of Christ. In some cases, however, the commentary is drawn from a reference to the forehead in the Bible. All this explains why the evidence cannot be reduced to specific moments in Augustine's life: he had several opportunities over the course of his life to discuss the rite. It seems that the rite was well known and remembered by his church audiences. Augustine therefore considered it particularly important for creating cohesion in Christian communities on the basis of biblical

place of preaching. It is highly problematic that le Landais (1953), 26-27 and Perler-Maier (1969), 83 consider that Augustine is expected to stay in Hippo during the baptismal preparation: there is no reason to imply that catechumens in Carthage or Hippo, both *catechumeni* and more specifically *competentes*, had to be taught exclusively by the local bishop. Besides the authorisation given by Aurelius to priests to preach in his church (Augustine, *Ep.* 41, 1), Augustine also composed model sermons for initiation to be used in his and other churches (as Augustine, *S.* 214), and sent dictated sermons to be read in Carthage (Augustine, *Ep.* 23A*, 3). Thus, it is likely that he instructed catechumens in Carthage even during the Lenten period, when other duties required him to stay there, probably on request of the local clergy. This may have happened in 413 when Augustine wrote the *De fide et operibus* and started working on the *De civitate Dei*. Priests in Hippo could take charge of the teaching of catechumens whenever Augustine was away. On the significance of Carthage in Augustine's life: Lapeyre, G. G., (1931), 'Saint Augustin et Carthage', *MA* 2, 90-148.

³ Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 118, 5 speaks of *credentes* who are most probably catechumens because they are mentioned in a progression then including baptism, the Chrism and the Eucharist (for the dating of the whole series of *Io. eu. tr.* 55-124 see Berrouard, M.-F., *BA* 74A (1993), 9-49 reprinted in Berrouard (2004), 177-194).

evidence about Christ, exhorting the audience to correct their lifestyle to that of followers of Christ.

There is as yet no detailed investigation on Augustine's interpretations of the rite as a core feature of Christian membership.⁴ While meanings generally associated with the sign of the cross on the forehead in early Christianity have mainly been explored in connection with the baptismal ceremonies,⁵ it is essential to point to Augustine's insistence on the relevance of the sign of the cross from the very beginning of the catechumenate and well beyond baptism as a major marker of incorporation. In contradistinction to baptism, the sign of the cross received at the admission into the catechumenate could also have been repeatedly conferred and it was used by catechumens and baptised Christians to sign themselves. By referring to this rite, Augustine reminded his audience of the commitment to the cross that they regularly made since the very beginning of their adhesion to Christianity. At the same time, by focusing on the main marker of inclusion for catechumens, Augustine skilfully aimed at including them in his broader pastoral care. Catechumens considered that they were less liable to church discipline because of their peculiar status. Augustine, however, made best use of this foundational rite to exhort both catechumens and baptised Christians to the same standards, often in lively dialogues with the audience.

1. Manifesting Christian belonging to the world and within the community

As we have seen in Chapter Three, Augustine relates the assertion of one's religious affiliation with the practice of signing the forehead with the cross. It is thus understandable that in most of his explanations of the rite Augustine exhorts his audience to manifest their religious belonging in a context of religious plurality in late antique Africa, especially in

⁴ The theme of the cross on the forehead in Augustine is briefly discussed in studies on the admission into the catechumenate (see chapter 3, p.80-81 n. 2), and in Pontet (1945), 366-369; Rondet (1954), 388-394; Dölger (1961), 12-16; Hammerstaedt (1996), 147-150.

⁵ For instance Jensen, R. M., (2012), *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions* (Grand Rapids MI), 86-88.

Carthage. It is worth noting that the forehead was commonly seen in the ancient world as the seat of emotions and especially the display of *pudor* and *verecundia* (shame and modesty) in social relations.⁶ Therefore, *frons* in Latin, while generally translating as “forehead”, could also more broadly refer to one’s face and attitude.⁷ I show in this section that Augustine exploits these extended meanings: he argues against being ashamed of the cross put on the forehead, particularly in confrontations with pagans and other religious groups. More broadly, he reflects on the relation and tension between outward and inward Christian belonging, describing how the rite should correspond to a visible change of attitude. Augustine evokes the rite to exhort his audience to behave according to his recommendations, advocating norms of behaviour and addressing the nature of Christian membership.

Shame, pride and the triumph of the humble cross

The crucifixion, the cross and the death of Jesus, who is said to be the son of God, were still seen by many as terrible, infamous and unfitting for God. Moreover, if the marking of the forehead with a sign of ownership was made visible, it could recall the branding of slaves, a derogatory practice in the ancient world.⁸ Thus, Augustine, as other early Christians, often preaches against the assumption that the cross would be shameful to bear on the forehead, exhorting his audience instead to display pride in the cross most often on the basis of Gal 6, 14a (“*Mihi, absit glorari, nisi in cruce Domini nostri Iesu Christi*”).⁹ For instance, when preaching on vision perhaps in Carthage, Augustine quotes Gal 6, 14a and comments that no one should be ashamed of the deformity of Christ (*Christi deformitas*) put on the forehead.¹⁰

⁶ See *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (1912-1926), 6, 1 (Leipzig), 1357-1358; Löfstedt, B., (1981), ‘*Frons* “Scham” und “Schamlosigkeit”’, *AClass* 24, 169-170.

⁷ *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 6, 1, 1353-1355 (forehead) and 1355-1358 (face and attitude).

⁸ Jones (1987), 147-149.

⁹ See for instance Cyrill of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 13, 22; John Chrysostom, *Adversus Iudaeos* 9; *Homiliae in Matthaeum* 55, 4.

¹⁰ Augustine, *S.* 27, 6 (unknown place of preaching, most probably during the Pelagian controversy, see Verbraken (1976), 59; Hombert (2000), 369 suggests 18/10/419, when Augustine was in Carthage: see Perler-Maier (1969), 356). Similar thoughts in *Io. eu. tr.* 43, 9 (part of a series generally situated in Hippo around 414-415 see chapter 3 p. 107 n. 109).

For Augustine, the rite is performed on the forehead precisely to prevent Christians from blushing and being ashamed (*erubescere, verecundare*), because the forehead is commonly understood as the seat of *pudor* and *verecundia*. These terms, which could more broadly refer to positive qualities of temperance – knowing one’s place in society, displaying care in social interactions – are employed negatively to refer to shame and bashfulness and contrasted with an assertive manifestation of Christian membership founded on Christ and the cross.¹¹ When preaching in Carthage to the people, at the beginning of the Pelagian controversy, on the need for Christ’s healing, Augustine takes the example of Zaccheus (cf. Lk 19, 1-10) to say that to climb the sycamore to see Jesus is little compared to putting the cross on the forehead and not being ashamed of it.¹² In Thagaste or perhaps again in Carthage, already in 407 or in 414-415, the bishop asks his audience to show pride in their belonging to Christ through the cross put on the forehead and to defend it against opponents, rebuking his audience against being ashamed of confessing their faith when they are with unbelievers.¹³ A unique textual version of Ps. 68, 8 (“*Quoniam propter te sustinui exprobrationem, operuit irreverentia faciem meam*”) where *reverentia* is strikingly replaced by *irreverentia*, shows how Augustine particularly wanted to emphasise this point: to display *irreverentia* (“irreverence”, “disrespect”) against those who oppose Christ means not to be ashamed of him, but keeping without fear his sign on the forehead.¹⁴ Again in Carthage, perhaps only a few years later in 415-416, Augustine contrasted

¹¹ Augustine, *S.* 218C (=Morin Guelf. 3), 4 (Good Friday, perhaps in Hippo; it is uncertainly dated, perhaps at some point starting from 411-412, see Verbraken (1976), 182 and Hombert (2000), 368 and n. 10); similar terms in *In Ps.* 68, II, 4; *Io. eu. tr.* 53, 13 (around 414-415 see chapter 3, p. 107 n. 109) and *S.* 160, 5-6. On *pudor* and *verecundia* as Roman values “monitoring the self in interpersonal dealings”, see Kaster, R. A., (2010), ‘Values and Virtues, Roman’, in Gagarin, M., and Fantham, E., (eds.), (2010), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford), 148-157, at 151-152. Jerome, *Ep.* 107, 1 remarks that *verecundia* may bring the pagan Albinus to convert to Christianity since all his family is already Christian. Later Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia* 32, 5 notes that in his time Christians only avoid being ashamed of their religion (*erubescere, verecundia*) because everyone is Christian.

¹² Augustine, *S.* 174, 3 (uncertain dating between 411 and 413 see Verbraken (1976), 96; Hombert (2000), 393 and n. 19 argues for 413).

¹³ Augustine, *In Ps.* 68, II, 4 (in Thagaste, 414-415, according to Hombert (2000), 595-98, while *In Ps.* 34, II preached at the same period is dated to 407 by Dulaey see note 30; other hypotheses in Müller (2001), 817).

¹⁴ Augustine, *In Ps.* 68, I, 12 (precedes *In Ps.* 68, II). This psalter version, repeated in *In Ps.* 68, II, 4 seems unique: I found no parallel in the *Vetus Latina Database* (www.brepolis.net). It is noted by Bruyne, D. de, (1933), ‘Notes sur le psautier de saint Augustin’, *RBen* 45, 20-28 at 23 as a “malheureuse correction d’Augustin” of εντροπη (shame, reverence).

the Old and the New Testament, opposing the circumcision, as a rite in the flesh and hidden, to the sign of the cross, visible, spiritual and revealing Christ's glory, not leading to shame but pride.¹⁵

More generally, to fight the feeling of shame, Augustine often notes in his sermons that the cross, which was ridiculed and neglected, is to be seen on the forehead of kings and all those who mocked it in the past; it brings everyone to believe in Christ. Thus, in a sermon on Psalm 32, probably pronounced at the feast of the vigil of Saint Cyprian in September 403, part of Augustine's preaching campaign in Carthage in autumn and winter 403-404, commenting Ps. 32 (33), 10 ("*Dominus dissipat consilia gentium, reprobant autem cogitationes populorum, et reprobant consilia principum*"), Augustine explains that kings have believed and now bear the sign of the cross of Christ on the forehead. This sign is more precious than any jewel of their diadem, while those who persecuted Christians are destroyed as the Church grows.¹⁶ Very similar comments are found in other sermons, a number of them from Carthage and preached in the 400s.¹⁷ Augustine also emphasises that the triumph of Christianity is particularly spectacular because it has humble origins: kings, emperors and learned pagans come to bear the cross that they considered shameful on the seat of shame and decency – the forehead – as they convert to the religion of fishermen.¹⁸ In a sermon preached in Boseth perhaps in December 403, these views are related to the *adventus* of the Christian emperor Honorius in the autumn, stating that emperors now come to pray at the tomb of Peter rather than paying

¹⁵ Augustine, *S.* 160, 1-7, esp. 5-6 (dating: Hombert (2000), 365-76; location: Verbraken (1976), 92).

¹⁶ Augustine, *In Ps.* 32, 2, II, 13 (dating: see chapter 3 p. 93 n. 56).

¹⁷ See Augustine, *In Ps.* 36, II, 4 (autumn 403 in Carthage, probably September, see Hombert (2000), 12-13 and Dulaey, M., (transl., not.), *BA* 58B (2014), 398-401); *S.* 88, 9.8 (unknown location, dating from the 400s, see Verbraken (1976), 75 for dating hypotheses and Hombert (2000), 368 n. 8 who suggests 404); *In Ps.* 73, 6 (perhaps in Carthage, see Rondet, H., (1974), 'Essais sur la chronologie des "Enarrationes in Psalmos" de saint Augustin', *BLE* 75, 161-188, at 165; probably preached in 412 see Hombert (2000), 502 n. 24 for a discussion); *In Ps.* 75, 10 (uncertain dating perhaps 404 according to Hombert (2000), 582-83 n. 78, see Müller (2001), 817); *In Ps.* 56, 3 (Hippo or Carthage, uncertain dating, maybe early or between 400-411 see Perler-Maier (1969), 248 and 449 who suggest early September 403 and other hypotheses in Müller (2001), 816).

¹⁸ Augustine, *S.* 272A (fragment), 1 (Pentecost, unknown date and place).

tributes to pagan gods.¹⁹ These remarks are followed by a call to pagans not to postpone conversion and become Christian, while Christians are exhorted to bring pagans to conversion through their own impeccable behaviour.²⁰

For Augustine, the main point is to stress the antithesis between the terrible punishment inflicted to Jesus and the triumph of Christianity in his own time. The bearing of the sign of the cross on the forehead is seen as a striking way of displaying one's conversion. More broadly, the reference to kings and learned pagans – the first persecuting Christians, the latter mocking them for their beliefs – and to their conversion throughout the world has the function to foster respect and reverence for the cross and the related rite of initiation. The contrast between Jesus' suffering and the state of Christianity in Augustine's time is well exploited to provide the bearers of the cross with a sense of greatness.

In texts particularly dating from the 400s, Augustine reflects on the consequences of not having the cross on the forehead, highlighting how it differentiates Christians from others. In the sixth book of the *Contra Faustum*, Augustine replies to Faustus' interpretation of regulations regarding defiling skin diseases (cf. Lev 13, 40) according to which bald men should be barred from ordination to priesthood. For Augustine, Faustus would have benefited from having a bald forehead on which to put the sign of the cross of Christ, because it would have prevented him from rejecting the Passion.²¹ Perhaps in 403-404, commenting on the title of Psalm 46, referring to the "sons of Core", baldness is interpreted differently. Augustine reads the title as a reference to the Calvary, translating Core as "bald (*calvus*)" but notes that the psalms are intended for the sons of Christ, who have not been left bald by Christ and thus are freed from the shame of baldness.²² Augustine's thoughts on the cross, associating the

¹⁹ Augustine, *S.* 360B (=Dolbeau 25), 24 (dating: Dolbeau (2009), 626). See the same remark in *S.* 341aug (=Dolbeau 22), 4 (12th December in Carthage perhaps the same year for Dolbeau (2009), 640).

²⁰ Augustine, *S.* 360B (=Dolbeau 25), 27.

²¹ Augustine, *C. Faust.* VI, 9.2.

²² Augustine, *In Ps.* 46, 2 (unsure location: Margoni-Kögler (2010), 438 notes that Augustine may be preaching outside Hippo; the dating is suggested by Dulaey, M., (transl., not.), *BA* 59A, complementary note 9 "Pour les fils de Coré" (forthcoming). Dulaey shows that Augustine's interpretation of the etymology of

triumphal views against pagans with a discussion of shame and baldness are particularly well summarised in a sermon on Psalm 141 probably preached again in the early 400s, as Augustine rejects the pagans' mocking of the cross:

For my part, I prefer to see Christ's cross on the foreheads of kings. [...] So far am I from being ashamed of the cross that I carry it not in a hidden place but on my forehead. [...] When you hear someone denouncing a person who is thoroughly impudent, he says, "That fellow has no forehead." What does it mean to say that a person has no forehead? That he is incapable of registering embarrassment. Let me have no bare forehead, let it be covered by the cross of my Lord.²³

Bearing the cross means to belong to the Christian community and to adhere to the beliefs about Christ. While Manichaeans like Faustus have left no room for the cross because they reject it, Christians cover their bald forehead with it. The cross should therefore bring Christians to display their belonging to Christianity, often with reference to pagans, implying that Christians may feel ashamed when interacting with them.

The pervasive theme of the triumph of the cross seems to be most common in sermons preached in the first fifteen years of Augustine's episcopacy, that particularly reflect a more optimistic context before the sack of Rome in 410. In all these passages, the presentation of a world converted to Christianity is a rhetorical tool employed to convince the remaining few to convert. Nevertheless, Augustine's sermons largely focus on Christians rather than on potential converts, perhaps particularly catechumens, more often stressing Christ's triumph rather than the Empire's, notably in sermons that attest the progressive deployment in the 400s of the theme of the two cities in an anti-Donatist context.²⁴ The success of Christianity and the power of the cross had to be given a universal dimension. It

Core evolved: the earliest sermons, all to be dated to 403-404, interpret Core as *calvus* referring to a dictionary of hebraic etymologies (*In Ps.* 44, 1; 46, 2-3; 83, 2 and 84, 2). A similar reference to the cross on the forehead of the sons of Core without comment is found in Augustine, *In Ps.* 41, 2, with a different etymology of Core, now translated as *calvaria* (as in *In Ps.* 87, 1), which is dated by Dulaey, *Ibid.* to 411 in Carthage.

²³ Augustine, *In Ps.* 141, 9 (Boulding, M., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/20 (2004), 334-335 adapted). For the dating and place (Hippo?) see chapter 3 p. 107 n. 104.

²⁴ For example: Augustine, *In Ps.* 54, 12 (uncertainly dated, hypotheses range from 394-396 to 411 see Müller (2001), 816); *In Ps.* 95, 2 (strongly anti-Donatist, part of a series preached over a winter between 405 and 411, perhaps 406-407, this sermon would then fit in Spring 407 see note 2 and Müller (2001), 825).

even ruled amongst Barbarians, well beyond Africa and the current limits of the Empire.²⁵ Thus, Augustine employs this theme to exhort the broader community to a positive display of their religious belonging. On the other hand, the sermons rebuking the audience against being ashamed on the basis of Gal 6, 14a were all probably preached during the Pelagian controversy, most often in Carthage.²⁶ Shame in connection to the cross on the forehead is regularly understood as conceit and lack of trust in God. Augustine transfers what Paul said in Gal. 6, 14a to his own specific context: receiving the rite on the forehead means that all Christians should trust in this humble cross and be proud of it, instead of themselves, in all their relationships with others.

Such exhortations, playing on the shame of the cross, are applied in exactly the same fashion when Augustine directly addresses catechumens and candidates for baptism. In a homily on the Gospel of John, perhaps at the beginning of Lent 407, Augustine notes that a catechumen who signs himself carries the cross on the forehead without being ashamed of it and thus believes in God.²⁷ In the undated Sermon 215 explaining the creed to *competentes*, the discussion of Christ's crucifixion leads Augustine to recall the reception of the cross on the forehead at the admission into the catechumenate, stating that it was put on the seat of shame precisely to prevent catechumens from being ashamed of the ignominious cross.²⁸ Similarly, when narrating the conversion of Marius Victorinus, Augustine emphasises Victorinus' lack of shame when he received the cross on his forehead.²⁹ The rite is central for Augustine in shaping the candidates' awareness of their faith in supporting their commitment to Christianity as they prepare for baptism. All these sermons make clear that Augustine employed the rite to bring his audience to display their Christian belonging and would

²⁵ Augustine, *In Ps.* 95, 2.

²⁶ For a list of references of this important quotation almost exclusively employed after 412 see Hombert (2000), 369-370.

²⁷ Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3 (for the location – Hippo; or perhaps Carthage? – and dating see note 2).

²⁸ Augustine, *S.* 215, 5 (see Verbraken (1976), 105; the date of around 425 suggested by Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/6 (1993), 165, n. 1 and n. 18 is unconvincing, as it is based on a variation of the text of the creed).

²⁹ Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.3.

emphasise this aspect in the case of catechumens as liminal Christians that he needed to convince about the power and universality of Christianity in a context of division and conflict with the Donatists and later Pelagians.

Displaying Christian behaviour

Discussion on the rite also often brought Augustine to reflect on behaviour within his own community, rather than only focusing on how it should define the attitude of Christians of his Church *vis-à-vis* the broader world. The rise of a Christian society is often sharply contrasted with the wrong behaviour of many Christians, what Augustine defines as new persecutions. The main rite of incorporation, shared by all Christians, brought him frequently to assert what it means to be a Christian, demanding more from his audience than a mere positive display of their Christian identity. He employed the cross on the forehead as a tool for inclusive preaching on morals, particularly reacting against celebrations at the martyrs' shrines and attending games and shows. Remarkably, a majority of the sermons on such topics were preached in Carthage. This shows that Augustine played an important role in shaping Christian belonging and rules of behaviour in the city.

While Augustine underlines that everyone sees the glory of the Church, and that it is not permitted to insult or hurt Christians,³⁰ he remarks that the difficult past situation of the Church, when Christians were persecuted for bearing the sign on their forehead and had to give testimony of their commitment, has been forgotten.³¹ As he explains in a sermon *ad populum*, preached on the feast of a martyr, this forgetfulness is the start of a new persecution, endured because of bad habits (*luxuria*) at the martyrs' feasts, suggested by the devil, that are

³⁰ For instance Augustine, *In Ps.* 34, II, 8 (Thagaste or perhaps Carthage, see Müller (2001), 812 listing hypotheses; probably in the summer 407 for Dulaey, M., (transl., not.), *BA* 58B (2014), 234-35 and in 414-415 for Hombert (2000), 595-598).

³¹ Augustine, *In Ps.* 59, 9 (Carthage, uncertain dating perhaps 413 or 414-415 see Müller (2001), 816).

visible on the same forehead on which the cross has been put.³² The cross on the forehead as a marker of belonging is in direct competition with such attitudes that the bishop utterly condemns: in a sermon preached in Carthage in December 403, Augustine deplores that many have attended the gladiators' shows instead of coming to church, contrasting such shows with the Passion and the suffering of martyrs. While carnal men only see cruelty and death in the Passion and the death of martyrs, those who come to church are "spiritual viewers" who should exhort their friends to love God and realise that he is never defeated.³³ Shame is interestingly related to what is experienced by supporters when their champion is defeated, Augustine underlining that Christ, whose sign is put on foreheads, is an undefeatable champion.³⁴ Despite the lack of clear evidence, it is worth hypothesising whether this competition also concretely took place on foreheads: marks on the forehead singling out supporters during games may have been in direct competition with the sign of the cross performed in the church.

Such evidence about Augustine's broader thinking helps us understand better similar calls mentioning the cross on the forehead rebuking catechumens against attending the theatre and against other sinful behaviour. In a sermon preached perhaps before 400 in Bulla Regia, the city is presented as an immoral town where all vices are found. For Augustine, while it is acceptable to have spectacles and other vices in cities like Carthage where there are still many pagans and Jews, Bulla is a Christian town and should be free from such things.³⁵ Theatres would be empty if Christians ceased to attend the theatre to go to church instead.³⁶ Augustine's preaching is centred on the contrast between Christian membership and unfitting habits. Quoting 1 Cor 6, 15 ("*Vos autem estis membra Christi*"), he reminds the audience that

³² Augustine, *In Ps.* 69, 2 (on the feast of a martyr, perhaps Hippo, uncertain dating in an anti-Donatist context probably in the early 400s, see hypotheses in Müller (2001), 817).

³³ Augustine, *S.* 51, 1.2 (dating and location: Hombert (2000), 82 and 102).

³⁴ Augustine, *S.* 51, 1.2. This idea of competition is commonly found in sermons, see for instance Augustine, *S.* 198aug (=Dolbeau 26), 3 (in Carthage) contrasting charioteers with the martyr Cyprian. On the Christian uneasiness with spectacles see Lugaresi, L., (2008), *Il teatro di Dio. Il problema degli spettacoli nel cristianesimo antico (II-IV secolo)* (Brescia).

³⁵ Augustine, *S.* 301A (=Denis 17), 7 (for the dating see chapter 3 p. 107 n. 105).

³⁶ Augustine, *S.* 301A (=Denis 17), 8.

these words were intended for the people (*plebes*), the faithful (*fideles*) and the Christians (*Christiani*): this noteworthy distinction immediately highlights that Augustine had in mind a wider audience including catechumens. Indeed, challenging his hearers against the promotion of prostitution, he stated:

And this is done by Christians (*Christiani*); I'd rather not say, and by the faithful (*fideles*). A catechumen (*catechumenus*), 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.³⁷

Augustine suggests that the status of catechumens, acquired through the sign of the cross, is incompatible with wrong behaviour and should imply a particular commitment. At the same time, he conveys the view shared by his audience that catechumens could expect to be treated with less severity in matters of behaviour.³⁸ The passage shows how Augustine fruitfully exploited the peculiarity of the catechumens' membership in exhortative preaching to reject such assumptions. The sermons previously analysed demonstrate that the requirements set here by the bishop on the basis of the cross on the forehead for catechumens fully correspond to what he emphasises in the case of a broader audience comprising baptised Christians.³⁹ Augustine both highlighted the lack of commitment of catechumens and urged them to be faithful to their membership in the same way as he would address the *fideles*, significantly including them in the *membra Christi* mentioned by Paul.⁴⁰

Augustine at times extends his moral exhortations by emphasising that the external and visible practice of the rite is, or rather should be, the cause of an inner change, particularly

³⁷ Augustine, *S.* 301A (=Denis 17), 8 (Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/6 (1993), 297).

³⁸ Augustine, *Conf.* I, 11.18 similarly deplored that his baptism was postponed, leaving him free to sin, thus implying that catechumens felt less committed. This is also noted in Rebillard (2012a), 66-67 and Rebillard (2012b), 42-43.

³⁹ This despite his reluctance in this sermon (*S.* 301A (=Denis 17), 8) to apply his exhortations to the *fideles*, perhaps because he was preaching in a foreign town.

⁴⁰ A similar interpretation of Paul is found in an uncertainly dated sermon on the love of God, where Christians including catechumens are defined as *membra Christi*: Augustine, *S.* 65A (=Etaix 1), 7 (for recent hypotheses of dating see Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/3 (1991), 206 who suggests 397-398 and Hombert (2000) 437 and n. 8 who prefers 406-407).

exploiting the fact that the rite is performed on the forehead, where individuals display their feelings. The cross is made on the body where it should provide a kind of passage or window to reach the hidden dispositions of each individual and transform them. Again in a homily on John's Gospel – part of a series with an audience including catechumens generally situated in Hippo in the winter of 406-407 – Augustine noted that to bear the cross on the forehead without shame means to have it in the heart.⁴¹ Later, in a sermon preached in Carthage probably during the Pelagian controversy, Augustine explained that there is a great difference between bearing the sign of the cross only on the forehead and bearing it in the heart as well.⁴² Commenting on the reading of Ez. 9, 4 (“*Vade, et da signum in frontibus eorum qui gemunt et mœrent de peccatis populi mei, quae fiunt in medio eorum*”), he applied to his fellow Christians the reference to a mark put on foreheads saving from destruction the worthy citizens of Jerusalem.⁴³ Augustine argued that there are two types of foreheads: the visible forehead and the forehead of conscience (*conscientia*) and of the inner man (*interior homo*), since the emotions of this inner forehead (*interior frons*) are reflected on the visible forehead when one turns pale out of fear or red out of shame.⁴⁴ The bishop also used this double understanding of the forehead against Donatists, particularly in an uncertainly dated sermon preached in Carthage for the *vigilia Cypriani*. Accusing them of pride when claiming to be the legitimate Church of Africa, the bishop stated that they lost the cross in their heart although they think that they are still bearing it on their foreheads.⁴⁵ Indeed, Donatists perhaps practised the same rite with similar interpretations, at least according to a recently published anonymous sermon closely recalling

⁴¹ See Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 3, 2 (on the series see note 2)

⁴² Augustine, *S.* 107, 6.7 (dating and location: Verbraken (1976), 79).

⁴³ Other early Christian writers comment on this passage with reference to the rite, see Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* III, 22 (performed by the *fideles*); Pseudo-Cyprian, *Adversus Iudaeos* II, 22; Chromatius of Aquileia, *Tractatus in Matthaeum* 54, 1; Jerome, *In Hiezechielem* III, ix, 4-6; Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina* VII, 23 (a discussion in Skeb, M., (1997), *Christo vivere: Studien zum literarischen Christusbild des Paulinus von Nola* (Bonn), 91-94); Theodoret of Cyrus, *In psalmos* 59, 6.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *S.* 107, 6.7.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *In Ps.* 85, 14 (dating hypotheses ranging from 401 to 416 see Müller (2001), 820).

Augustine's preaching on the rite.⁴⁶ Catechumens were fully included in such conceptions: the above mentioned quotation of Ezekiel was already discussed in the *Contra Faustum* in the very passage where Augustine describes the first catechesis and provides recommendations about changing one's lifestyle.⁴⁷

2. A powerful rite of protection

Augustine's emphasis on the inward and outward transformation that should be brought by the cross also relates to the fact that it was considered a powerful apotropaic rite. Augustine often mentioned that bearing the cross on the forehead granted protection, particularly as a sign of victory over the devil.⁴⁸ However, he cleverly employed the rite in his moral preaching to argue that only those who accord their inner dispositions to this external rite truly bear it and benefit from its protection.⁴⁹ When commenting on Ps 48, 15 (*"Sicut oves in inferno positae, mors pastor est eis"*), Augustine remarks that those who behave badly as Christians have death, the devil, as their shepherd, while good Christians are turned towards immortality and therefore rightly bear the sign of the cross of Christ on their forehead, since life, Christ, is their shepherd. The rite thus should enact a transformation and a new belonging, which bring Christians to life and heaven after death.⁵⁰ Most explanations of the

⁴⁶ The sermon entitled "De principiis christiani nominis" (AN h Esc 49; *Inc.* "Christiana generositas prima sortis suae fidei") perhaps of a Donatist preacher compares the circumcision to the sign of the cross on the forehead like Augustine, *S.* 160, contrasting the hidden and the open character of the rites (Leroy, F., (1999), 'Les 22 inédits de la catéchèse donatiste de Vienne. Une édition provisoire', *RecAug* 31, 149-234, at 204-206).

⁴⁷ Augustine, *C. Faust.* XIII, 16.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *S.* 342, 1: "Est ergo hoc signum quod in fronte gestamus, signum quo salvi sumus" (*PL* 39 (1845), 1501; no evidence of date or place of preaching); on the devil's defeat with quotation of Gal 6, 14a: *Io. eu. tr.* 36, 4 (perhaps around 414-415 see chapter 3 p. 107 n. 109). This property of the rite is noted in Busch (1938), 413-414; Dölger (1961), 13; van der Meer (1961), 354-355. See parallels in Leo the Great, *Sermo* LV, 5 (linking it to the story in Exodus); Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 121, 8. Heid (2006), 1127-1128 and Bernard, Ph., (2008), *Transitions liturgiques en Gaule carolingienne* (Paris), 162-163 provide further parallels and note archaeological evidence for putting crosses or performing a sign of the cross on the foreheads or bodies of the dead before burial.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* II, 41.62 well summarises the significance of the cross for every Christian action, as part of a reflection on the Passover episode described in Exodus.

⁵⁰ Augustine, *In Ps.* 48, II, 2 (uncertain location and dating, see Müller (2001), 813 and Hombert (2000), 272 n. 13 who favours an early dating without precision).

protective function of the cross revolve around key biblical passages, which Augustine allegorised: he rooted the power of the rite in the history of salvation, as episodes of the Old Testament are understood to prefigure its efficacy. These well-known stories served as a medium to convey essential catechesis on the rite both to the catechumens and to the baptised, by emphasising the protection granted by the rite and at the same time the necessity of a corresponding trust and fitting behaviour.

Allegories of salvation

The main allegorical reading in Augustine is Ex. 12, 22-23, which narrates the Jewish Passover, when the blood of lambs was put on the doorposts as a protection. This interpretation was quite natural since the rite focused on Jesus' Passion, which Augustine commonly understood as a prefiguration of the Passover. Thus, Augustine extended the analogy and stated that the biblical episode prefigured the cross put on the forehead of all Christians. Significantly, Augustine's interpretation was already employed in the *De catechizandis rudibus* to teach newcomers becoming catechumens, making them fully aware of the power associated with the rite that they were about to receive. In the long model speech given to Deogratias for catechumens, when the main episodes of the Old Testament which would announce Christ's coming are summarised, Augustine tells that Ex. 12, 22-23 prefigures the Passion of Christ, and adds: "with the sign (*signo*) of his Passion and cross, you today are to be signed (*signandus*) upon your forehead, as it were upon a doorpost; and so are all Christians signed (*signantur*)".⁵¹ The rite was not simply understood as a reference to the Passion and the cross but was filled with additional meaning as the Christian accomplishment of a Jewish rite, reinforcing its importance. The same equivalence between the story in Exodus and the Christian rite appears in the *Contra Faustum*, in a polemical tone, to demonstrate that many episodes of the Old Testament announce Christ, this time underlining the fact that the people

⁵¹ Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 20, 34 (Christopher, J. P., (transl., not.), *ACW* 2 (1946), 65 adapted).

of God receive the rite to be protected and saved as the Hebrews were.⁵² Augustine came back to the theme quite naturally, as he commented the Passion of Christ according to the Gospel of John. First, around 414-415, in a preached homily commenting on John 11, 55 about the Jewish Passover, Augustine tells his audience that the blood of the lambs in Exodus is the blood of Christ which signs the foreheads of many, although it only protects from the devil those who have received Christ in their heart.⁵³ Similar thoughts are found in a dictated homily from November 419 to be sent to Carthage where the reference to the Passover in John 13, 1 leads Augustine to the same interpretation, without the moral exhortation however – perhaps because it is detached from the audience.⁵⁴ This allegorical interpretation, repeated over almost twenty years in a variety of contexts, whether in a catechesis, a treatise, preached or dictated homilies, shows the significance of the apotropaic power of the rite, which was conferred by the power of the Passion of Christ, Augustine insisting on the necessity of a corresponding commitment.

Other allegories of the rite are less common and are all explained by the fact that a reference in the biblical text commented by Augustine leads him to draw comparisons with contemporary practice. Thus, in a single sermon preached in Carthage or perhaps Camerata and dated after 403, the mention of Rahab in Ps. 86, 3-4 (*“Gloriosa dicta sunt de te, civitas Dei. Memor ero Raab et Babylonis, scientibus me. Etenim alienigenae, et Tyrus, et populus Aethiopum, hi fuerunt ibi”*) brings Augustine to connect the psalm with Joshua 2, 17-21 and 6, 17.22-25 telling the story of Rahab the prostitute who protected three spies of the Hebrews in Jericho and put a red cloth on her window which protected her and her family from being killed when the city was taken.⁵⁵ For Augustine, the red cloth refers to the fact that Rahab actually put the sign

⁵² Augustine, *C. Faust.* XII, 30.

⁵³ Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2 (dating: chapter 3 p. 107 n. 109). The sign of the cross is also most probably in Augustine’s mind in *ibid.* 50, 12 when he tells his audience that Christians possess Christ through a number of rites amongst which a *signum*.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 55, 1 (dating: note 3).

⁵⁵ Augustine, *In Ps.* 86, 6 (see Müller (2001), 820 for dating and location). On the theme of the city of God and this preached *enarratio* see Luras-Rondet (1953), 124-137.

(*signum*) of the blood of Christ on her forehead, offering protection to her and her family. Because Rahab did not belong to the Jewish people, Augustine saw her as a figure of the Church of the Nations: he particularly underlined that Rahab, like other publicans and prostitutes who gain the kingdom of heaven, had faith in God and feared him.⁵⁶ Augustine gave a liturgical and Christian meaning to the episode with particular emphasis on the link between the rite and faith in God to obtain everlasting life after death. He stressed that a core meaning of the rite was to manifest an act of faith, which in turn protected the individual.

Augustine also connected the story narrating the fight between David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17, 38-51) to the rite because the single stone thrown by David hit Goliath on the forehead. It is noteworthy that the biblical passage is only quoted and studied by Augustine probably not more than eight times in all of his preserved texts, amongst which three make the link with the Christian rite and the other texts use Goliath as an example of an individual trusting himself instead of God, either against Donatists or Pelagians.⁵⁷ In Sermon 32 preached in the *basilica Triclinarum* in Carthage in September 403, Augustine commented on Psalm 143, which for him had the title “*Ipsi David ad Goliath*”.⁵⁸ He explained to his audience – composed of both Christians trained in the Scriptures and beginners⁵⁹ – that David’s courage illustrated that he had put all his hope in God and not in himself, while Goliath boasting about his own strength represented the proud.⁶⁰ He was therefore struck on the forehead because he had a proud and barefaced forehead, while David’s forehead displayed the

⁵⁶ Augustine, *In Ps.* 86, 6 (with quotations of Mt 21, 31 and Mt 11, 12).

⁵⁷ Apart from the three sermons here studied, Bonnardière, A.-M. la, (1960), *Biblia Augustiniana*, II. *Livres historiques* (Paris), 72 finds the story commented, without a reference to the rite, in Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* I, 9.10 (Donatists are proud like Goliath); *In Ps.* 33, I, 2 and 10 (killing Goliath is to kill pride; on a Saturday, uncertainly dated see Müller (2001), 812); *S.* 153, 9.11 (relying on one’s own strengths means to be killed like Goliath: against Pelagians, see Verbraken (1976), 90). To this list one should add *C. Iul.* III, 1.4 (Augustine is Goliath, Julian David) and *C. Iul. Imp.* III, 32 (a debate on Goliath’s skin colour), although the topic is brought up by Julian in both cases. For a broader overview of early Christian exegesis of the episode, generally understood as a prefiguration of Christ’s victory over the devil, see Dulaey, M., (2014), ‘L’histoire de David lue par les écrivains des premiers siècles chrétiens. (I) Le roi caché’, *REAug* 60/2, 175-212, at 192-196. As noted *ibid.* 195, Cyprian already referred to the cross on the forehead when commenting the story in *Ad Quirinum* II, 16.

⁵⁸ Augustine, *S.* 32 (dating hypotheses in Verbraken (1976), 61).

⁵⁹ Augustine, *S.* 32, 2 and 6. This may indicate a mixed audience of baptised and catechumens but nothing implies it.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *S.* 32, 7-9.

humility of the cross of Christ.⁶¹ In this precise case, Augustine refers to the practice of signing oneself on the forehead and builds a moral exhortation on the gesture, rebuking his audience against simulating the gesture and exhorting them to bear the sign in the heart as well.⁶² Later, the same theme appears in an explanation of Psalm 143, uncertainly dated and perhaps preached in Carthage, again in connection to the title of the psalm. Augustine underlines that Goliath fell because he did not bear the sign of Christ on his forehead to protect him.⁶³ The last sermon, undated, comments on the story perhaps because it was read that day; explaining that the stone hit Goliath on his forehead because he lacked the sign of grace (*signum gratiae*), Augustine compares Jesus to a new David who hit the devil's forehead.⁶⁴

These interpretations bring further light on Augustine's understanding of the rite: besides the fact that he insists on grace as a common way to highlight how the Old Testament episode is fulfilled in Christian times, he also stresses that the sign gives grace as a protection, which prevents the destruction brought by God against his enemies. Not having the sign is interpreted either simply as a lack of grace and thus protection, or as evidence of a barefaced attitude which leads to condemnation by God, echoing Augustine's thoughts about bald foreheads, as we have seen.

The protection offered by the rite was deeply valued. However, Augustine's audience did not see it as strictly exclusive and entirely depending on one's behaviour as he advocated. In an undated sermon on martyrs, Augustine rebuked Christians (*Christiani* and *fideles*) against resorting to astrologers, diviners, amulets and other magical treatments when in danger of death, and exhorted them instead to put all their trust in the Christian rite. Again employing the theme of new persecutions, Augustine concludes that those who refuse such remedies on

⁶¹ Augustine, *S.* 32, 12.

⁶² Augustine, *S.* 32, 13. A good parallel is provided by *S.* 110A (= Dolbeau 17), 4 probably preached to an audience of baptised Christians and focusing on the need of a corresponding good Christian life when signing oneself (for Hombert (2000), 485-94 it also dates from before 411-412, perhaps around 403-404).

⁶³ Augustine, *In Ps.* 143, 2 (see Müller (2001), 825). This is echoed in Caesarius, *Sermo* 121, 7.

⁶⁴ Augustine, *S.* 335K (= Lambot 21), 5 (no evidence for the date and location, see Verbraken (1976), 171). No discussion about the Old Testament reading in Margoni-Kögler (2010), 170 n. 489 probably because the sermon does not indicate any reading explicitly. However the rare discussion of the episode should at least hint at the possibility that the story had been read.

their deathbed are true martyrs, keeping their forehead clean from amulets, but marked by the cross, ready to meet their protector.⁶⁵ In another sermon on Psalm 50 preached in Carthage on the day of games celebrating the anniversary of the city (13th of August), Augustine deplored that *fideles*, not even *catechumeni*, sign themselves during games when they are afraid, noting that a true commitment to the sign in the heart would have brought them to church instead.⁶⁶ Such thoughts not only relay the distinction assumed in the audience between *catechumeni* and baptised Christians, but also illustrate the adaptability of religious belonging beyond Augustine's strict views. Another homily on the Gospel of John, preached probably shortly before Lent perhaps in 407 as part of the already mentioned series where catechumens feature prominently, Augustine again noted that resorting to these popular remedies meant to put the sign of the devil on the forehead where there was the sign of Christ.⁶⁷ Thus, while his audience seems to have been more accommodating, Augustine insisted on exclusively performing Christian rites as a necessary condition for being Christian and benefitting from God's protection. Augustine's preaching might have been particularly relevant knowing that protective power may have been attributed to cross-shaped signs in magical practices in Africa as attested elsewhere.⁶⁸

Although touching upon the *fideles*, these exhortations also well fit with an audience comprising catechumens, for whom the sign of the cross constituted the main rite of protection. Despite their liminal position and expectations of a lower commitment, catechumens hoped to receive protection from the rite. While it was clearly refused by Augustine, catechumens appealed to their inclusion into the community for protection in the

⁶⁵ Augustine, *S.* 335D (=Lambot 6), 3 (no evidence for the date and location, see Verbraken (1976), 169). For a recent analysis: Rebillard (2012a), 74-75 and Rebillard (2012b), 50.

⁶⁶ Augustine, *In Ps.* 50, 1 (uncertain year, see Müller (2001), 813; perhaps 413 for Hombert (2000) 163 n. 332).

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 7, 7 (dating: see note 2).

⁶⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in epistolam primam ad Corinthios* 12, 7 mentions women putting marks with mud on the foreheads of children for protection against the evil eye and witchcraft, exhorting them to mark their children with the cross instead (see Maxwell, J. L., (2006), *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity. John Chrysostom and his Congregation in Antioch* (Cambridge), 151-152). See as well Heid (2006), 1128-1129 with further references to evidence in the East.

afterlife: indeed, the family of a young man who died as a catechumen expected that he would be granted burial amongst the baptised and perhaps also hoped that he would enjoy protection in the afterlife.⁶⁹ Augustine himself likewise noted the power of the cross. In the *Confessiones* he narrates how, almost dying in Rome, the cross would have protected him from God's enmity, if he were not holding to Manichaean beliefs:

You had not yet forgiven me in Christ for any of them, nor had he by his cross delivered me from the hostile disposition towards you which I had contracted by my sins. How could he deliver me from them if his cross was, as I had believed, a phantom?⁷⁰

The powerful qualities associated with the rite offered a way for catechumens to feel included into the community. Augustine knew that and skilfully employed the rite to set strict requirements in terms of behaviour to all Christians. For Augustine bearing the cross on the forehead was an essential feature of Christian membership and a powerful statement because of the paradoxical emphasis on Jesus' shameful death. The references to pagans and Faustus the Manichee shaming Christians for their attachment to the cross and to Christ crucified and the comparison with the circumcision show that for Augustine it should foster belonging and clearly distinguish Christians from other religious groups. The emphasis on religious diversity and on the necessity of manifesting one's religious belonging without shame particularly well reflects the situation in a city like Carthage. Augustine's insistence on the universal practice of the rite and his exhortations to be proud of the cross and nothing else on the basis of Gal. 6, 14a also show that he again resorted to the liturgy to define his own community and draw lines of separation with Donatists and Pelagians.

As baptism, the sign of the cross durably asserted religious belonging and defined Christians; as baptism, the forehead marked was one and the same, although it could be ruined. Contrary to baptism, however, it was shared by all Christians, enabling Augustine to reach a wider audience and develop an inclusive approach. This foundational rite of the

⁶⁹ Augustine, *S.* 147aug (=Dolbeau 7), 2.

⁷⁰ Augustine, *Conf.* V, 9.16 (Chadwick (1991), 82).

catechumenate, repeated all over the course of one's life, was a powerful tool to set rules of behaviour pertaining to all Christians and renew the commitment of the whole community. Augustine underlines that those undergoing the rite would feel protected from the devil, cut off from paganism, becoming part of the chosen ones, the Christians, to be spared at the time of God's judgement. Sermons show that his audience was more accommodating and believed in the enduring efficacy of the rite while resorting to complementary popular remedies. Catechumens in particular may have had a flexible understanding of their membership, hoping to benefit from the cross as a protection however without fully committing to Christianity as the baptised Christians. Ritual power, however, was employed by Augustine as another way to create a united community: he argued that the *raison d'être* of the sign of the cross and its efficacy were entirely related to a corresponding commitment to rules of behaviour applying to catechumens as much as to baptised Christians.

II. Rules for becoming Christian: the polemical treatise *De fide et operibus*

Augustine's effort to include catechumens in his broader preaching on moral duties and his recourse to the catechumenate as a tool to set standards for being Christian can be more fully demonstrated through the analysis of the *De fide et operibus*. In this treatise, Augustine similarly argues for the necessity of the moral instruction of catechumens and candidates to baptism, defining strict rules of behaviour. The *De fide et operibus* is understudied: most scholars have focused on its exegesis of 1 Cor. 3, 11-15 and on rare references to the rites of the catechumenate and to types of penance.⁷¹ I shall highlight, however, that the work is a particularly important polemical synthesis showing that catechumens played a major role

⁷¹ See Galtier, P., (1934), 'A propos de la pénitence primitive. Méthodes et conclusions', *RHE* 30, 517-557 and 797-846, esp. 548-553 and 817-823; Pegon, J., (transl., not.), *BA* 8 (1951), 503-508; Ntedika, J., (1966), *L'évolution de la doctrine du purgatoire chez saint Augustin* (Paris), 56-58 (the debate on 1 Cor. 3, 11-15 in *F. et op.* as a precursory discussion on the purgatory); Bonnardière, A.-M. la, (1967), 'Pénitence et réconciliation des Pénitents d'après saint Augustin – II', *REAug* 13, 249-283; Harmless (2014), 292-298; Meßner, R., (2014), 'Paenitentia', *AL* 4, fasc. 3/4, 413-446 at 429-430 and 436-439. See more broadly the summaries of Clancy, F. G., (1999), 'Fide et operibus, De', in Fitzgerald (1999a), 359-360 and Drecoll, V. H., (2002), 'Fide et operibus (De-)', *AL* 2, fasc. 7/8, 1305-1311.

in the definition of Christian membership and in community dynamics at a period of conflicting views and practices.

Augustine presents his treatise as a refutation against unnamed opponents (“*quibusdam videtur*”)⁷² who argue that catechumens should only be taught Christian faith before baptism, while teaching on behaviour may follow baptism. He emphasises that they admit everyone to baptism, particularly accepting individuals in adulterous relationships without requiring a change of behaviour.⁷³ His opponents also suggest that the baptised Christians, even without conforming to the Christian way of life, are saved through fire, as is clear from 1 Cor. 3, 11-15.⁷⁴ Therefore, Augustine wrote to demonstrate that the mixture of the good and wicked in the Church must indeed be tolerated until the end but that it should not lead Christian communities to dismiss discipline before baptism: converts should be taught on both faith and Christian morality, excluding from baptism those who do not agree to change their way of life. Finally, Augustine argued that everlasting life might only be attained when faith goes together with good works.⁷⁵ At the end of his life, Augustine provided more clues on the context of composition and the main issues at stake: he noted that he received from lay brothers well trained in the Scriptures a number of writings arguing that only faith was needed to attain eternal life. For Augustine the treatise was written to demonstrate how baptised Christians should live and who should be admitted to baptism.⁷⁶ Thus, he saw the work as a discussion of the relationship between baptism and moral duties.

The *De fide et operibus* is traditionally dated around 413, particularly because it mentions the *De spiritu et littera* written some time before, probably in 412, and follows it in the

⁷² Augustine, *F. et op.* 1, 1.

⁷³ Augustine, *F. et op.* 1, 1 – 1, 2.

⁷⁴ Augustine, *F. et op.* 1, 1 and 15, 24.

⁷⁵ His position is well summarised in Augustine, *F. et op.* 27, 49.

⁷⁶ Augustine, *Retr.* II, 38: “Interea missa sunt mihi a quibusdam fratribus laicis quidem sed divinorum eloquiorum studiosis scripta nonnulla, quae ita distinguerent a bonis operibus christianam fidem, ut sine hac non posse, sine illis autem posse perveniri suaderetur ad aeternam vitam. Quibus respondens librum scripsi cuius nomen est *De fide et operibus*. In quo disputavi non solum quemadmodum vivere debeant gratia Christi regenerati, verum etiam quales ad lavacrum regenerationis admitti” (Mutzenbecher, A., (ed.), *CCSL* 57 (1984), 121).

Retractationes.⁷⁷ At that time, Augustine had recently finished his *Breviculus conlationis*, a summary of the Conference of Carthage against the Donatists, and his *Ad Donatistas post conlationem*, both sanctioning the triumph of his party; Caelestius, the disciple of Pelagius, and his ideas already reached Africa and were first condemned in the same year.⁷⁸ Augustine had just begun his long series of polemical works directed against such ideas: he had finished his first anti-Pelagian polemic on baptism and forgiveness of sin *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum* (winter 411-412), and the *De spiritu et littera*, focusing on the differences between the Old and New Testament laws which he recalls in the *Retractationes* as a strong statement against the “enemies of divine grace”.⁷⁹ In 413, he then started writing the *De natura et gratia* (413-415)⁸⁰ and the *De civitate Dei* (413-426).⁸¹ This lively context, particularly affected by the beginning of the Pelagian controversy, not only shows, as it has been underlined, that the busy bishop was so highly concerned with the issues explored in the *De Fide et Operibus* that he took the time to write the book.⁸² More significantly, it makes patent that the views which he felt the need to refute were brought to him at a turning point for churches in Africa.

Augustine’s refutation however is not written specifically against the major opponents that he was facing at the time, the Donatists and the Pelagians: scholars have therefore

⁷⁷ Augustine, *F. et op.* 14, 21; *Retr.* II, 37-38. In *F. et op.* 14, 21, some manuscripts read: “quia modo ex hac quaestione prolixum librum edidi” referring to *Spir. et Litt.*; *modo* is rejected by Zycha, J., (ed.), *CSEL* 41 (1900), 62. Despite the uncertainty of this reading, *Retr.* corroborates this sequence: it refers to the reception of the writings refuted in *F. et op.* as happening in connection to the composition of *Spir. et litt.* (*Retr.* II, 38: “interea”). Thus, *F. et op.* was written not too long after *Spir. et litt.*; scholars date *Spir. et litt.* to 412 and therefore suggest a dating in 413: Liguori, M., (transl., not.), *FOC* 27 (1955), 218-219; Lombardo, G. J., *ACW* 48 (1988), 1; Fiedrowicz, M., (not.), *WSA* I/8 (2005), 221 n. 2. On *Spir. et litt.* see Marafioti, D., (1983), *L’uomo tra legge e grazia. Analisi teologica del De Spiritu et littera di S. Agostino* (Brescia), 46-47 dating it to the middle of 412, after *Ep.* 140. I relate the composition of *F. et op.* to Augustine’s travels to Carthage from late 412 to summer 413 in section 4 below. Drecoll (2002), 1309 has proposed to date *Spir. et litt.* after *F. et op.* in 413, relating *F. et op.* to Augustine’s stances on baptism in *Pecc. mer.* and *S.* 294 (summer 413), while *Spir. et litt.* would have moved away from baptism as the main concern. However, this goes against the order of works in *Retr.* II, 37-38.

⁷⁸ In general see Lancel (1999), 461-463. On the Conference of Carthage with edition and translation of the acts, see Lancel, (ed., transl., not.), *SC* 194 (1972), 195 (1972), 224 (1975), 373 (1991). On these works after the Conference see: Lancel, S., (1992), ‘Breviculus conlationis cum Donatistis’, *AL* 1, fasc. 5/6, 681-684; *Id.* (1994), ‘Conlatio Carthaginiensis’, *AL* 1, fasc. 7/8, 1204-1209; and more generally: *Id.*, (1999), ‘Donatistae I’, *AL* 2, fasc. 3/4, 606-622; Tilley, M., (1999b), ‘Anti-Donatist works’, in Fitzgerald (1999a), 34-39.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Retr.* II, 37. See Lancel (1999), 464-467. On *Pecc. mer.* Delaroche, B., (transl., not.), *BA* 20/A (2013), 7-57 and 419-559.

⁸⁰ Lancel (1999), 469-472; Löhr, W., (2012), ‘Natura et gratia (De –)’, *AL* 4, fasc. 1/2, 188-190.

⁸¹ Lancel (1999), 553-555.

⁸² Thus Fiedrowicz, M., (not.), *WSA* I/8 (2005), 221.

struggled to identify the context behind the polemic. Hypotheses that Augustine wrote the treatise against Jerome or that he attempted to impose a new dogma on salvation against the tolerant interpretation of 1 Cor. 3, 11-15 adopted by all the other Latin Fathers have been abandoned.⁸³ Scholars often assume, adopting Augustine's presentation of the controversy, that the treatise was written in reaction against the recent resurgence of a "merciful" wing amongst Catholics who questioned Church discipline. In a specific community, clerics would have decided to admit to baptism divorced men and women who stayed in relationships which were normally understood as adulterous, then extending this more tolerant attitude toward all candidates, accepting everyone to baptism without inquiring on their morality. This new practice would have been then promoted in writings which would have eventually reached Augustine in some form.⁸⁴

However, a careful analysis of the treatise shows that Augustine precisely aimed at characterising his opponents as a marginal group and his own position as traditional. His explanation of the origins of the controversy does not furnish direct evidence for the real context and the opponents behind the polemic. Moreover, it is too restrictive to see Catholics divided between a "merciful" attitude and a more traditionalist and strict wing, to which Augustine would belong. Ferguson and Drecoll have rightly noted that in the context of the Pelagian controversy Augustine may have written the *De fide et operibus* to nuance his stances on infant baptism, thus arguing for the necessity of individual commitment in the case of adults.⁸⁵ Augustine's treatise has to be set in a wider context of debates and interactions over unsettled issues. Building on these insights, in this study I more broadly demonstrate that Augustine neither refuted a local practice nor took a stand in the context of two competing

⁸³ J. Garnier formulated the hypothesis about Jerome, which was refuted by the Maurists see *PL* 40 (1841), 195-198. On the other hand Turmel, J., *Histoire des Dogmes* IV (Paris, 1935), 288-292 argued for the imposition of a new dogma: this limited perspective on the treatise, which in fact focuses on Church discipline rather than dogma, has been well criticised by Gaudel, A., (not.), *BA* 9 (1947), 388-391 and Pegon, J., (transl., not.), *BA* 8 (1951), 346-348.

⁸⁴ Thus Gaudel, A., (not.), *BA* 9 (1947), 388-389; Pegon, J., (transl., not.), *BA* 8 (1951), 345 and 508; Fiedrowicz, M., (not.), *WSA* I/8 (2005), 221-222 and 225: "what he was doing was recalling the traditional teaching of the Church".

⁸⁵ Ferguson (2001), 263; Drecoll (2002), 1309 particularly contrasting *F. et op.* with *Pecc. mer.* and S. 294.

views of Christianity but aimed at providing an authoritative synthesis enforcing pre-baptismal discipline to bring cohesion to the Catholic party in a troubled context. Focusing on the polemic on the catechumenate, covering the paragraphs 1.1 to 14.23, 17.31-21.38 and 27.49,⁸⁶ I first explore how, through a detailed exegesis of key passages, Augustine rejected alternative views circulating in writing as marginal and new, and put forward his own position, that he presented as in continuity with the practices of the earliest Christian communities. I then underline how, by proposing a number of rules of admission both for catechumens and for *competentes* preparing for baptism, he offered a synthetic presentation of his views on catechumens as an essential group for the definition of community boundaries. Finally, I test the hypothesis that the treatise constitutes the outcome of a long-lasting and little-noticed emphasis on the inclusion of catechumens in moral teaching, often when preaching in the city of Carthage, as shown in the first part of this chapter. I particularly demonstrate that specific references to the themes discussed in the treatise appear in a number of sermons, at different occasions, both perhaps several years before and at the time of composition of the treatise. In the aftermath of the fall of Rome, the recent defeat of the Donatists and the development of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine wrote a polemical refutation on an aspect that had deeply concerned him for many years. I suggest that the bishop composed the treatise in connection to his travels to Carthage: at a time when it became essential to define the position of Catholics in the seat of African primacy, Augustine seized the opportunity to propose normative rules of admission and implement the teaching of morals before baptism.

⁸⁶ A tripartite structure can be identified in the work: chapters 1, 1 to 6, 8 would deal with the links between faith and works, chapters 6, 9 to 13, 20 refuting the idea that only faith should be taught before baptism, and 14, 21 to 26, 48 rejecting the salvation of baptised sinners through fire (as noted for instance by Liguori, M., (transl., not.), *FOC* 27 (1955), 216; Clancy (1999)). However, Pegon, J., (transl., not.), *BA* 8 (1951), 348 and Fiedrowicz, M., (not.), *WSA* I/8 (2005), 224 recognise that the section 17, 31 to 21, 38 is more heterogeneous and specifically oriented towards the pastoral issues of the catechumenate.

1. Competing views on pre-baptismal discipline: marginalising opponents

In his presentation of the controversy, from the very beginning of the treatise, Augustine strives to demonstrate the marginality of his opponents' authority and the novelty of their ideas to oppose their claims of universality. For Augustine, his adversaries enforced neither prohibitions nor pre-baptismal instructions on morals because of excessive tolerance resulting from human pity and from the desire to baptise everyone.⁸⁷ He particularly reacts against the custom of admitting adulterous individuals, anyone in a relationship outside marriage, especially men and women who left their partner for someone else, since he considers remarriage after divorce as a form of adultery.⁸⁸ The practice of his opponents would have originated from some communities which started admitting adulterous individuals to baptism; after some time, because of especially bad Christians, the custom would have developed and been extended to all candidates, who were not instructed nor examined on habits anymore. Augustine takes the fact that Cyprian's *De lapsis* does not mention such practices as evidence for the recent introduction of bad teaching (*mala doctrina*).⁸⁹

This explanation of the origins of the controversy cannot be simply acknowledged: it is clear that the polemical tone of Augustine's refutation precisely aimed at reducing the claims of his opponents to a localised divergence. In fact, the same attempt was made by his opponents in their writings: Augustine replies to accusations of novelty precisely to demonstrate that the need of repentance and the prohibitions that he recommends are not new but an old custom of the Church.⁹⁰ This further suggests that the debate did not involve a

⁸⁷ Augustine, *F. et op.* 1, 1-2.

⁸⁸ Cf. Augustine, *F. et op.* 1, 1-2 ; 6, 8 ; 7, 10 ; 17, 32 (etc.). See more generally: Crouzel, H., (1999), 'Diuortium', *AL* 2, fasc. 3/4, 532-534; As noted by Bonnardière, A.-M. la, (1986b), 'Adulterium', *AL* 1, fasc. 1/2, 125-137 at 127-129 adultery was discussed almost in every polemical work of Augustine.

⁸⁹ Augustine, *F. et op.* 19, 33.

⁹⁰ Augustine, *F. et op.* 18, 33: "Illud sane mirabile est, quod fratres, qui aliter sapiunt, cum debeant ab ista vel nova vel vetere, perniciose tamen opinione discedere, ipsi insuper dicunt novam esse doctrinam [...] quasi nescio ubi peregrinentur, quando meretrices et histriones et quilibet alii publicae turpitudinis professores, nisi solutis aut disruptis talibus vinculis ad christiana sacramenta non permittuntur accedere, qui utique secundum istorum sententiam omnes admitterentur, nisi antiquum et robustum morem sancta Ecclesia retineret [...]" (Zycha, J., (ed.), *CSEL* 41 (1900), 78).

united Church on one side, to which Augustine would belong, and a marginal group on the other, but rather diverging views on a series of unsettled issues that were debated over time. Augustine also anticipates and rejects the accusation of being too strict, explaining that candidates who do not change behaviour exclude themselves already.⁹¹ Exclusion is justified throughout the work, in line with Augustine's earlier thought,⁹² not on the basis of wrong conversion motives or because of the habits of individuals but more precisely and repeatedly on grounds that people openly declared their sins without wanting to repent and change.⁹³ While marginalising his opponents, Augustine therefore also aims at presenting his own position as the most balanced, both strict enough to require a change of behaviour for admitting new candidates, and still tolerant, recommending to keep sinners who fail to perfect their way of life within the Church.⁹⁴

To express the contrast between his teaching and that of his opponents, Augustine employs the image of the good and the bad nets, inspired by the parable of the net (Mt 13, 47-52):

These [the teaching rejected] are the bad nets which fishermen ought especially guard against, if in that parable fishers are to be understood as bishops or superiors of a lower order in the Church [...] With good nets can be caught fish good and bad: with bad nets, however, good fish cannot be caught, since from good teaching (*doctrina*) one can be good [...] and another can be bad [...] but from bad doctrine (*doctrina*) he who thinks that the teaching is true although he does not submit to it is bad and he who submits is worse.⁹⁵

Thus, Augustine writes for clerics to provide a standard *doctrina* to be employed in the catching of fishes, i.e. the catechumens and candidates for baptism. He presents himself as an expert defending a common cause, pointing to clerics affected by the debate and defending them from the accusation of negligence and laziness that apparently was proffered against

⁹¹ For instance Augustine, *F. et op.* 17, 31.

⁹² See more below in section 3.

⁹³ Cf. Augustine, *F. et op.* 1, 1 : 6, 8 ; 16, 30 ; 17, 31 ; 17, 32 ; 18, 33 ; 25, 47.

⁹⁴ Augustine, *F. et op.* 17, 31.

⁹⁵ Augustine, *F. et op.* 17, 32 (Liguori, M., (transl., not.), *FOC* 27 (1955), 261-263).

them.⁹⁶ It is worth reflecting on the possibility that such accusations were brought by former Donatists recently rallied to the Catholic Church against Catholic clerics. Indeed, Augustine presents his position as the perfect compromise between Donatist severity – wholly rejecting sinners from the Church – and the lax practices of his specific opponents, who would accuse him of being too strict.⁹⁷ Against the Donatists, Augustine also employs the same recurrent argument: they are too strict because they repeat the catechumenate for Catholic Christians denying the validity of their previous initiation. Therefore, the Donatist controversy lies in the background of Augustine’s mind, while the opponents rebuked would belong to the opposite trend. It is plausible that the bishop aimed at finding a compromise to reconcile divergent views in the aftermath of the defeat of Donatists in 411. In the last words of the work, Augustine explained that he would not come back to issues that he considered now solved. Augustine implied that his treatise had addressed complex problems affecting clerics, providing the tools for others to carry on implementing and defending the standards that he had set.⁹⁸ Far from providing evidence of a consensus and accepted procedure of admission of candidates to baptism, Augustine’s attempt to define a “middle position” for clerics demonstrates that views and practices diverged.⁹⁹ It is particularly unfortunate that only Augustine’s treatise is preserved, since it appears quite distinctly that he proposed his own model in a wider ongoing debate on the catechumenate.

⁹⁶ Augustine, *F. et op.* 27, 49.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *F. et op.* 4, 5-5, 7.

⁹⁸ When asked about matters of faith and works, at least three times in the following ten years, Augustine systematically referred to his treatise as a reference. However, in these later works he never came back to the catechumenate but focused only on the possibility for persistent sinners of achieving salvation through fire in the last Judgment (Augustine, *Ench.* 18, 67; *Dulc. qu.* 1, 2; perhaps also referring to the treatise in *Ep.* 205, 4.18; see Fiedrowicz, M., (not.), *WSA* I/8 (2005), 224).

⁹⁹ Augustine, *F. et op.* 27, 49.

2. Developing authority and setting rules

Augustine, like his adversaries, did not simply dictate rules on the basis of his own authority. In fact, Augustine's treatise shows that the controversy developed around key biblical quotations that were most probably discussed in detail in a number of lost writings to develop standard and universal views that would gain authority. Augustine's position is defined within this context of competing exegeses, answering difficulties by confronting passages with each other, and thus refuting what is seen as conflicting interpretations. The difficulty of Augustine's demonstration lies in the fact that the biblical passages employed to show the necessity of pre-baptismal discipline are short, allusive and incomplete about ritual practices: his adversaries therefore emphasised this lack of evidence, particularly employing Paul's letters and the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁰⁰ Augustine holds that his adversaries have misunderstood the passages used to accept everyone to baptism, because they have read them in isolation and too literally without seeing the broader picture, which he consequently aims at restoring. Various cases of such misleading interpretations are evoked to set his opponents in a wider context of exegetical lack of expertise.¹⁰¹ Significantly, both Augustine and his adversaries leave no room for historical distance and change of practices since Apostolic times: they share the assumption that texts from the New testament should reflect practices of the fifth-century catechumenate, each side trying to demonstrate that this original catechumenate survives in their own community. Augustine notes that his opponents read the letters of the Apostles dictating rules of behaviour as pertaining to an audience of baptised Christians, while those focusing on faith would address candidates to baptism.¹⁰² Augustine instead wants to demonstrate the inclusive character of the New Testament, in line with his views in sermons: the Apostolic letters were written both for the baptised Christians and for

¹⁰⁰ See Augustine, *F. et op.* 7, 11 – 13, 21. The discussion of the exegesis of each passage is beyond the remits of this synthetic presentation: see a summary in Lombardo, G. J., *ACW* 48 (1988), 3-4. A further study systematically comparing Augustine's exegeses with those of his opponents would be a fruitful endeavour.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Augustine, *F. et op.* 4, 5.

¹⁰² Augustine, *F. et op.* 7, 11.

the catechumens and required both faith and works from them, while the lack of clear descriptions about the rites of initiation should not imply that that they were not performed.¹⁰³ Moreover, passages that announced the mixed character of good and bad in the Church should not be used to diminish the strict observation of rules and discipline.¹⁰⁴

Exegesis was not the only technique employed by Augustine to gain authority and convince his audience. Indeed, as he had done repeatedly to refute opponents in other controversies, in the *De fide et operibus* the bishop again resorts to the performance of initiation practices to buttress his theological stances. Augustine remarks that the conceptions of his opponents are incompatible with his own understanding and experience of the catechumenate.¹⁰⁵ He compares performing the catechumenate without instruction on morals to emergency baptism, which is then contrasted with what Augustine sees as the routine practice: an individual asks for baptism and then is ready to undergo a period of intense preparation. For the bishop, this time of preparation is particularly meant to provide teaching on morals, since baptism should achieve a transformation of the self. Augustine particularly relates this practice to his own experience as a candidate for baptism, as seen in Chapter Two, resorting to it as evidence for the need of intense catechesis and ritual initiation. What Augustine expects is initiative, both from the Church and from the candidates: the experience he recalls tells of a community effort, a shared experience.¹⁰⁶ In this apologia for the catechumenate, Augustine also recalls more broadly the whole period during which candidates are *catechumeni*, identified as a *tempus* appointed by the Church during which they hear about faith and the right way of life to prepare for the Eucharist, receiving regular instruction.¹⁰⁷ Augustine clearly promotes the inclusion of the *catechumeni* in the process of moral instruction

¹⁰³ Augustine, *F. et op.* 9, 14.

¹⁰⁴ See Augustine, *F. et op.* 2, 3 to 4, 5.

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9 employs the plural: “An usque adeo dissimulamus a sensibus nostris, ut vel nos ipsos non recordemur, quam fuerimus attentis atque sollicitis, quid nobis praeciperent, a quibus catechizabamur, cum fontis illius sacramenta peteremus atque ab hoc competentes etiam vocaremur?” (Zycha, J., (ed.), *CSEL* 41 (1900), 44).

¹⁰⁷ Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9 (see chapter 3).

before baptism. The practices of the catechumenate appeared as a central stake of ongoing controversies not only because the integration of new members into the Christian community was fundamental for its self-definition, but also because Augustine thought that arguing from practice would provide the strongest basis to impose his views. Claiming that the progressive ritual integration of catechumens before baptism was perfectly in line with his interpretation of Scripture was essential. Only then could the catechumenate become a living demonstration of the close relationship between faith and works.

On the basis of his exegetical interpretations and the recourse to his experience of the catechumenate, Augustine proposed a series of rules of admission to be enforced in Christian communities. He more specifically insisted on prohibitions, instruction on morals and penance as the three essential components of pre-baptismal discipline. The treatise lists prohibitions but only contains scattered allusions to the concrete organisation of teaching and penitential practices.¹⁰⁸ Prostitutes, actors, gladiators, dancers and broadly all entertainment-related professions are banned, but also any individual manifestly leading a sinful life: only a change of profession and a statement demonstrating the wish to amend one's conduct should grant access to baptism.¹⁰⁹ Individuals in adulterous relationships, which are, according to Augustine, the main reason why his opponents started admitting everyone, also have to be refused admission, as they commit one of the three deadly sins (impurity, idolatry, murder). They may only be admitted after penance.¹¹⁰ Augustine however seems to have doubts about the cases of repudiated concubines and husbands who repudiated adulterous wives and have remarried. Since the Bible does not provide clear answers, he advocates that baptism should

¹⁰⁸ Concerning the *correptiones* mentioned in Augustine, *F. et op.* 26, 48, it has been shown, against earlier hypotheses (Galtier (1934), 548-553, already questioned by Pegon, J., (transl., not.), *BA* 8 (1951), 505-507), that Augustine does not refer to institutionalised private penance, but to brotherly correction: see La Bonnardière (1967), 279-281 and Meßner (2014), 438-439. See as well more generally: Fitzgerald, A. D. (1999b), 'Penance', in Fitzgerald (1999a), 640-646.

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, *F. et op.* 18, 33. On the ban for prostitutes see also 15, 24 and 21, 37. For dancers: 27, 49.

¹¹⁰ Augustine, *F. et op.* 18, 33-19.35; the rule is reiterated in *Adult. coniug.* I, 28.35 except for emergency baptism.

be granted.¹¹¹ As already suggested in Chapter Three and as further demonstrated below, an analysis of the treatise and other references in Augustine imply that, despite an emphasis on baptism and the baptismal preparation, these rules were to be enforced from the very beginning of the catechumenate.

It cannot be assumed that Augustine's opponents were completely lax and had no rules of admission pertaining to behaviour. While criticising them for admitting individuals accused of adultery, Augustine explains that they do not admit married couples who do not follow restrictions on sexual intercourse during the baptismal preparation.¹¹² It is clear that such rules were in the making and that many aspects still raised doubts, even for Augustine himself.¹¹³ Thus, Augustine's rules were dictated against opponents mainly with the objective to offer an authoritative synthesis that would settle issues on the matter. It is worth noting that Augustine's rules may have served as a complement to canon legislation: at the council of Carthage in 401, prohibitions already affected the performance of shows on Sunday and the baptism of charioteers.¹¹⁴ Moreover, rules for marriage and divorce were being redefined in canon law and more broadly in society during the period.¹¹⁵ Further study would be needed in particular to better ascertain the links between such changes, canon law, and Augustine's treatise.

¹¹¹ Augustine, *F. et op.* 19, 35. See the commentary in Pegon, J., (transl., not.), *BA* 8 (1951), 508.

¹¹² Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 8.

¹¹³ Augustine also changed his mind later: in *Adult. coniug.* II, 16.16 (dated to 419/420 see Bonnardière, A.-M. la, (1986a), 'Adulterinis coniugiis (De -)', *AL* 1, fasc. 1/2, 116-125 at 117), Augustine forbids to admit to baptism husbands who are *catechumeni* and have repudiated their adulterous wives to seek another marriage. More generally for Augustine's evolving thought about marriage: Hunter, D., (1999), 'Marriage', in Fitzgerald (1999a), 535-537; Geest, P. J. J. van, (2012), 'Nuptiae', *AL* 4, fasc. 1/2, 243-261.

¹¹⁴ *Registri ecclesiae Carthagenensis excerpta*, council held at Carthage on 16/6/401, canons 61 and 63 (Munier, Ch., (ed.), *CCSL* 149 (1974), 197-198).

¹¹⁵ For a recent overview: Bof, R., and Leyser, C., (2016), 'Divorce and remarriage between late antiquity and the early middle ages: canon law and conflict resolution', in Cooper, K., and Leyser, C., (eds.), (2016), *Making Early Medieval Societies* (Cambridge), 155-180; see at 164-165 a discussion of a canon on divorce and remarriage at the council of Carthage in 407. There is no reference to rules about baptism in this canon however.

3. Enforcing discipline for *catechumeni*? A case for continuity

The debate sheds light on the fact that Augustine viewed the catechumenate as an occasion to test and teach recruits on morals. As we have seen in Chapter Three and in the first part of this chapter, the discipline recommended here exactly corresponds to what Augustine had practiced and taught in the previous decade. I argue therefore that Augustine did not write the *De fide et operibus* to reply to a specific challenge by a marginal group, but instead to provide a more detailed synthesis on a topic that concerned him for years. This demonstrates that there was a variety of ways of understanding and organising the catechumenate and that Augustine tried to enforce his own views to promote a uniform practice.

It should be noted that Augustine's recommendations most visibly relate to the preparation for baptism, with repeated references to the learning of the creed and the *catechismi* received by the *competentes* which should include exhortations to change their manner of living, and more generally to the need to enquire on habits when candidates ask for baptism.¹¹⁶ Moreover, in Sermons 351 and 352, uncertainly dated, Augustine clearly refers to the pre-baptismal penance for *competentes*.¹¹⁷ At first, therefore, it may seem that the whole debate of

¹¹⁶ Augustine, *F. et op.* 18, 33 – 19, 34; also 9, 14 (on the eunuch); 20, 36 and 27, 49 referring to the preparation for baptism. The term *catechismus* is never employed in the entire *corpus* of Augustine except in this treatise and is applied here only to *competentes* (this is shown thanks to the database *Library of Latin Texts A*, <http://www.brepolis.net>, consulted 21/7/2016).

¹¹⁷ See Augustine, *S.* 351, 2.2 and *S.* 352, 1.2 mentioning three types of penance (pre-baptismal, daily and exceptional penance for grave sins leading to the status of penitent). *S.* 351 is uncertainly dated; the parallels evoked by Hombert (2000), 463 n. 21 with *In Ps.* 39, 20 to date *S.* 351 to 413 are weakened because the dating of *In Ps.* 39 is uncertain and 407 has now been put forward (see note 145). The authenticity of *S.* 351 has sometimes been doubted but is generally accepted see Verbraken (1976), 147. *S.* 352 was clearly preached during Lent and addressed *competentes* amongst others (*S.* 352, 1.1, 1.6); Dolbeau (2009), 274-275, suggests that it was at the beginning of Lent in February/March 404, arguing on the basis of the order of sermons in the Lorsch/Mainz collection and parallels with other sermons, in particular *De utilitate ieiunii* (preached the preceding day) and *S.* 159B (= Dolbeau 21). For Dolbeau the sermon was preached during a trip returning to Hippo. It is close to a set of sermons on Psalms (*In Ps.* 147, 103, 102, 66, 146) probably preached in Carthage in winter 403 (see note 140). For an analysis of *S.* 352 see Mühlenberg, E., (2002), 'Wenn Augustin die Bibel unvorbereitet auslegt. Augustins Sermo 352', in Bultmann, Ch., Dietrich, W. and Levin, Ch. (eds.), (2002), *Vergegenwärtigung des Alten Testaments. Beiträge zur biblischen Hermeneutik* (Göttingen), 196-210. Parallels on the theme of penance with *S.* 352A (=Dolbeau 14), have brought Mühlenberg (2002), 209 to date *S.* 352 to the same period. *S.* 352A was first dated to 397 by Dolbeau but then Hombert argued for 413, see more later in this chapter.

the *De fide et operibus* focused on pre-baptismal discipline for *competentes*. Nevertheless, the lack of references to penance for *catechumeni* in the sermons evoked should not lead us to conclude there was no penance for them, since these were pronounced during Lent for the *competentes*. More significantly, despite the visibility of the *competentes*, the *De fide et operibus* also makes clear that Augustine was particularly concerned with the necessity to include catechumens in the teaching of church discipline since the very beginning of the catechumenate. Beyond the already mentioned passage in which Augustine refers to the *tempus* spent by *catechumeni* to prepare for the Eucharist as proof for the necessity of instruction on morals,¹¹⁸ two striking examples well highlight that Augustine clearly included *catechumeni* in the debate. First, concerning the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, 35-38, in which no pre-baptismal penance is mentioned, Augustine argues that the brevity of the account should not provide evidence against pre-baptismal discipline, which should be taught since the time of the evangelisation of new converts entering the catechumenate.¹¹⁹ Second, Augustine imagines a pagan priest who would ask for baptism, state to believe in Christ and continue to practise sacrifices to idols and asks whether his opponents would agree to baptise him, or even “make him a catechumen”, to conclude that they would obviously not. Augustine argues that there is no difference between idolatry and fornication and that both should be banned.¹²⁰ Thus, Augustine also intended his rules to pertain to the *catechumeni*.

Augustine’s position in the *De fide et operibus* is in remarkable continuity with what he had been recommending in treatises dealing with catechumens. The requirement to teach catechumens about behaviour at the admission process directly recalls the rules that Augustine had sketched in the *De catechizandis rudibus* sent to Carthage, while the debate about the pagan convert shows parallels with his refutation of Faustus’ first catechesis and the enforcement of

¹¹⁸ Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9.

¹¹⁹ Augustine, *F. et op.* 9, 14.

¹²⁰ Augustine, *F. et op.* 12, 18.

moral teaching in the *Contra Faustum*.¹²¹ Moreover, the example of the pagan, intended to show the contradiction of his opponents' conceptions of the catechumenate, also offers a glimpse into Augustine's understanding of the relation between candidates, initiation and habits. Wrong habits, here idolatry, are so deeply rooted in individuals, often since early youth, that they need long penance to be eradicated. One cannot fail to recognise Augustine's own presentation of his difficult journey towards conversion, both slowly rejecting his past as a Manichaean and building on the Christian roots of his youth. The bishop saw the catechumenate not merely as a time to adhere to the beliefs of Christianity but as an essential time to transform oneself.

Beyond treatises, it has been shown in the first part of this chapter that Augustine devoted attention to the moral teaching of *catechumeni*, particularly in his sermons on the rite of the cross on the forehead. The bishop regularly aimed at creating an exclusive identity, rejecting both the possibility of performing alternative rituals and of being protected through the Christian rites without a commitment to rules of behaviour. Some sermons even more directly relate to specific aspects of the controversy in the *De fide et operibus*. Thus, in a sermon preached in Carthage perhaps at the end of 403,¹²² Augustine rejects, like in the *De fide et operibus*, the opinion of some Christians who lead bad lives but believe, on the basis of their interpretation of 1 Cor 3, 10-15, that they will be purified through fire and saved from eternal hell because they have the sign (*signum*), and rites (*sacramenta*) of Christ – baptism is mentioned as well specifically.¹²³ Augustine asserts that only works accompanying faith can bring them to the kingdom of heaven and explains that venial sins can be forgiven but not major sins.¹²⁴ There is no evidence to suggest that this sermon was preached at the time of the *De fide et operibus*: thus, the treatise dealt with a recurrent controversy. A similar debate is found in

¹²¹ See chapter 3 part I.

¹²² Augustine, *In Ps.* 80 (see Hombert (2000), 563-88, esp. 578-79 and other hypotheses in Müller (2001), 828).

¹²³ Augustine, *In Ps.* 80, 20.

¹²⁴ Augustine, *In Ps.* 80, 21.

another sermon preached in the *basilica maiorum* in Carthage the 18th of June, often dated either to 405 or 411, as Augustine comments on the Gospel reading of the day (John 8, 1-11) and explains that Jesus forgave the adulterous woman as a result of her confession. This leads the bishop to reject the opinion of catechumens (*catechumeni*), who believe that they can be forgiven their sins, particularly adultery, through a profession of faith, by emphasising the necessity of repentance. As in the *De fide et operibus*, debates over sexuality, marriage and Christian membership particularly come to the forefront: the sermon ends rebuking parents who refuse to allow their children to enter monastic communities because they hope to have grandchildren.¹²⁵

Later, in the newly discovered Sermon 352A (=Dolbeau 14), Augustine again quotes the opinion of *catechumeni* who would prefer to be baptised first and repent and change their way of life afterwards. Starting from Mk 1, 15 (“*Quoniam impleta sunt tempora et appropinquavit regnum Dei, paenitemini et credite in Evangelium*”) read that day,¹²⁶ Augustine notes that the words are said for pagans and Jews but also apply to the catechumens in the audience, already conceived but not yet born, unrepentant believers.¹²⁷ As shown by Hombert, several of the biblical quotations evoked in the sermon to reject such views and promote penance and a change of behaviour before baptism for *catechumeni* are associated and employed in a similar way in the *De fide et operibus* to refute the unnamed adversaries.¹²⁸ Hombert, with further evidence unrelated to the treatise, has suggested that the sermon was perhaps preached at around the time of the composition of the *De fide et operibus* in 413.¹²⁹ The debate and

¹²⁵ Augustine, *S.* 16A (=Denis 20), 12 (for the dating see Perler-Maier (1969), 294 and Verbraken (1976), 164; on the readings of the day: Margoni-Kögler (2010), 227 n. 637).

¹²⁶ Margoni-Kögler (2010), 191-192.

¹²⁷ On this imagery, see chapter 3 p. 100 n. 81.

¹²⁸ Hombert (2000), 463-464.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* Another example, not mentioning catechumens – but rather pointing to pagans as potential converts – and more broadly reflecting on the relationship between faith and works is *In Ps.* 31, II which is preached in Carthage on a Thursday (Müller (2001), 809) at an uncertain date. It has been connected to the composition of *F. et op.* by Zarb, S. M., (1948), *Chronologia Enarrationum S. Augustini in psalmos* (Valetta, Malta), 58 and 174-175 who dated it to January 413, followed by Rondet, H., (1960), ‘Essais sur la chronologie des “Enarrationes in Psalmos” de saint Augustin’, *BLE* 61, 258-286, at 281-284 who proposed 412-413; the dating to January 413 proposed by Perler-Maier (1969), 458-459 is accepted by Dulaey, M.

Augustine's arguments in these sermons largely correspond to the *De fide et operibus*, and he has *catechumeni* particularly in mind. As in the *De fide et operibus*, he refers to Acts 2, 4 and quotes Acts 2, 37-38 to prove the need for repentance to access baptism:

A catechumen (*catechumenus*) can answer me, "Why say *Repent* to us? First let me become one of the faithful (*fidelis*), and perhaps I shall live a good life, and I won't have to be a penitent." My answer to that is, "In order to join the faithful, *repent*. Those who come to baptism, after all, come by way of repentance. I mean, unless they condemn their old way of life by repenting, they won't come to the new life by asking together for baptism (*competendo*). I haven't been excessively daring in saying this, or taken anything on myself that is not in accord with God's scriptures. Let the catechumens listen to the Acts of the Apostles."¹³⁰

Basing his authority on Acts, Augustine commands that catechumens should first undergo penance otherwise baptism will not transform them. Augustine further sets the debate in the wider frame of the *De fide et operibus*, discussing the question of purification through fire, to assert that baptism is not enough to enter the kingdom of God, but good works are central. Augustine again argues on the basis of a detailed exegesis for a middle position, rejecting both mild and harsh regulations on morals.

This and the previous sermon show that while attempting to promote baptism and strict pre-baptismal discipline, Augustine seems to have faced some resistance from catechumens. In Sermon 352A, Augustine particularly divides catechumens into two categories: he opposes catechumens who postpone enrolment because they fear not to be forgiven afterwards if they sin and catechumens who think that they do not have to amend their lives to be baptised.¹³¹ However, these are not incompatible categories: it shows mainly that Augustine's catechumens were reluctant to take the step of baptism both because of strict regulations at admittance and because of the lack of post-baptismal unilateral forgiveness of sins. For the bishop, catechumens would postpone baptism in order to keep leading the lives that they wish. As we have already seen, Augustine relates the status of catechumens to a less

(transl. not.), *BA* 58/A (2011), 325-327. However, Blic, J. de, (1936), 'La date du sermon de saint Augustin in "psalmum 31" (ML 36, 257=275)', *Gregorianum* 17, 407-412 reacting against Zarb, rightly noted that a common theme is a weak argument to provide a dating.

¹³⁰ Augustine, S. 352A (= Dolbeau 14), 4 (Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/11 (1997), 89 adapted).

¹³¹ Augustine, S. 352A (=Dolbeau 14), 7-8.

committed attitude to condemn it and promote the enforcement of pre-baptismal moral instruction. For Augustine, the initiation is essential to bring catechumens to further inclusion into the community and enforce the recommended discipline. Two other already mentioned sermons, probably unrelated chronologically, further stress the necessity of a change of conduct before baptism for *competentes* and echo the requirements set in the *De fide et operibus*, although they are less specific and do not bear a polemical tone.¹³²

An opposite trend of resistance is singled out in some of Augustine's sermons preached outside Lent against "ascetic" *catechumeni*. Preaching on the reasons why Jesus needed to be baptised as narrated in the Gospel of John in two sermons respectively more than a month before Lent probably in December-January and after Easter week – part of a series perhaps preached between 406 and 407¹³³ – Augustine portrays these catechumens in a fictive dialogue, noting that they consider themselves better than the married faithful (*fideles*) and therefore scorn baptism.¹³⁴ Augustine replied urging them to follow Jesus' example and explaining that works are not enough and that baptism is essential for the forgiveness of sins. The same theme also building on the story of Jesus' baptism, surfaces in a preached explanation of Psalm 90 that perhaps belongs to the same series.¹³⁵ All of these three sermons are preached in a context of anti-Donatist polemics. They recall the explanation of the necessity of baptism found in the *De baptismo*, composed earlier, around 404-405 in which Augustine stated that, although good catechumens are to be preferred over bad baptised Christians, the former need baptism and the latter repentance to enter the kingdom of

¹³² Augustine, *S.* 351, 2.2; 4.10 and *S.* 352, 1.2; 1.6; 2.7 (see note 117).

¹³³ On the series see note 2.

¹³⁴ Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 4, 13; the same theme is recalled in *Io. eu. tr.* 13, 6 with reference to the previous sermon. Another related discussion of Jesus' baptism, which does not mention catechumens is found in *Io. eu. tr.* 5, 3. The precise dating of single sermons remains uncertain, however *Io. eu. tr.* 4 and 5 are early in the series, perhaps preached towards the end of December and the beginning of January, while *Io. eu. tr.* 13 is preached after Easter perhaps close to the Ascension according to la Bonnardière (1965), 46-53.

¹³⁵ Augustine, *In Ps.* 90 II, 6-7 (it follows *In Ps.* 90 I of the preceding day). The sermon is briefly analysed by Busch (1938), 428-429. For the possible links to the series see Rondet, H., (1976), 'Essais sur la chronologie des "Enarrationes in Psalmos" de saint Augustin', *BLE* 77, 99-118, at 99-101.

heaven.¹³⁶ Thus, Augustine rebuked reluctant catechumens in the Donatist polemics, perhaps in 406-407, both to persuade them to enter initiation in his community and reassert his wider principles on baptism against the Donatists. Augustine's rejection of elitist catechumens recalls his statements against the purity of the administrator of baptism, an essential stake in the polemic. These catechumens may therefore represent, for Augustine, the Donatists' teaching on catechumens and criticisms of Donatist catechumens and clerics against baptised members of Augustine's community. They may also point to groups of monks-catechumens – maybe in the Donatists' communities? – as suggested by Harmless.¹³⁷

This concentration on a specific theme, the “ascetic” catechumens, resembles the parallel debate on the “lax” initiation of catechumens of the *De fide et operibus* and other sermons.¹³⁸ Further study would be needed to refine the dating and circumstances of all these texts. Nevertheless, both show that, at different times and with different purposes, Augustine was particularly concerned with catechumens in his polemical fights and would use various devices to refute his opponents in other Christian communities and bring these heterogeneous groups to adhere to his views. His main technique seems to have been to gather these catechumens under a remarkable label, “the ascetics” or the “adulterers” to put them under a pejorative light, underline their contradictions, and enforce his position under the authority of Scripture. Although a more detailed study would be needed to map out in detail the steps of Augustine's argument for the inclusion of catechumens in terms of moral teaching throughout his life, the evidence already explored suggests that he may have written the *De fide et operibus* to give greater authority and visibility to the discipline for catechumens that he had recommended for many years. Accepting this hypothesis, instead of assuming that Augustine wrote simply as a result of the circulation of some writings holding views unacceptable for most, opens up new perspectives and raises questions. Assuming that the treatise was written

¹³⁶ Augustine, *Bapt.* IV, 21.28.

¹³⁷ Harmless (2014), 273-275 with references.

¹³⁸ This dichotomy is briefly mentioned in Rebillard (1998), 289-291; Gavriluk (2007), 290-291.

on purpose requires us to investigate further the genesis of Augustine's ideas and the immediate context of composition, to shed light on the reasons that may have brought him to write it at that specific time. As a preliminary step towards a more detailed study particularly focusing on Augustine's moral teaching to catechumens at key moments in his life, a few hypotheses may already be suggested about the context of composition in 412-413.

4. 412-413: Seizing an opportunity?

The treatise was written some time after the defeat of the Donatists at the Conference of Carthage and the condemnation of Pelagius' disciple Caelestius (411): this already suggests that it may have been particularly needed, at that particular time, to write a synthesis which would both ease the reintegration of Donatists and clarify the position of his party on adult baptism in the wake of polemics against Pelagians on the necessity of infant baptism.¹³⁹ I argue, moreover, that the *De fide et operibus* was not only written at a significant time, but also in connection to Augustine's travels to the city of Carthage in the winter of 412-413, where he preached between December and January.¹⁴⁰ Although this has not been emphasised in

¹³⁹ See Drecoll (2002), 1309.

¹⁴⁰ Augustine preached a series of sermons (S. 111, S. 23, S. 53, S. 277) on consecutive days, 19th to 22nd of January, which are thought to date from 413, see Perler-Maier (1969), 310-316; Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA* III/2 (1990), 65 n. 1; also Verbraken (1976), 58, 65, 80, 126 listing some divergent hypotheses. For Perler-Maier (1969), *ibid.* S. 69 and S. 70 may have been preached during the same period. *In Ps.* 64, 138 and 136 may also be situated in connection to Augustine's travel from Hippo to Carthage, as they are preached as a series on consecutive days in Utica (one day away from Carthage), perhaps in December 412 (Perler-Maier (1969), 341; Müller (2001), 829 dates them not before 410). For Perler-Maier (1969), 316 he may have reached Carthage before Christmas and preached there S. 25A (=Morin 12) in the *Basilica Maiorum*, see Hombert (2000), 363-364 agreeing with a dating of S. 25A in winter 412-413. Then, S. 369 preached on Christmas day in Carthage in the *Basilica Restituta* may also date from 412 (see Verbraken (1976), 151). As noted by Perler-Maier (1969), 314, *Ep.* 121, 14 sent by Paulinus of Nola mentions that Augustine stayed in Carthage for the winter when he wrote a short and quick letter in reply to his queries about the resurrection (the reading *exhimiare*s rather than *exhimiare*m is indeed preferable, see Mratschek, S., (2002), *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola. Kommunikation und soziale Kontakte zwischen christlichen Intellektuellen* (Göttingen), 295 n. 132). Indeed, Augustine, *Ep.* 149, 1.2 (to be dated before spring 416 perhaps in the second half of 415 see Hombert (2000), 372 n. 22) situates this reply to Paulinus in the city of Carthage. It is more difficult to know when Augustine left Hippo after the summer 412: Zarb (1948), 172-176 had put his departure in September and argued that the following series of sermons were preached during that period in Carthage: *In Ps.* 85, 86; *In Ps.* 146, 147, 103, 102, 66; *In Ps.* 38, 61, 76. *In Ps.* 85-86 are now dated after 403 by Müller (2001), 820 and situated in Carthage or Camarata, while Hombert (2000), 621-625 still dates them, with *In Ps.* 142, to the 13th-14th-15th September 412). *In Ps.* 147, 103, 102, 66, 146, were preached in winter 403 in Carthage as suggested by Hombert (2000), 580-589; see also a summary of hypotheses in Müller (2001), 828. Finally, *In Ps.* 38, 61, 76 are uncertainly dated most probably either in 412 or 416 (see Müller (2001), 812 and 816). Hombert (2000), 599-602 and Dulaey, M., (transl., not.), *BA* 59A

previous studies, provided that Augustine very often played an important role in the teaching of catechumens in sermons preached in Carthage – as seen in the first part of this chapter – and in works for audiences in Carthage – as the *De catechizandis rudibus* and the eighteenth book of the *De civitate Dei*¹⁴¹ – it is entirely plausible to situate the composition of the work either in Carthage or closely after his stay in the city. His decision to travel to Carthage – which as Perler and Maier note cannot be easily explained that year – may not only relate to the beginning of his work on the *De civitate Dei* but also be linked to his task as a preacher and teacher of catechumens.¹⁴² Moreover, the possible connection of Augustine’s rules of admission to the development of canon legislation may suggest that Augustine wrote the treatise not simply on his own initiative, but perhaps in tandem with the bishop Aurelius of Carthage and other clerics and leading figures of the city, to bring further authority to his demonstration. As he had written to Aurelius as a young priest: “If the healing must begin from one church, just as it seems bold to try to change what the church of Carthage holds, so it involves great impudence to want to keep what the church of Carthage has corrected”.¹⁴³ Drecoll has remarked that one should perhaps distinguish between the anonymous opponents of Augustine and the lay brothers trained in the Scriptures who provided Augustine with the writings.¹⁴⁴ It seems plausible that these writings were collected in the city of Carthage by these skilled laymen and given to Augustine to be refuted. Knowing that Augustine preached in Carthage between the end of 412 and the beginning of 413 and then again in the summer of 413, from June to September, it is likely that the treatise was written in that context, perhaps close to or during Lent, either in Carthage or after temporarily returning to Hippo.

(forthcoming) prefer 412. Dulaey also notes that only *In Ps.* 38 and 61 are closely related, although *In Ps.* 76 bears themes very close to the former two. Thus, it remains uncertain whether in 412 Augustine already arrived in Carthage in September or only later. Zarb (1948), 92-97, 135-137, 174-175 also situated other sermons perhaps in January 413, however with uncertainty: *In Ps.* 51 and *Ps.* 53 (preached closely to each other); *In Ps.* 58 and 59 (preached close to each other); *In Ps.* 55; *In Ps.* 31 II (see note 129). For these sermons see Müller (2001), 810 and 816 with other dating hypotheses.

¹⁴¹ See chapter 3 p. 83.

¹⁴² Perler-Maier (1969), 315.

¹⁴³ Augustine, *Ep.* 22, 4 (Teske, R., (transl., not.), *WSA* II/1 (2001), 60).

¹⁴⁴ Mentioned in Augustine, *Retr.* II, 38; Drecoll (2002), 1309.

Although scholars assume that Augustine returned to Hippo before Lent and stayed there until after Easter, it has to be at least hypothesised that he may have stayed for Lent and Easter in Carthage that year.¹⁴⁵ The already cited Sermon 352A which may be contemporary to the treatise and dealt with the same issues was preached in the city of Carthage, and perhaps during Lent.¹⁴⁶ A Lenten context would provide a compelling explanation for Augustine's emphasis on the discipline of the *competentes*; a work commissioned in Carthage would also provide a particularly fitting *milieu* for the contemporary debates between rival factions on rules of admission to baptism in the aftermath of the Conference of 411 and the beginning of the Pelagian controversy.

While these preliminary hypotheses would require a more detailed investigation, they suggest a particularly interesting scenario: after Augustine had arrived in Carthage in winter 412, perhaps closer to Lent, people from Carthage requested him to write a clear summary about the “Catholic” position on matters of the admission to baptism, penance and the afterlife that would settle issues at a particularly troubled time. To facilitate his task he was handed a *dossier* of texts that held particularly lenient views on the basis of detailed exegeses. Augustine therefore wrote the treatise and perhaps preached on the issue in Sermon 352A to the audience in Carthage to further reject alternative views and confirm the position that he had been defending for years. It remains uncertain whether Augustine first preached on the

¹⁴⁵ Perler-Maier (1969), 317 after demonstrating that Augustine preached in Carthage in January, argue that he returned to Hippo in February to celebrate Lent and Easter (6th April) in Hippo. He would only have returned to Carthage in June to preach *S.* 293-294 (24th and 27th June) and *S.* 299 (29th June), see now Hombert (2000), 385-398. He perhaps also preached some of the following sermons in Carthage that summer: *S.* 299D (=Denis 16) (13th July); *S.* 305 (10th August); *In Ps.* 50 (13th August); *S.* 174 (Sunday, including a discussion of the cross on the forehead see note 12); *S.* 134 (Sunday); *S.* 90; see Perler-Maier (1969), 319-320 and Hombert (2000), 163 n. 332 and 453 n. 11. Other sermons perhaps from 412-414: *In Ps.* 70, I-II (Hombert (2000), 394 n. 20 and 461 n. 14); *S.* 7, *S.* 28 (Hombert (2000), 305-324); *S.* 175-176 (Hombert (2000), 393 n. 19). Bonnardière, A.-M. la, (1971), ‘Les *Enarrationes in Psalmos* prêchées par saint Augustin à l’occasion de fêtes de martyrs’, *RecAug* 7, 75-103, at 80-81 has suggested to date *In Ps.* 39 to 14/7/413, the day before *In Ps.* 50; however new evidence on the *titulus* of *In Ps.* 50 situates it the 13th of August (Müller (2001), 813); Dulaey, M., (transl., not.), *BA* 59A (forthcoming) dates *In Ps.* 39 to 407; see other hypotheses in Müller (2001), 812. Augustine’s departure from Carthage in Summer 413 is better documented: *Ep.* 151 describes how Augustine, following the execution of his friend Marcellinus left Carthage probably on the 14th of September and avoided the city for a time.

¹⁴⁶ The sermon has no clear evidence regarding the liturgical context; Dolbeau (2009), 105-106 thinks that its references to faithful and catechumens alike would put it outside Lent. However the fact that Augustine does not specifically call catechumens to baptism does not preclude that it was preached during or close to Lent.

issue in Carthage and only later wrote the treatise, or, on the contrary, preached on the views already put into writing in the treatise. It is possible, although unsure, that Augustine stayed in Carthage during Lent precisely because his presence was fundamental to define a clear position for the Catholic Church in the city. A long stay outside Hippo, however, could not remain unnoticed. Sermon 163B (= Frangipane 5) preached the 8th of September in Carthage at the *mensa Cypriani*, and mentioning the discontent of his community asking for his return to Hippo, may well date to 413 and would correspond to a long absence of Augustine, from December 412 to September 413.¹⁴⁷ Thus, I would argue that at some point between the end of 412 and the summer of 413, a work settling issues on the catechumenate, baptism, penance and the afterlife was commissioned to Augustine in Carthage and provided him with the opportunity to offer his own model, already tested in works and sermons in the previous decade.

Augustine presented his views on matters that were central to Christian theology and practice, and which had deep implications and significance for the more prominent anti-Donatist and anti-Pelagian polemics in which he was involved. Providing a definite and balanced position on the requirements for admitting catechumens to baptism and for rebuking baptised Christians, staying at equal distance from the Donatist's and lax views, amongst others, was particularly relevant. Augustine's mild and intermediary views on the Christians' duties in the Pelagian controversy have prompted Markus' definition of "Christian mediocrity".¹⁴⁸ However, the *De fide et operibus* provides interesting nuances to this view, at least for Augustine's perspective in the early 410s: it is indeed an apologia for the importance of individual behaviour and visible commitment in obtaining grace. The work may be seen as a way for Augustine to counterbalance views expressed in the *De spiritu et littera* in which he insisted on the need for grace, by emphasising the need for the initiative of candidates in

¹⁴⁷ Augustine, *S.* 163B (=Frangipane 5), 5. The sermon is generally dated to 410 with uncertainty see Verbraken (1976), 166).

¹⁴⁸ Markus (1990), 45-62 who particularly quotes the synthetic presentation of Augustine's milder view in a later work: Augustine, *C. ep. Pel.* III, 5.14.

conforming their lives to the Christian ideals through a gradual penitential preparation.¹⁴⁹ For Drecoll, Augustine's opponents developed their own model for the catechumenate focused on faith, probably in the wake of the Pelagian controversy and were perhaps keen readers of Augustine's works.¹⁵⁰ This would make the *De fide et operibus* particularly interesting as an effort to react against views perhaps developed close to Augustine's circle. Speaking to his Carthaginian audience, Augustine confirmed his earlier teaching on catechumens: he deeply valued pre-baptismal moral requirements and the regular initiation of adults, a transformation achieved through a combination of personal commitment and the reception of life-changing rites and teaching. The *De fide et operibus* corresponds to Augustine's negotiation of a moderate but still demanding position that aimed at reaching a wider consensus.

In a context of changing practices and divergent views on initiation, skilled writers were brought to suggest their own interpretation and foster a normalisation of practices. Clerics and influential laymen in Carthage, probably led by their bishop Aurelius, who often commissioned works to Augustine, asked him to preach and write a treatise on the need of penance before baptism and to coordinate efforts to define a standard position on the catechumenate. Recapitulating thoughts that he had expressed since the previous decade, Augustine defined his position against a whole set of views which he thought were wrong, and which were defended in writings of other individuals similarly aiming at setting norms on the catechumenate. Resorting both to Biblical texts and liturgical practice, even recalling his own experience as a catechumen as proof for the need of catechesis on morals, he skilfully presented his model as a compromise in conformity with tradition, contrasted with the lax views of the treatise's main opponents on one side, and the harsh discipline of Donatists on

¹⁴⁹ On this see Lancel (1999), 465-467; on the other hand, as said, Drecoll (2002), 1309 who situates *Spir. et litt.* after *F. et op.* rather emphasises the counterbalancing of *Pecc. mer.* and *S.* 294. It seems more plausible that *Spir. et litt.* was written before *F. et op.* see note 77. There is perhaps only a short reference to the Pelagian controversy at the end of the treatise, when Augustine explains that human works are good but should not lead individuals to think that they can be sinless, *F. et op.* 26, 48: "Non quia quisquam ita debet extolli, ut, non dicam apud alios iactare, sed apud se ipsum putare audeat se in hac vita esse sine peccato" (Zycha, J., (ed.), *CSEL* 41 (1900), 94).

¹⁵⁰ See Drecoll (2002), 1309.

the other. While the *De fide et operibus* generally keeps its focus on the *competentes*, various passages suggest that Augustine also wanted to implement teaching on morals and strict rules for *catechumeni*. As in the debates against Donatists over rebaptism and against Pelagians over the necessity of infant baptism for the forgiveness of sins, Augustine defined the relationship between faith and works by resorting to practices of initiation, describing the rites of the catechumenate as proof of the need for a change of behaviour. In the context of the aftermath of the Conference of Carthage and the beginning of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine seized the opportunity to define his position on the links between faith, works, and baptism, between penance, baptism and final judgment, and to underline the importance of stating and showing one's transformation as a Christian, particularly during the catechumenate and especially during the time when candidates ask for baptism as *competentes*.

Conclusion

In his sermons and works, Augustine defined the catechumenate as a necessary process of inclusion. He tried to shape Christian membership as a process of progressive adhesion to norms of behaviour: in this respect, catechumens were particularly important. This chapter confirms Rebillard's conclusion that Augustine included all Christians in his pastoral preaching and particularly fought against the assumption amongst catechumens that they would be less liable to church discipline.¹⁵¹ It also shows, however, that catechumens were an essential category employed as a tool for renewal of the broader community, both as seen in the use of the rite of the cross on the forehead and in the study of rules of admission to baptism in the *De fide et operibus*. Augustine referred to the foundational sign of the cross, the most basic marker of Christians, to address the wider community and define the boundaries of Christian membership often in doctrinal controversies. He used these liminal Christians to renew the commitment of the community, provisionally erasing the distinction

¹⁵¹ Rebillard (2012a), 66-67; (2012b), 43.

based on initiation to demonstrate that Christian membership should rest first and foremost on a radical change of lifestyle. Augustine's objective, when including catechumens, was to promote a united community of committed members.

An exploration of the context in which Augustine developed these views suggests that he may have taken a prominent role in the city of Carthage, as part of his long involvement in the teaching of catechumens in the city. In the early 400s, Augustine wrote the *De catechizandis rudibus* to Deogratias of Carthage in which he set a model for integrating newcomers into the catechumenate; over the course of his life, he regularly preached on the sign of the cross on the forehead in the city, and also sent there transcripts of his homilies on the Gospel of John. During his preaching campaigns in Carthage, he also particularly argued for the necessity of pre-baptismal discipline and synthesised his views on the matter in the *De fide et operibus*, which I have proposed to situate in connection to his stay in the city between late 412 and September 413. Finally, in the 420s, the catechumen Firmus, based in Carthage, exchanged a number of letters with Augustine, attended a reading of the eighteenth book of the *De civitate Dei* in the city, and was in charge of spreading the whole work amongst his pagan and catechumen friends. Catechumens may even have constituted a major incentive for the composition of several works and for his frequent travels to the city.

Further light needs to be shed on debates on the catechumenate, penance and the afterlife by putting them in a wider Mediterranean context of polemics over the definition of Christian membership during this period, particularly investigating connections to similar debates over the “merciful” in fifth-century Southern Gaul.¹⁵² The *De fide et operibus* offers a striking demonstration of the broader argument of the thesis, already demonstrated in Chapter Three: in a context of variety of practices, polemical controversies brought Augustine to define norms and develop authoritative views regarding the organisation and understanding of the catechumenate. Although only Augustine's refutation is preserved, it is essential to

¹⁵² See Villegas Marín, R. (2013), ‘Un épisode méconnu de la ‘préhistoire’ du purgatoire chrétien: Fauste de Riez, Césaire d’Arles et les ‘miséricordieux’ gaulois’, *REAug* 59, 299-335.

recover some sense of a wider context of debate and exchange: Augustine was not acting alone but as the representative of a particular party of the North African Church. Gradually, African writers aimed at fixing norms and dictating practices but were confronted with various opposing trends.

Brown's recent book well highlights that Augustine's literary production is the result of dialogues with his audience: "precisely because so many of Augustine's statements were prompted by the questions of others, we find that we are not dealing with a series of ex cathedra pronouncements issuing from Augustine alone. We are listening in to a vigorous conversation".¹⁵³ This constant questioning enables us to shed light on how the catechumens themselves considered their status within Christian communities. As we have seen, Augustine developed his views against a more flexible understanding of Christian membership amongst catechumens. Augustine's sermons show that catechumens not only resorted to alternative remedies, but also may have considered that their Christian status and rites, particularly the cross put on the forehead, offered them protection in the afterlife. They also thought that their status did not require them to abide to Church discipline, which would be reserved for the baptised Christians. Some catechumens may have considered that baptism was not necessary to commit to Christianity but represented submission to ecclesiastical authority.¹⁵⁴

Augustine and other clerics could not fail to see that persuading and initiating catechumens was a central stake of their pastoral activity. While his adversaries in the *De fide et operibus* employed the catechumenate to define Christian membership in terms of faith rather than rules of behaviour and promoted swift baptism, Augustine saw the catechumenate as a major opportunity to enforce discipline and bring the Christian community to a higher degree of commitment. He attempted to impose strict pre-baptismal discipline from the very

¹⁵³ Brown, P., *The Ransom of the Soul* (Cambridge MA, 2015), 65, see more broadly 47-65. This aspect is also briefly noted in Harmless (2014), 175-179.

¹⁵⁴ Augustine, *Ep. 2** to Firmus is a good example of a lively dialogue between Augustine and a catechumen. Firmus was both sincerely interested in Christianity without however wanting to undergo baptism; Augustine saw this as a paradox and strived to bring him to ask for baptism; I discuss this letter in detail in Pignot (2016).

beginning of the catechumenate. He saw the admission into the catechumenate and the entrance into the baptismal preparation as two main occasions to impose rules of behaviour. At the same time, he emphasised the strict division between catechumens and baptised Christians in terms of ritual participation and hopes for the afterlife. This was meant to show to catechumens that their partial membership required a more radical commitment and that in turn only baptism would bring them to share the full benefits of Christian membership. As we have seen in Chapter Two, while he had himself experienced the flexibility of religious membership, Augustine employed his own *parcours* to provide a path towards commitment and baptism for catechumens and potential converts. Chapter Three and Four have shown that he witnessed the same flexibility as a cleric in Hippo and Carthage and frequently aimed at building a sense of belonging with corresponding rituals and behaviour for catechumens that would transcend their liminality.

As he commented on Augustine's invitation to baptism on the basis of John 6, 55 and the catechumens' lack of participation in the Eucharist, Harmless noted: "this division within his own congregation bothered him. Thus the rousing appeals. He wanted to dismantle the barriers such readings created, but he knew he could pull down the walls only if they heard him 'knocking' and so enrolled for the Lenten training".¹⁵⁵ This investigation has shown that while Augustine aimed at going beyond this distinction, the significance of catechumens as a specific Christian category should not be underestimated: it constituted the essential framework for the definition of Christian membership. Augustine's particularly well-documented efforts find clear parallels in the more scarce African evidence preserved from his lifetime and in the century after his death. Sermons and council proceedings explored in the next chapter and letters from the early sixth century discussed in Chapter Six shall further demonstrate that the catechumenate remained essential for the progressive integration of members until the sixth century at least, and that, at the same time, it often challenged clerics

¹⁵⁵ Harmless (2014), 200.

attempting to build a united community in a context of divisions. Catechumens were at the centre of polemics because they were at the core of the process of community formation. As a liminal group, they were essential to the definition of what it meant to become and therefore be a Christian in late antique Africa.

CHAPTER 5.

Councils, preaching and the catechumenate in fourth- and fifth-century Africa

This chapter explores the catechumenate in lesser known African sources to shed light on the experience, impact and significance of initiation in the world of Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries. The balance between Augustine's influence, common heritage and local traditions is particularly difficult to assess. This chapter reinforces the conclusions drawn against the assumption that Augustine offers evidence for a sort of standard African practice and it also argues against the opposing view that Augustine's texts would not be representative of widely spread African traditions and ideas but only reflect Augustine's idiosyncrasy. Rather, I shall argue that Augustine and other African texts all relate to an African tradition of initiation that has strong commonalities, particularly in terms of liturgical language and ideas, and at the same time, that the initiation of catechumens, both its rituals and catechesis, was not normalised into a standard pattern but followed local and changing practices. The study of African evidence beyond Augustine is particularly needed because of the imposing mark of Augustine on any study of late antique Africa: analysing neglected African texts underlines that initiation should be studied in a much wider world, where there was no normalisation of rituals but creativity. African sources, be they great figures such as Augustine or lesser known texts, have all to be understood within this framework to draw a more accurate picture of the catechumenate as a constantly evolving organisation, shaped by a context of recurrent religious polemics, requiring Christian communities to define their boundaries. I shall show that African sources provide consistent evidence for a context of competition with rival churches which gave the impulse for the development of intense and diverse initiatory rites and catecheses and created the need for defining normative practices and beliefs. The main challenge in writing the history of the catechumenate is to recover a sense of the capacity of

local clerics to improvise and innovate within this lively context, far beyond the limited evidence available today as a result of the medieval selection of material.

This chapter is divided into three sections, first looking at relatively well-dated texts, then examining evidence more difficult to situate. I first discuss references to *catechumeni* in council rulings and show that there is only rare evidence of church legislation preserved, which however illustrates that attempts already were made in the fourth century to set normative practices in a context of rivalry with the Donatists. Extending research beyond the *catechumeni*, the study of the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus then provides an opportunity of exploring how candidates were prepared for baptism in late antique Africa. Focusing on this little-studied body of evidence shall shed new light on shared traditions and local originality. I shall particularly demonstrate that these sermons mostly focus on a remarkable ritual of renunciation and profession of faith connected to vivid polemics against heretics, offering an alternative and informative view on initiation very close to Augustine in terms of language, ideas and exegesis, but pertaining to a liturgical organisation that is not described in sermons currently attributed to Augustine. Finally, I examine a small selection of anonymous sermons, which contain complementary information on the preparation for baptism and may have been preached in late antique North Africa. Without taking a definitive position on their African origin, I argue that these sermons cast further light on common features and changing local practices. Particularly, the teaching and learning of psalms before baptism appears as a distinctive feature that was more widespread than it has been assumed.

I. Council proceedings

Numerous council proceedings were put into writing in Africa from the third to the sixth century at least. Their history of transmission is particularly intricate: most of the preserved documents stem from collections already circulating in the fifth century, the material being reworked and transmitted in later centuries through various collections,

particularly the successive sixth- and seventh-century compilations of Dionysius Exiguus, Ferrandus of Carthage and Cresconius and the *Collectio Hispana*.¹ Without entering into this complex matter and related scholarly debates, this section shall focus on relevant information about *catechumeni* found in the African acts of councils and canonical collections dating from the fourth and fifth century, mainly edited by Charles Munier.² Apart from the proceedings of the councils of Carthage (345/48 and 390), Thela (418) and Hippo (427) that are edited as documents on their own, the rest of the legislation, mostly promulgated in the years between 393 and 419, is not preserved in the form of single council proceedings but as abridged versions in broader collections composed on the basis of the original proceedings. These are in particular the *Breviarium Hipponense* (393) composed in 397 in two versions and later enlarged, the *Gesta de nomine Apiarii* (419) including earlier legislation also expanded later, and the abbreviated extracts from the Carthage Register, covering legislation from 393 to 419. Most of this fifth-century evidence thus corresponds to the primacy of Aurelius of Carthage and Augustine's time as a priest and bishop.

A close perusal of this whole set of documents shows that there are very few rulings about catechumens, with in fact only one canon mentioning catechumens, promulgated at the general council of Hippo (393). It is noteworthy that almost nothing is said about the status of catechumens in churches and how the catechumenate should be organised. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that there were no regulations on the matter, particularly knowing the significance of debates on initiation during the period, as shown in the preceding chapters. In light of the very fragmentary and abridged character of the medieval transmission

¹ See with further bibliography: Munier, Ch., (1972), 'Vers une édition nouvelle des Canons Africains (345-525)', *REAug* 18, 249-59; Munier, Ch., (ed.), *CCSL* 149 (1974), v-xii; *Id.*, (1986), 'Canon' and 'Concilium (Concilia)', *AL* 1, fasc. 1-2, 1085-1099, at 1088-1089; *Id.*, (1987), *Vie conciliaire et collections canoniques en Occident, IVe-XIIe siècles* (London). See as well for an recent overview: Perrin, M.-Y., 'Non solo Agostino. I Padri africani nella vicenda dottrinale e nella elaborazione canonistica della Chiesa latina', in *Atti della XXXVI Settimana europea 'Storia religiosa euro-mediterranea V': 'Africa / Ifriqiya. Il Mahghreb nella storia religiosa di Cristianesimo e Islam' (Villa Cagnola, Gazzada, 2-6 September)* (forthcoming).

² Munier, Ch., (ed.), *CCSL* 149 (1974) with the remarks of Mordek, H., (1986), *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonistische Abteilung* 72, 366-386. The Acts of the Conference of Carthage (411) do not provide evidence on *catechumeni*.

of the proceedings, a great number of canons has certainly been lost. Despite the conservative and repetitive character – canon are often reissued – of the African legislation partially compensating the fragmentary state of the evidence, several councils were held for which no or little evidence is preserved.³ Sources from other regions of the Latin West, in particular the canons of the so-called council of Elvira, suggest that in Africa too there may have been more substantial canonical rules focusing on catechumens.⁴ Avoiding speculation based on the state of the evidence, it is more significant to notice that the only preserved canon about catechumens is puzzling and difficult to interpret. This study shall focus on this single canon and provide a new interpretation: it shall demonstrate that the canon sheds lights on the attempts during Aurelius' primacy, corroborating our investigation of Augustine, at normalising the organisation of the catechumenate, in particular by drawing clear lines in terms of rituals between the *catechumeni* and the *fideles*.

Canon 3 in the Breviarium Hipponense

The canon is part of the lost proceedings of the council held at Hippo the 8th October 393, preserved in the abbreviated version (*Breviarium*) that was written for the council of Carthage in two versions during August 397.⁵ The council of Hippo was convened to gather a great number of bishops from all regions of Africa and was presided over by the primate Aurelius of Carthage. Augustine was deeply involved: not only did it take place in his own town, but Augustine opened the council with a speech on the creed, the *De fide et symbolo*.⁶ The council had the aim of reforming African churches on a large scale, showing Aurelius' and Augustine's determination to reinforce their party in terms of church discipline from the very

³ Munier (1972), 249-51.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of canons focusing on catechumens in the so-called council of Elvira, see Villela, J., (2013), 'Las estipulaciones pseudoiliberitanas acerca de los catecúmenos', in *'Lex et religio' in età tardoantica, XL Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana (Roma, 10-12 maggio 2012)* (Rome), 587-616.

⁵ Cross, F.L., (1961), 'History and Fiction in the African Canons', *JTS* 12 (1961), 227-247, at 229-233; Munier (1972), 255.

⁶ Augustine, *Retr.* I, 17. Contrarily to what is stated in Hefele, C., (1908), *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, volume 2 (Paris), part 1, 82 and others, Possidius never mentions this council: the reference given is to the Maurists' life of Augustine taking its information from Augustine's *Retractationes*.

beginning of their ministry. The council was held in a context of competition with the Donatists who were in a position of strength in Hippo at the time.⁷ Canons legislate on several matters affecting all aspects of ecclesiastical hierarchy and organisation, ordering churches to convene councils each year and particularly focusing on rules for the various orders of the clergy and their ordination. Liturgical practices are also an important concern of the council. It legislates on prayer, the Eucharist, fasting and baptism.⁸ Canon 3, the only one focusing on catechumens, states:

That as well during the especially solemn days of Easter the rite (*sacramentum*) should not be given to catechumens (*catechumenis*), except the customary salt (*salis*). Because, as the faithful (*fideles*) do not change rites (*sacramenta*) during those days, catechumens too should not change [*sacramenta*].⁹

Many conjectures have been made on the forbidden *sacramentum*: some scholars have suggested that it refers to honey and milk – given to newly baptised as is clear from Canon 23b – salted bread or *Eulogia*, while many point to the Eucharist without providing compelling arguments.¹⁰ However, the content of the canon has not been considered in detail nor compared to the other canons and contemporary evidence. There is no basis to suggest that Canon 3 specifically concerns the Eucharist: it would imply that some churches across Africa freely gave the Eucharist to catechumens during Easter time without admitting them to baptism, a practice which has no attested parallel during the period and goes deeply against

⁷ Augustine, *Ep.* 22, 2 and 4 makes clear that he exhorted Aurelius to convene councils in order to reform the African churches. For an attempt to trace the background for these reforms see Merdinger, J., (2009), ‘On the Eve of the Council of Hippo, 393’, *AS* 40/1, 27-36.

⁸ For a detailed presentation of the material from this and other African councils see Sabw Kanyang, J.-A., (2000), *Episcopus et plebs. L'évêque et la communauté ecclésiale dans les conciles africains (345-525)* (Bern-Berlin et al.). On reforms in the liturgy see Klöckener, M., (2002), ‘Liturgiereform in der nordafrikanischen Kirche des 4./5. Jahrhunderts’, in Klöckener, M., Kranemann, B., (eds.), (2002), *Liturgiereformen. Historische Studien zum einen bleibenden Grunzug des christlichen Gottesdienstes* (Münster), 121-168, mentioning Canon 3 at 159-160.

⁹ *Breviarium Hipponense*, Canon 3: “Ut etiam per sollemnissimos paschales dies sacramentum catechumenis non detur, nisi solitum salis; quia, si fideles per illos dies sacramenta non mutant, nec catechumenos oportet mutare” (Munier, Ch., *CCSL* 149 (1974), 33, own translation).

¹⁰ Already de l'Aubespine (1623), 437-440. For an overview of interpretations see Bingham (1840), 290-293; Latham (1982), 96-98. Gaudemet, J., (1958), *L'église et l'empire romain (IVe- Ve siècles)* (Paris), 58 n. 8 followed by Sabw Kanyang (2000), 200-201 still suggests the Eucharist, as does McGowan, A., (1999), *Ascetic Eucharists. Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford), 123.

the liturgical connection between baptism and the Eucharist – mentioned in several instances in Augustine as seen in previous chapters and widespread in late antique sources.

As in the case of the mention of a *sacramentum* in the *De catechizandis rudibus*, modern scholarly interpretations of the canon are all based on the idea that *sacramentum* alludes to a single rite performed on its own, either the equivalent of a modern sacrament or more specifically the administration of some edible item in contrast with salt. However, the canons in the *Breviarium* referring to a specific rite usually clearly identify it with its name or an explanatory phrase. The custom of offering honey and milk to the newly baptised is for instance mentioned in Canon 23b and distinguished from the Eucharist, and Canon 4 forbids the administration of baptism and the Eucharist to the dead. Canon 23b speaks of “*lac et mel*” and “*sacramentum dominici corporis et sanguinis*” and Canon 4 employs the specific terms *eucharistia* and *baptizari*.¹¹ In contrast, Canon 3 only refers to a *sacramentum* that is best translated as “rite” rather than “sacrament”. It is relevant here to recall that in Augustine’s writings, *sacramentum* is often applied to the Eucharist or baptism but also employed more broadly to refer to other rites or sets of rites. In the case of catechumens it refers to the rites performed by them in a sort of counterpart to those of the baptised.¹² The canon itself implies that *sacramentum* should entail the broader meaning of “rite” rather than “sacrament” since it is opposed to the reception of salt “only” and refers in the plural to the *sacramenta* of the faithful.¹³ It is clear that this canon aims at ruling on the correct calendar for initiation, since rites for catechumens are compared with those for the faithful to highlight that no changes should happen “as well (*etiam*)” during the Easter period. “The solemn days of Easter” most probably point to the period from Lent until after Easter, at least the first week and perhaps until Pentecost.¹⁴

¹¹ *Breviarium Hipponense*, canon 4 and 23b (Munier, Ch., (ed.), CCSL 149 (1974), 33-34 and 40).

¹² See chapter 3 part I.

¹³ Sabw Kanyang (2000), 201 n. 30 notes that various rites could be implied.

¹⁴ For this period as an extension of Easter day see Bradshaw, P., Johnson, M. E., (2011), *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (London-Collegeville MN), 69-86; Margoni-Kögler (2010), 81 n.220 remarks that for Augustine the *paschalis solemnitas* encompasses Lent.

It seems plausible to argue for a new hypothesis: *sacramentum* in Canon 3 would refer broadly to the full initiation cycle to become a *fidelis*, in particular the learning and recitation of the creed perhaps with other texts, baptism, the Eucharist, anointment and other associated rites. It does not matter whether legislators, by using *sacramentum* in the singular, had the specific rites like baptism or the Eucharist more specifically in mind: the two rites were closely intertwined – as is clear in Canon 4 – since they were administered at the same occasion to the candidates becoming *fideles*.¹⁵ Canon 3 thus would prohibit ordinary *catechumeni*, individuals who have not begun the baptismal preparation, from receiving the initiation rites of the faithful during Easter time *as well*. It would aim at enforcing as canonical practices on one hand the process of admission of *catechumeni* as candidates for baptism (*competentes*), and on the other hand, the administration of baptism, the first Eucharist and other rites at Easter making the *competentes* into *fideles* after a preparation during Lent. The canon would thus forbid the baptism of *catechumeni* without a proper preparation. This implies that in some churches *catechumeni* were initiated in the wake of the Easter celebrations, avoiding the Lenten preparation. The canon would rule that catechumens should not be admitted to baptism during Easter time but keep receiving the customary salt (*solitum salis*). Klöckener has argued that the salt was given once only at the rite of admission into the catechumenate and that the canon rules about only admitting newcomers to the catechumenate at Easter time.¹⁶ However, as shown in Chapter Three, the giving of salt was most likely repeated and not limited to the admission, thus it should point to catechumens in general. Indeed, the canon itself seems to constitute evidence of this repetition: *catechumenus* needs to have a clear technical meaning in order to be relevant as a distinction and it should refer to catechumens, not newcomers. Such an interpretation is consistent with Augustine's technical use of *catechumenus* for individuals who have been admitted into the catechumenate but have not entered the second stage of

¹⁵ In *Breviarium Hipponense*, Canon 39, the plural *sacramenta* is employed twice to refer to the rites performed at baptism.

¹⁶ Klöckener (1998), 156; Sabw Kanyang (2000), 213 even suggests that the canon aims at resurrecting the giving of salt as a forgotten practice.

preparation for baptism – when they would be called *competentes*. It seems plausible therefore that the canon rules in favour of a proper Lenten baptismal preparation, which was indeed a concern of Augustine, as shown from his sermons and the *De fide et operibus*.

Other canons show the same attempt to control the administration of baptism, clearly promoting a standard for initiation and only permitting quick baptism in emergency cases which are themselves closely monitored. Canon 32 allows emergency baptism but rules that sick individuals who “cannot reply by themselves” can only be baptised with the help of witnesses to support the candidate’s commitment.¹⁷ Similarly, Canon 39 permits the baptism of infants who were taken captive by barbarians only when there are no witnesses to testify that they were baptised.¹⁸ Canon 4 forbidding the administration of baptism to the dead has to be understood in the same context: it refers to individuals who died shortly before they could receive the rites and were baptised after their death. Relating this evidence to Augustine’s prohibition to bury a dead catechumen where *sacramenta* are celebrated makes it easier to understand why some would have baptised dead catechumens to obtain a decent burial.¹⁹ All these canons legislate against uncontrolled baptism. Canon 3, in the same vein, puts particular emphasis on distinguishing individuals at various stages of commitment within Christian communities, thus aiming to regulate and standardise the organisation of the catechumenate. Augustine’s strict distinction between *catechumeni* and *fideles* in terms of rituals in his sermons and works well corresponds to this canonical legislation. Such a canon certainly provides noteworthy evidence of the attempts to standardise practices during the episcopate of Aurelius, with Augustine’s support. As a matter of fact Canon 3 precisely aimed at standardising existing diversity: by legislating against change (“*non mutant, nec catechumenos oportet mutare*”) it rejects diversity as innovation and promotes its own standard. Later, the council of Carthage of 525 and canon collections, in particular Ferrandus’ *Breviatio* written

¹⁷ *Breviarium Hipponense*, Canon 32.

¹⁸ See a discussion in Sabw Kanyang (2000), 202-205.

¹⁹ Augustine, S. 142aug (= Dolbeau 7).

between 523 and 546,²⁰ incorporated and repeated this ruling,²¹ demonstrating that the canon enjoyed a wide diffusion in later centuries.

In summary, Canon 3 of the *Breviarium hipponense* may perhaps be described as the tip of an iceberg, as a rule emerging from diverging practices. Augustine's more abundant evidence provided the basis to suggest that this canon was an attempt to enforce the Lenten baptismal preparation and draw a clear distinction between the catechumens and the faithful in a context in which converts were freely initiated. Rites seem to have been more freely administered than may be generally assumed from the evidence in Augustine, and councils in late fourth-century Africa were precisely meant to create new legislation standardising the catechumenate into a single well-established organisation. It is noteworthy that such legislation is promulgated in a context of competition with the Donatists: defining the Catholic discipline in matters of initiation was crucial particularly knowing that the opposing parties fought over the issue of rebaptism and that baptism had been a recurrent concern of councils since Cyprian's time. Augustine's recurrent debates over the catechumenate with the Donatists and the fight for members sheds light on why legislating on such matters would have been essential. The extent to which these attempts to set clear norms were successful and the role played by religious polemics in the drive towards uniformity can only be appreciated by focusing on the long term evolution that shall be the focus of Chapter Six. Indeed, Canon 32 on emergency baptism quoted above was precisely the starting point of a discussion on the efficacy of baptism and the necessity of the catechumenate in sixth-century letters exchanged between Ferrandus and Fulgentius. The next section shall further show that in the fifth century, the fight against opposing religious groups, particularly Arians, played a major role in initiation practices, which were developed and adapted locally in connection with this evolving context.

²⁰ Munier, Ch., (ed.), *CCSL* 149 (1974), 284-286.

²¹ Ferrandus, *Breviatio canonum*, Canon 226 (Munier, Ch., (ed.), *CCSL* 149 (1974), 305). It is also found in the *collectio Hispana* (*ibid.* 330).

II. The sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus of Carthage and the baptismal preparation in fifth-century Africa

Sermons are an essential source to study how catechumens were initiated in late antique Africa. The only relevant collection currently attached to an African author in the fifth century is that of the twelve/thirteen sermons of Quodvultdeus – compared to more than eight hundred sermons of Augustine. There is a noteworthy imbalance in terms of the preserved evidence, reflecting the results of the medieval transmission of texts on the catechumenate: none of the sermons preserved contain references to *catechumeni*, for which Augustine provided extensive evidence. However, nine of the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus are preached for the baptismal preparation during Lent, before Easter, some mentioning the rite of enrolment of candidates (*dare nomen*) to start the preparation.²² They contain unique details on the rites of initiation and embrace essential steps of the preparation that would be otherwise little known. Thus, they are an invaluable source for the initiation process, which has few parallels in late antique Africa. In comparison, while Augustine is particularly informative on the yearly calls of the bishop to invite candidates and on rules of admission into the baptismal preparation – as we have seen – his *corpus* only preserves ten complete sermons and two fragments preached to candidates during the baptismal preparation, which have been extensively studied.²³ Five were preached on the Lord's Prayer, six on the creed and one after a formal examination. However, they do not provide detailed descriptions of the central rituals of learning the creed and renouncing to the devil.²⁴ While in the preceding chapters I have focused on the *catechumeni* in Augustine, I shall here follow the process of the baptismal preparation in late antique Africa through the sermons attributed to

²² *De cantico novo* (= *Cant*), 1; *De accedentibus ad gratiam* 1 (= *Gr* 1), 2. In Augustine see *Ciu.* XXII, 8.5; *Conf.* VIII, 2.4, 6.14; *Cura mort.* 12, 15; *Ep.* 258, 4; *F. et op.* 6, 8; *S.* 132, 1; *S.* 302, 3.

²³ See chapter 1 p. 20 n. 27.

²⁴ Augustine, *S.* 56, *S.* 57, *S.* 58, *S.* 59aug, (on the Lord's Prayer); *S.* 212, *S.* 213, *S.* 214, *S.* 215 and *Symb. cat* (on the creed); *S.* 216 on an examination. The fragments were recently discovered: *S.* 214A (=Dolbeau 1) on the creed and *S.* 59A on the Lord's Prayer (discovered by Weidmann).

Quodvultdeus to provide a fresh study putting Augustine's better-known material in a broader perspective.²⁵

Few studies have taken these sermons into account for the history of the catechumenate. They accept the attribution of the set to Quodvultdeus of Carthage and often use the sermons as companions to Augustine's sermons, filling the gaps found in either source to suggest a common African pattern of initiation, thus standardising sources.²⁶ Only a few scholars have envisaged Quodvultdeus's sermons as witnesses of otherwise little-known rites.²⁷ It is essential, therefore, to examine these sermons in a new perspective that restores their originality. After showing that there is little ground to attribute the sermons to Quodvultdeus as a single author, I shall attempt to situate each of them within the framework of the preparation to shed light on the practices of the catechumenate that they illustrate. In this endeavour, Augustine and other late antique evidence on the broad organisation of the catechumenate during the period shall serve as points of reference to evaluate the evidence. I shall however be attentive to variation and not assume that standard practices were in place. This would lead me to erase differences in order to bring the information found in these texts in harmony with other late antique evidence. On the contrary, the study of these sermons should enrich our understanding of the catechumenate during the period by highlighting variety and inventiveness as much as commonalities. Leaving aside a detailed analysis of the exegesis, that has been well studied by De Simone, I shall concentrate on the catechumenate

²⁵ During my research, I have carried out a detailed investigation on the rites and procedure of the baptismal preparation in Augustine. I have here chosen to privilege lesser-known other African sources, which I compare with Augustine on the basis of my investigation. Issues of interpretation arising from Augustine's material, which has been excessively standardised, would be worth a separate study: I plan to carry it out elsewhere.

²⁶ Franes, D., (1920), *Die Werke des hl. Quodvultdeus, Bischofs von Karthago: gestorben um 453* (Munich), 60-63; Dondeyne (1932), 16-17; Roetzer (1930), 150-154; Quasten, J., (1956), 'Ein Taufexorcismus bei Augustinus', *REAug* 2, 101-108; Finn, Th., (transl., not.), *ACW* 60 (2004); Johnson (2007), 186-187; Ferguson (2009), 771-775; Harmless (2014), 310-313.

²⁷ Wiegand (1899), 54-60; Saxer (1988), 401-416; Brakmann-Pasquato (2004), 470-472; Metzger-Drew-Brakmann (2004), 543. I have not been able to see Silva, J. C. da, (1987), *A preparação ao batismo em Quodvultdeus* (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Diss. Lic.).

and explore these sermons as single witnesses to the rites and teaching for candidates, each of them offering a partial and peculiar view.²⁸

The attribution to Quodvultdeus

After early discussions rejecting the attribution to Augustine of some of the sermons,²⁹ Le Nain de Tillemont was the first to discuss nine sermons – *De Cantico Novo*, *De Catachysmo*, *De ultima quarta feria*, *De Symbolo* 1-2-3, *De tempore barbarico* I, *Contra Iudaeos, paganos et arianos*, *Adversus Quinque haereses* – that were attributed to Augustine and to suggest that they were all unauthentic and from the period of the Vandal conquest or later, noting in a subsequent study that some were perhaps preached by the bishops Capreolus or Quodvultdeus of Carthage or their priests.³⁰ Morin was then the first to attribute a larger set of twelve sermons – including the former nine – to a same author and around twenty years later to suggest that the author should be the bishop Quodvultdeus of Carthage,³¹ who may also have written the *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei*.³² The attribution has been generally accepted since, particularly after Braun's critical editions of the *Liber* and the sermons, adding a thirteenth sermon to the collection.³³ While the *Liber* is of no help to study the catechumenate, the sermons are an

²⁸ Simone, R. de, (1985), 'The baptismal and christological catechesis of Quodvultdeus', *Augustinianum* 25, 265-282.

²⁹ See Franes (1920), 7-8 for an overview.

³⁰ Le Nain de Tillemont, S., (1710), *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles*, volume 13, 2nd edition (Paris), 934-939 and later volume 16, 2nd edition (1712), 502 and 506. The Maurists also suggested a common authorship (a disciple of Augustine in the Vandal period) for all except *De Cantico Novo* see PL 40 (1841), 625-626. *Adversus Quinque Haereses* and *Contra Iudaeos* now attributed to Quodvultdeus are also analysed with parallels from the other sermons, see PL 42 (1841), 1099 and 1115-1116.

³¹ 'Quodvultdeus 5', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 947-949.

³² Morin, G., (1896), 'Notes d'ancienne littérature ecclésiastique', *RBen* 13, 337-347, at 343; *Id.*, (1914-1919), 'Pour une future édition des opuscules de S. Quodvultdeus évêque de Carthage au Ve siècle', *RBen* 31, 156-162. Morin also provisionally attributed seven other sermons to Quodvultdeus that have been left out since. His early hypothesis was discussed by Wiegand (1899), 53 for whom the sermons to candidates discussed in this study (except *De accedentibus ad gratiam* 1 and 2 not mentioned) are of a same author, to be situated between ca. 450 and 530. Caspari, C. P., (1869), *Ungedruckte, unbeachtete und wenig beachtete Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols und der Glaubensregel*, volume 2 (Christiania), 152 n. 120 suggested the first half of the sixth century for the three sermons on the creed and *Contra Iudaeos*.

³³ The thirteenth sermon is entitled *De quattuor virtutibus caritatis* (= PS-AU s 106; CPL 368). See Braun, R., (transl., not.), *SC* 101-102 (1964); *Id.*, (ed.), *CCSL* 60 (1976), and the survey in Braun, R., (1986), 'Quodvultdeus', in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique* 12, 2882-2889. See sometimes detailed discussions accepting the attribution in: Schepens, P., (1919), 'Un traité à restituer à saint

essential source: although not dated, their late antique African character and shared environment and language have long been recognised. They display close familiarity with Augustine's work, hint at the pressure of Barbarians and polemicise vividly against heretics, particularly Arians. The sermons have to be situated in Africa, often in connection to the Vandal conquest of Africa. They were preached in the fifth century, starting most probably after the beginning of the Pelagian controversy and perhaps mostly before 439 when many Catholic clerics were expelled.

The attribution of the *Liber* to a bishop of Carthage at the time of the Vandal conquest is based on sound arguments,³⁴ while it is more difficult to be sure that this bishop was Quodvultdeus of Carthage and even less that he was the same individual writing letters to Augustine in the late 420s as a deacon, since Quodvultdeus was a common name.³⁵ The attribution of the sermons to Quodvultdeus of Carthage is even more uncertain: although Franes in particular provided arguments to attribute the sermons to a single preacher who would be the same as the author of the *Liber*, critics have raised sensible objections and expressed doubts about the unity of the set of sermons and their attribution. It is noteworthy that Braun's discussion of the sermons mainly consisted in refuting objections rather than providing positive evidence.³⁶ The attribution is based on two assumptions reinforcing each

Quodvultdeus, évêque de Carthage au Ve siècle', *RSR* 9, 230-243; Id., (1923), 'Les oeuvres de saint Quodvultdeus', *RSR* 13, 76-78; Franes (1920); Kalkman, R. G., (1963), *Two Sermons 'De tempore barbarico' Attributed to St. Quodvultdeus, Bishop of Carthage. A study of Text and Attribution with Translation and Commentary* (Catholic University of America, Washington DC), 29-48; Courcelle, P., (1965), 'Quodvultdeus redivivus', *REA* 67, 165-170. Recently, scholars who accept the attribution are for instance: Finn, Th., (1997b), 'Quodvultdeus: The Preacher and the Audience. The Homilies on the Creed', *Studia Patristica* 31, 42-58 almost reprinted as the introduction of Id., (ed.), *ACW* 60, 1-21; Ferguson (2009), 771-775; Mbonigaba, F., (2015), *La traditio symboli nell'Africa cristiana all'epoca dell'invasione dei vandali: introduzione, testo latino e traduzione italiana del Contra Iudaeos, Paganos et Arrianos di Quodvultdeus di Cartagine* (Rome), 47-51.

³⁴ See a summary in Slyke, D. van, (2003), *Quodvultdeus of Carthage: the apocalyptic theology of a Roman African in exile* (Strathfield NSW), 21-48.

³⁵ Thus in *PCBE* 1 (1982), 945-955 there are twenty-five individuals named Quodvultdeus. This is a significant number: for instance in comparison there are only five clerics named "Firmus", although it was a very common name.

³⁶ Braun, R., (transl., not.), *SC* 101 (1964), 88-106. For critiques of the attribution, particularly against Franes (1920) or Braun (1964), see Kappelmacher, A., (1931), 'Echte und unechte Predigten Augustins', *WS* 49, 89-102; Courtois, Ch., (1954), *Victor de Vita et son oeuvre* (Algiers), 60 n. 305; Simonetti, M., (1950), 'Studi sulla letteratura cristiana d'Africa in età vandalica', *RIL* 83, 407-424; Id., (1978a), 'Note sul

other in a circular argument: the sermons were all preached by a same author and this author was necessarily the bishop of Carthage at the time of the Vandal conquest (439), particularly because of references in various sermons to Barbarians, a conquered city, and games.³⁷ The attribution of the sermons to a same author rests on arguments developed since Morin and his followers which mostly focused on common linguistic features and evidence of a culture shared by the bishop of Carthage during the Vandal conquest, the author of the *Liber* and the deacon Quodvultdeus writing to Augustine, such as similar phrases or sentence construction, mentions of the same rites, the use of the same biblical text, an interest in heresies and synthetic summaries on Christianity, a shared devotion for the martyrs Cyprian and Perpetua and Felicity, references to the fact that the preacher studied the Scriptures since childhood and a taste for modesty.³⁸

It is clear that such arguments are not decisive but only demonstrate that all this evidence probably originates from a common environment. The assumption about the author may also be questioned: on the one hand, since priests were granted the right to preach in Augustine's time and could be in charge of the teaching of catechumens together with deacons, there is no compelling reason to suggest that all sermons were preached by a bishop;³⁹ on the other hand, details in each sermon about the historical context cannot be

testo di alcuni passi di opere attribuite a Quodvultdeus', *RFIC* 106, 291-299; *Id.*, (1978b), 'Qualche riflessione su Quodvultdeus di Cartagine', *RSLR* 14, 201-207. See a summary of the debate with more bibliography in van Slyke (2003), 48-63.

³⁷ The sermon *De tempore barbarico* II, 5 would refer to a conquered city identified with Carthage in 439 and serves to date and situate the other sermons before it; the preacher would be Quodvultdeus because he is mentioned by Victor of Vita (*Historia persecutionis* I, 15) as the bishop of Carthage, expelled amongst other clerics after the conquest. See Franes (1920), 11-18. Kappelmacher (1931), 96-98 suggests that this sermon and *Gr* 1 and 2 were preached by Augustine in a besieged Hippo: these contrasting views show the weakness of the hypotheses (see note 42).

³⁸ For example Morin (1914-1919); Franes (1920), 18-37; Braun, R., (transl., not.), *SC* 101 (1964), 107-113.

³⁹ Deogratias, deacon of Carthage was in charge of teaching catechumens, see Augustine, *Cat. rud.* Finn, Th., (transl., not.), *ACW* 60 (2004), 3 followed by Mbonigaba (2015), 68 n. 34 and 72-73, thinks that the sermon *Contra Iudaeos* (= *Jud*) was preached by Quodvultdeus as deacon in the early 430s because it mentions a *pater familias* handing over the creed – this may however refer to God. On priests preaching see Augustine, *Ep.* 41, 1; *S.* 20; Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 5. Sermons written by others could be used: see Augustine, *Ep.* 23A*, 3; *S.* 214 (model sermon). *S.* 216 was perhaps preached by Augustine as a priest. See more in Olivar, A., (1991), *La predicación cristiana antigua* (Barcelona), 537-545.

harmonised to suggest a single and precise setting and dating – Carthage, between Quodvultdeus’ election and 439⁴⁰ – knowing that the common authorship is not proved.

The only area where progress has been substantial is the study of the manuscript tradition, but despite its claims, Braun’s extensive work does not provide stronger ground for the attribution.⁴¹ All sermons are preserved under the name of Augustine – some perhaps since the fifth century⁴² – and generally circulated with authentic texts of Augustine.⁴³ The three sermons *De symbolo* (“on the creed”), some of the few that circulated together, are often transmitted in a set of four sermons, the first one being distinguished and attributed to Augustine (*De symbolo ad catechumenos*) since the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ The fact that a number of the sermons are found together in some manuscripts does not constitute solid proof: it is easy to explain the association of sermons as the work of early medieval compilers who attempted to create collections of Augustine’s texts on faith, baptism and initiation against heretics, particularly Arians.⁴⁵ More broadly, except Augustine’s case – for which Possidius’ *Indiculum* and the substantial *corpus* of texts provides extensive evidence to draw parallels⁴⁶ – the very idea of providing an authorship and a strict geographical localisation for pseudonymous sermons on initiation from late antique Africa that are not all transmitted together as part of a clearly identifiable late antique collection is problematic because of the lack of evidence that would connect the sermons to each other and point to their composition

⁴⁰ See Braun (1986), 2883-2884 even suggesting a precise chronology for the sermons; also Finn, Th., (transl., not.), *ACW* 60 (2004), 63.

⁴¹ Braun (1976), VII-CVI. See as well Franes (1920), 1-9; Kalkman (1963), 10-28.

⁴² The sermon *Gr* 2 – and thus consequently *Gr* 1 – was probably already attributed to Augustine by the author of the *Liber* – Quodvultdeus ? – if it is identified with the reference made in *Liber* II, 25 to an explanation of 2 Samuel, 6, 16-23. Franes (1920), 45-47 (followed by Braun (1964), 101) explains it by formulating the improbable hypothesis that *Gr* 2 borrows from a lost sermon of Augustine, while Kappelmacher (1931) accepts the attribution to Augustine. Knowing that authorship fluctuates in antiquity, neither Franes nor Kappelmacher’s hypotheses are necessary: *Gr* 1 and 2 may be unauthentic but already attributed to Augustine by contemporaries.

⁴³ See *CPPM* 1103-1109, 1204, 1205, 1728, 1729, 1730.

⁴⁴ On Augustine, *Symb. cat.* see chapter 3 p. 98 n. 77.

⁴⁵ Laon, *BM* 136 (s. IX) is a good example as the earliest witness of a collection containing seven of the nine sermons discussed by Le Nain de Tillemont (excluding *Contra Iudaeos* and *Adversus Quinque haereses* see note 30) starting with Augustine, *Symb. cat.* and followed by other African pseudonymous works against Arians. The other sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus do not circulate with this collection.

⁴⁶ Possidius, *Indiculum* X⁶, 175 is however incomplete as it only lists three sermons on the creed compared to the six today attributed to Augustine (*S.* 212, *S.* 213, *S.* 214, *S.* 214A (=Dolbeau 1), *S.* 215; *Symb. cat.*).

by a single individual.⁴⁷ In this study, therefore, the sermons shall not be considered as the work of Quodvultdeus and it shall not be assumed that they were all preached by the same individual in the same city. The sermons shall be studied for the initiation of catechumens in Africa between the beginning of the fifth century and the Vandal period, perhaps in Carthage and the surrounding region. Reading these sermons without assuming that they are the work of a single author shall provide a fresh perspective, stressing diversity and adaptations in the catechesis and rites performed.

The baptismal preparation: transforming the self, renouncing the devil and believing in God

From concealment you were each presented before the entire church, where, with your head – once erect in pride and malice – bowed, you were standing barefoot on goatskin. [...] He has probed, he has examined, he has touched the hearts of his servants with fear of him; by his power he has caused the devil to flee, and he has freed his servants from the devil's dominion. [...] And so the purified family of the redeemer, after it had chanted the song of salvation, received the creed as a remedy against the venom of the serpent. [...] In short, he sees that his *rat-traps have been broken and we have been set free: our help is in the name of the Lord* (Ps 123, 7-8). If our help is in his name, let us renounce the devil, his pomps and his angels. You have heard this and you have also professed aloud that you renounce the devil, his pomp, and his angels.⁴⁸

This important ritual session, here described in *Sy* 1, was certainly the climax of the preparation for baptism and had a deep significance for candidates. Amongst a number of rites, it prominently included a public renunciation of the devil and a profession of faith, demonstrating their new commitment to the whole community. Six sermons were preached as explanations some time after the ritual session: *De symbolo III* (= *Sy* 1-2-3), *Adversus Iudaeos, paganos et Arrianos* (= *Jud*) and *De accedentibus ad gratiam II* (= *Gr* 1 and *Gr* 2).⁴⁹ It is noteworthy that there is no parallel description of this rite in any of Augustine's sermons: the closest parallels are Sermons 215 and 216. The first was preached after the creed was recited (perhaps a solemn *redditio symboli*): it explains the creed memorised by candidates and it allusively refers

⁴⁷ This was noted by Kappelmacher (1931), 101. A detailed demonstration of this point is outside the scope of this study, but I plan to carry it out elsewhere.

⁴⁸ *Sy* 1, 1 (Finn, Th., (transl., not.), *ACW* 60 (2004), 23-24).

⁴⁹ Saxer (1988), 403 wrongly situates *Gr* 1-2 before the renunciation.

to a renunciation of the devil.⁵⁰ The latter preaches about a new commitment and generically describes an examination of candidates who were exorcised on goat-skins. It is uncertainly situated, probably at the beginning of Lent as a sermon following the admission of *competentes* to prepare for baptism.⁵¹ While all the six above-mentioned sermons closely connect the renunciation to the creed, in Augustine, only Sermon 215 does it explicitly, but without further details. Moreover, Sermon 215 sharply differs in its style and concern, particularly as it does not include any polemical discussion; as most other sermons of Augustine on the creed, it puts most emphasis on memorising the creed, which was not to be put into writing.⁵² By contrast, the sermons here considered all dwell extensively on heresiological discourse, while only *Sy* 2 refers to memorisation. Thus, these sermons offer an alternative and illuminating view on catecheses and ritual practices in fifth-century Africa.

The six sermons are all long and detailed: *Sy* 2-3 reach around 4500 words while *Gr* 1 and its continuation *Gr* 2 come together at more than 8000 words, which is about the length of *Sy* 1, while *Jud* is just above 7000 words. Thus, the rites discussed were a very important moment in the preparation, worthy of a lengthy catechesis. Three other sermons, not connected to this rite of renunciation and adhesion, much shorter and less informative about the initiation process, still provide rare references to the candidates and give a further idea of the catechesis imparted to them before baptism: *De ultima quarta feria* (= *Fer*) focuses on the Passion of Christ and was preached on Holy Wednesday, *De cataclysmo* (= *Cata*) is a remarkable example of African baptismal catechesis preached shortly before baptism and providing a detailed explanation of the theological significance of the initiation rites,⁵³ and *De cantico novo* (= *Cant*),

⁵⁰ Augustine, *S.* 215, 1.

⁵¹ Augustine, *S.* 216, 11; as suggested by Busch (1938), 430-31; Monachino (1947), 172; Audet (1954), 158; de Latte (1975), 192-194; Harmless (2014), 310. The sermon is studied in Harmless (2014), 310-322, who however merges evidence in Augustine and Quodvultdeus.

⁵² Augustine, *S.* 215, 1; it only refers to heretics most briefly at 215, 9. See as well on memorisation: *S.* 58, 11.13 (for the Lord's Prayer); *S.* 213, 11; *Symb. cat.* 1, 1. Against writing the creed but memorising it: *S.* 212, 2; 213, 2; *S.* 214, 1-2. On the importance of oral performance in the process see Harrison (2013), chapter 4.

⁵³ *Cata* 1: "In proximo est dies redemptionis vestrae"; 3: "Ecce, dilectissimi, venturi estis ad fontem aquae" (Braun, R., (ed.), *CCSL* 60 (1976), 409-410).

exhorting candidates to a newly begun life, cannot be clearly situated but may have been preached at the beginning of Lent, like Augustine's Sermon 216.⁵⁴

When detached from Quodvultdeus' authorship, the sermons can no longer be precisely dated in the 430s. They themselves contain little information on the historical context and may have been preached at different periods. There is no reference to Barbarians or to difficult times in *Cant*, *Sy* 2 and 3. Moreover, while *Sy* 2 and 3 particularly polemicise against Arians, *Cant* only refutes them as part of a triad of heretics with Manichaeans and Pelagians, the latter being prominently refuted throughout the sermon. Thus, knowing that Augustine polemicised against Arians, particularly towards the end of his life, these sermons, in particular *Cant*, may have been preached during his episcopate, most probably after 418.⁵⁵ The other sermons are strongly anti-Arian, while often also refuting other groups, amongst which Pelagians for *Cata* and *Fer*.⁵⁶ However, they also refer to a context of war: *Cata* mentions Barbarians oppressing the congregation,⁵⁷ *Jud* refers to a difficult situation, while *Gr* 2, which is a continuation of *Gr* 1, starts with a reminder of the past sermon and a long introductory exhortation to the audience asked to persevere in the midst of the evil of the world, with reference to captivity and a context of war, most probably hinting at the Vandal conquest.⁵⁸ *Fer* also mentions the evils endured by his community and clearly states that he preaches in

⁵⁴ There are few hints in the sermons at the possible readings of the day that could help situating them. Only *Fer* 1 mentions Lk 14, 15-24 as the Gospel read that day. On the theme of *Cant* in Augustine and its roots in the Psalms see Rondet, H., (1964), 'Le thème du cantique nouveau dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustin', in Alverny, M.-Th. d', et al. (eds.), (1964), *L'homme devant Dieu: mélanges offerts au père Henri de Lubac* (Paris), 341-366.

⁵⁵ The dating depends on the reference to Pelagians (*Pelagiani*) in *Cant* 8, a term used by Augustine first in *Nupt. et conc.* and *An. et or.* written in 419-421 and *Ep.* 202A from 419. See Berrouard, M.-F., (1981), 'Les lettres 6* et 19* de St. Augustin. Leur date et les renseignements qu'elles apportent sur l'évolution de la crise pélagienne', *REAug* 27, 264-277, esp. 270-274. Against Arians, see for instance Augustine, *Conl. Max.* and *C. Max.* dated after 427. For a recent overview on Arians both before and after Augustine: Whelan, R., (2016), 'Arianism in Africa', in Berndt, G. M., Steinacher, R., (eds.), (2016), *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed* (London), 239-255.

⁵⁶ *Fer* 5; *Cata* 6.

⁵⁷ *Cata* 6: "Iam nec barbaros timent" (Braun, R., (ed.), *CCSL* 60 (1976), 419).

⁵⁸ *Gr* 2, 1-3; *Jud* 1. *Fer* 6-7 recalls a sermon previously preached about how to handle difficult times, which may be *Gr* 2, in which case *Fer* would be the third sermon of the same preacher. Le Nain de Tillemont (1710), 935 and others after him prefer to relate *Fer* to *De tempore barbarico* I. The possible links between the sermons remain hypotheses.

Africa.⁵⁹ Thus, these sermons are more likely to have been preached starting from the late 420s into the Vandal period. *Jud* also extensively borrows from the eighteenth book of the *De civitate Dei*, thus it should have been preached after its diffusion in the 420s.⁶⁰

It is remarkable that although they do not necessarily all pertain to the same historical context and liturgical setting, all the sermons broadly share the same structure, starting with exhortations to preserve the benefits of the rites and the new life begun, then providing explanations and exegesis related to the liturgical setting of the day, and finally focusing on the Church, often refuting Arians and concluding on examples to foster unity and discipline within the congregation. This, I shall argue, results from the fact that they are part of the same genre, catechesis to baptismal candidates, and thus follow a set of conventions, amongst which were the recalling or anticipation of rituals and the refutation of religious opponents, which played a major role.⁶¹ I shall also show that within this shared framework they display evidence of remarkable creativity both in terms of the rites and the catechesis. I shall here first focus on the main rites of renunciation and adhesion, which are best explored by analysing all the six sermons on the creed together to highlight common features. However, to emphasise the diverse and fragmentary nature of the evidence, instead of merging all sermons into a single presentation, I shall take *Sy* 1, the most complete description, as a point of reference and comparison. I shall then compare all the nine sermons as sources for the catechesis provided to candidates, particularly analysing their references to the status and progress of candidates in the initiation, their use of initiation as a way to foster unity within the broader congregation, and their conclusive remarks on the Church, demonstrating the significance of the polemical context in the initiation process.

⁵⁹ *Fer* 6.

⁶⁰ See more later in this chapter.

⁶¹ On the rhetorical structure of *Jud* see Mbonigaba (2015), 92-103.

1. The rites of renunciation and adhesion

In *Sy* 1 the preacher begins by stating that his catechesis is intended as an explanation both on the rites (*sacramenta*) of the preceding night and on the creed.⁶² For the preacher, candidates need the sermon as fitting food (*competens cibum*) through which God gives the increase – perhaps an allusion to their status as *competentes* and the common African interpretation of 1 Cor 3, 6 in link to the catechumenate. *Sy* 1 then contains a unique and detailed description of the initiation process: candidates, who were at first gathered in a separate place (*ex locis secretis*), come that night – and not on other nights (*praeteritis noctibus actum non est*) – each at a time (*singuli*) in front of the whole community (*in conspectu totius ecclesiae*), bow their neck, put their feet on goatskin, undergo an examination (*examen*), are freed from the devil and hear the name of Christ invoked upon them. During this humbling rite, they all chant Psalm 138, 3: “Probe me, Lord, and know my heart”. The preacher explains that this dramatic rite, identical for everyone no matter their social status, is meant to test candidates, expel the devil and induce fear of God. After the chanting, the ritual session includes a renunciation of the devil in three parts, renouncing “the devil, his pomps and his angels”.⁶³ It is followed by the reception of the creed, a *sacramentum*⁶⁴ and new weapon against the devil together with the banner of the cross (*crucis vexillo*) that bring the victory to Christians. From this time, candidates are soldiers of Christ, new recruits (*tirones Dei*) ready to fight with the weapon of the *sacramenta* – this terminology recalls Augustine’s Sermon 216.⁶⁵ Thus the creed received is a new step in their membership complementary to the cross that was until then their main marker of Christian belonging. *Sy* 2 and 3 contain short allusions to the ritual actions performed, mostly corresponding to *Sy* 1, again using very similar language

⁶² *Sy* 1, 1.

⁶³ *Sy* 1, 1.

⁶⁴ The repeated use of *sacramentum* for the creed in these sermons further shows, as it has already been suggested for the canon of the council of Hippo and for Augustine in general, that the term often points to rites of initiation.

⁶⁵ *Sy* 1, 1; Augustine *S.* 216, 2 (*contirones*).

to refer to the rituals. *Sy* 3 lists exorcisms, prayers, chants, insufflations (*insufflationes*), goat-skins, bowing necks and bare feet, actions which for him are *sacramenta* and food in the womb. Van Slyke has suggested that the *insufflationes* are not exorcising actions but the breathing to bless or bestow the Spirit in the phase of adhesion following the renunciation of the devil.⁶⁶ The preacher states that the devil has been expelled from the candidates when they renounced him and relates these actions to the reception of the creed which he is about to explain.⁶⁷ *Sy* 2 is much less informative about the rite but similarly connects the recitation of the creed to the renunciation of the devil. *Jud* and *Gr* 1 also provide brief descriptions of the rites that bear strong commonalities to *Sy* 1. In *Jud*, there are references to the great *sacramentum* that was celebrated on the night before (*transactae noctis*), the expulsion of the devil and the introduction of Christ in each candidate as they put Christ's yoke – in connection to Mt 11, 29-30, and the addition that they shall now receive an explanation of the creed that they have recently received.⁶⁸ In *Gr* 1, the preacher also points to a rite that has happened during the past night (*transactae noctis*), when candidates received a remedy (*medicina*), which is a reference to the creed.⁶⁹ "Those who come to grace" received the words of the Father as an antidote against the venom of the snake of the devil, submitted their necks to a light yoke – again Mt 11, 29-30 – and were assembled in public (*ad publicum*) where they renounced the devil and received Christ.⁷⁰ Finally, *Jud*, *Gr* 1 and *Sy* 2, as *Sy* 1 seem to refer to the same phrase of renunciation of the devil structured in three parts, renouncing "the devil, his pomps and his angels", most probably corresponding to the liturgical formula that was used, attested as well in Augustine.⁷¹ *Jud*, *Gr* 1, *Sy* 2 and 3 thus seems all to comment on the same main rite as *Sy* 1.

⁶⁶ On the often drawn distinction between *exsufflare* (breathe to expel the devil) and *insufflare* (breathe to bestow the Spirit) see Slyke, D. van, (2007), 'Breathing blessing, bestowing the Spirit: "Insufflatio" as a distinct ritual gesture in ancient Christian initiation', *EphLit* 121, 301-327. For van Slyke the distinction was common in the fourth and fifth centuries particularly in Africa but blurred in the early middle ages.

⁶⁷ *Sy* 3, 1.

⁶⁸ *Jud* 1.

⁶⁹ *Gr* 1, 1.

⁷⁰ *Gr* 1, 2.

⁷¹ *Jud* 1: "Renuntiare diabolo, pompis et angelis eius"; 3: "Renuntiet diabolo, pompis et angelis eius"; *Gr* 1, 3 and particularly 4: "Renuntiare pompis diaboli, et angelis eius" *Sy* 2, 1: "Renuntiet diabolo, pompis et

However, each sermon contains peculiar details not found in *Sy* 1, but sometimes shared between them. The preacher of *Jud* closely relates the reception of the creed to the sermon and notes that he is preaching on a special day with a crowded assembly (*tantae congregationis*): playing with the imagery of light and darkness, he situates the sermon after a night of vigil during which candidates prayed and chanted psalms.⁷² These precisions seem to partially correspond to *Gr* 1 in which the preacher states that his sermon is required because it is a day of special solemnity (*sollemnitatis congregationis*) and provides a striking description of the process compared and contrasted to contemporary schools: “You have seen how this teacher (*magister*) has prepared the classroom (*auditorium*) [...] and he made you stay in the morning in front of him (cf. Ps 5, 4-5), listen and say what should be renounced (*renuntiandum*), and in whom to believe (*credendum*)”.⁷³ The preacher seems to situate the rites in the morning and the reference to candidates who are there to “listen and say” might seem in contradiction with the earlier statement in *Gr* 1 that the rites happened on the preceding night. A way to solve this would be to assume that *Gr* 1 implies the same practice as *Jud*: the rites started at night as a vigil and finished in the morning with the renunciation and the creed, followed by the sermon preached after dawn.⁷⁴ In contrast, *Sy* 2 and 3 do not refer to the moment when the rite was performed. *Sy* 3 only states that the ritual actions “were and are made (*acta sunt et aguntur*)”, thus not clearly situating nor confining them to a single session.⁷⁵ *Sy* 3 however provides an explanation of why the sermon is closely connected to the rites but only preached after they were performed, seeing the ritual cleansing of the candidates’ hearts as a necessary condition

angelis eius” (Braun, R., (ed.), *CCSL* 60 (1976), 228; 335; 442-444); Augustine, *S.* 215, 1: “Renuntiantes enim diabolo, pompis et angelis eius” (*PL* 38 (1841), 1072). Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 10 is the earliest occurrence of the renunciation formula. On the various formulae with more bibliography see Slyke, D. van, (2005), ‘The devil and his poms in fifth-century Carthage: renouncing spectacula with spectacular imagery’, *DOP* 59, 53-72.

⁷² *Jud* 1: “[...] neque enim delectatione somni sopitos sensus nostros agnovimus [...] sed vigilando, orando, psallendo, contra adversarium diabolum dimicando, et magnam lucem infusam cordibus nostris sensimus, et in nocte opera diei peregrimus. [...] Quid sit hoc, ex verbis symboli quod modo accepistis, vobis expositum esse cognoscite” (Braun, R., (ed.), *CCSL* 60 (1976), 227).

⁷³ *Gr* 1, 2 (my translation).

⁷⁴ Saxer (1988), 406 seems not to have seen this difficulty and simply stated that the preacher spoke in the morning.

⁷⁵ *Sy* 3, 1.

to hear an explanation. This cleansing is the renunciation of the devil, which according to both *Gr* 1 and *Sy* 3 took the form of questions and answers, candidates replying “I renounce”, probably to three questions: “Do you renounce the devil?”, “his pomps?” and “his angels?”.⁷⁶ *Gr* 1 insists on the fact that all candidates replied together (*una voce*) using the first person singular rather than the plural to highlight the unity of the group since the time when they had enrolled for baptismal preparation (*qui nomina vestra conscribenda dedistis*): they become one single individual (*ex multis una persona*), representing the Church.⁷⁷ *Sy* 3 extends this to the creed, noting that candidates have themselves pronounced “I believe (*credo*)”: this is a clear allusion to the fact that the creed was recited, either in full declaratory form by the candidates or in interrogatory form, candidates simply replying “*credo*” to each proposition.⁷⁸ In contrast, Augustine’s Sermon 215 clearly states that each candidate recited the creed on its own (“*singuli reddidistis*”).⁷⁹ Perhaps in connection with this first recitation, *Sy* 2 starts with a reference to memorisation recalling Augustine’s sermons: “You have come to know that the mystery (*sacramentum*) of the creed, which, as required, you have fixed in your memory (*retinetis*) as your salvation commanded, is the foundation of the Catholic faith”.⁸⁰

In summary, it can only be inferred that all the sermons followed exactly the same liturgical practice. It is possible but uncertain that they followed a rite celebrated only once (*Sy* 1) that was part of a vigil with chants and prayers (*Jud*), the sermon being preached on the following morning (*Gr* 1). However, silences and differences in sermons leave open the possibility of diverging ways of organising the preparation in Africa, some communities preferring a unique rite, while others repeated it. Quasten noted a parallel with Theodore of Mopsuestia, who also refers to a rite of exorcisms on goat-skins that was repeated at the

⁷⁶ As noted by Saxer (1988), 408-410.

⁷⁷ *Gr* 1, 2.

⁷⁸ *Sy* 3, 4; this is also hinted in *Adversus quinque haereses* VI, 7 where interrogations are quoted in full as noted by Westra, L. H., (2002), *The apostles’ creed: origin, history, and some early commentaries* (Utrecht), 169 n. 239.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *S.* 215, 1.

⁸⁰ *Sy* 1, 1 (Finn, Th., (transl., not.), *ACW* 60 (2004), 51).

beginning of Lent and on Easter Vigil, and argued that Quodvultdeus' community, because of the reference to a single rite in *Sy* 1 only celebrated it just before baptism.⁸¹ This parallel cannot be strictly used to interpret the sermons and date the rituals but it still suggests that the repetition of such rites was possible. The sermons only show with certainty that they were all preached in communities where an important rite of renunciation and adhesion took place sometime before it was explained in a sermon, and perhaps repeated as suggested in *Sy* 3. *Gr* 1, *Sy* 2 and 3 imply that candidates received and recited – or replied to – the creed some time before the sermon was given, having started the process of memorisation according to *Sy* 2.

Despite widespread consensus in scholarship, there is no evidence in any of the sermons about their respective dating during the Lenten period. It can only be said that they were all preached after a main rite of renunciation and profession of faith which for most of them – except perhaps *Jud* – cannot have taken place on Easter Vigil, because they clearly state that candidates are not yet baptised.⁸² The sermons were probably preached at least a week before Easter but there is no evidence to corroborate this hypothesis and no reason to suggest, as scholars have stated on the basis of hasty conclusions drawn from Augustine's material, that the creed was first given to candidates on a Saturday two weeks before Easter, then recited the next Saturday night, the sermons being preached on the following day, Sunday a week before Easter.⁸³ Although the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus could broadly correspond both to a "handing over" or to a "recitation" of the creed (*traditio* and *redditio symboli*) found in Augustine as two separate rituals happening over a week and allowing time for candidates to memorise the received creed before they recite it, the sermons here discussed leave no clear clue about such a two-step process. Moreover, contrary to common assumptions, Augustine's sermons do not provide evidence for a precise dating of each ceremony during Lent but only

⁸¹ Quasten (1956), 104.

⁸² See *Gr* 1, 2 preached to candidates before *Gr* 2; *Sy* 1, 1; *Sy* 3, 1. *Sy* 2 has no evidence. *Jud* is similarly unspecific but points to a vigil: Roetzer (1930), 150-154; de Simone (1985), 272-273; Brakmann-Pasquato (2004), 472 therefore propose that it was preached at Easter Vigil.

⁸³ Finn, Th., (transl., not.), *ACW* 60 (2004), 3-8; Ferguson (2009), 772.

for a relative chronology.⁸⁴ There is nothing to suggest that the rites mentioned in the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus have to correspond to a single rite of examination, called the “scrutiny” in scholarship that would be the same in these sermons, in Augustine’s sermons and in other regions.⁸⁵ The fact that these sermons closely relate the humbling rite on goat-skins to the renunciation and the profession of faith, while Augustine’s Sermon 216 does not, shows that the evidence on baptismal preparation found in African sources should not be overly harmonised.⁸⁶ Finally, there is no trace in the sermons of any pre-baptismal explanation of the Lord’s Prayer, contrary to what is known from Augustine, the first to witness this practice in the West.⁸⁷ It is plausible, however, that it was taught in several African communities, knowing that many anonymous sermons that may have been preached in Africa – but were not generally attributed to Quodvultdeus⁸⁸ – comment on the Lord’s Prayer, as we shall see later. Thus, while leaving many gaps in our knowledge, the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus contain uniquely detailed descriptions of rites of the preparation for baptism that show the complexity and variety of initiation practices in late antique Africa.

⁸⁴ Augustine’s sermons are most allusive about the ceremonies: they only show that the *traditio symboli* happened on an unknown day during Lent, followed one week later by a first *redditio symboli* and, on the same day, the *traditio orationis* (handing over of the Lord’s Prayer). One week later, there was the *redditio orationis* (recitation of the Lord’s Prayer), and finally, on Holy Saturday during the Easter vigil, there was a final solemn *redditio symboli* but no solemn *redditio orationis*. Instead, the newly baptised recited it during mass on Easter day (see S. 213, 1 and 11; S. 58, 1.1 and 11.13; S. 59, 1.1 and 4.7). See Roetzer (1930), 148-150; Grossi (1993), 90; Verbraken, P.-P., De Coninck, L., Coppieters ’t Wallant, B., Demeulenaere, R., Dolbeau, F., (eds.), *CCSL* 41AA (2008), 150-151 all rightly refraining from precisely situating sermons on specific days of Lent. For diverging hypotheses, impossible to prove however, see for instance Dondeyne (1932), 13-14; Bouhot, J.-P., (1980), ‘Une ancienne homélie catéchétique pour la tradition de l’oraison dominicale’, *Augustinianum* 20, 69-78 at 70-71 n. 8; Saxer (1988), 386.

⁸⁵ Despite Harmless (2014), 309-313 with further bibliography. Mann, P. M., (2011), *How Rituals Form and Transform: The Scrutiny Rite from Medieval to Modern Times* (Catholic University of America, Washington DC, PhD Thesis), 48-149 (Quodvultdeus: 133-138) well represents and summarises this scholarship based on early medieval sources.

⁸⁶ Thus against Dondeyne (1932), 16; Quasten (1956) 101-102; Poque, S., (transl., not.), *SC* 116 (1966), 26-33, Saxer (1988), 388-389 and Harmless (2014), 310-313, all suggesting that Quodvultdeus’ sermons and Augustine, S. 216 refer to the same and single ritual.

⁸⁷ Augustine, S. 56, S. 57, S. 58, S. 59aug, S. 59A.

⁸⁸ Quodvultdeus has been suggested as author by Morin for QU tr 1 = *CPL* 414 = *CPPM* 1975 (*Inc.*: “Videmus dilectissimi vestram sanctam devotionem”) on the Lord’s Prayer to candidates.

2. “Anyone who desires the baptism of Christ aspires to a new life”⁸⁹: catechesis on the initiation process

Old things have passed away: what sort of old things? You were sons of Adam, sons of flesh. New things have happened: what sort of new things? That you have become sons of God, sons of spirit. Old things have passed away, you were earth; now new things have happened: you have now become almost of heaven. [...] Old things have passed, you worshipped stones, new things have come, you adore the true God. Old things have passed, mortality has passed, new things have come: immortality has been promised. Old things have passed, the land of oldness has passed, new things have come, Jerusalem the city of heavenly novelty has followed. Those of you who have given their names have desired to reach that new city.⁹⁰

Beyond the rite of renunciation and adhesion, the nine sermons preached to candidates are precious sources to study the content of catechesis and its link with rites, shedding light on the preacher’s and the audience’s understanding of the initiation process as a radical transformation of the self. The passage quoted, strikingly describing candidates as sons of God, shows that the enrolment to prepare for baptism was understood as a major step in the acquisition of a new status within the community. The sermons all highlight the significant commitment and rules of behaviour that the progress in the initiation process implies. Despite the fact that six of them focus on the creed, all the sermons share a similar structure: they first explain the initiation and the impact that it should have on the lives of candidates, who are invited to put their ritual commitment into practice and start a new life, and they are all meant to offer candidates a comprehensive training on the core beliefs of Christians, following the specific interpretation of the community in opposition to other religious groups. In this section, I shall study and compare the catechesis of each sermon by looking first at the way in which they relate the preparation for baptism to a commitment to a new way of life and the language and imagery employed to refer to candidates preparing for baptism. I shall suggest that catechesis aimed at accompanying the ritual process by constantly stressing the necessity to conform one’s life to the ritual training received. I shall show that this function of the

⁸⁹ *Cant* 1.

⁹⁰ *Cant* 1 (my translation).

catechesis extended to the whole community, making of the initiation process an opportunity for renewing the commitment of all. I shall then more specifically compare the style of the explanations given, particularly on the creed, and explore to what extent they diverge in the emphasis put on polemical debates, assessing the significance of the “single Church” mentioned in the creed in the context of competition between rival Christian churches. Despite the fact that most sermons are similar in structure and content, significant differences emerge which highlight the changing nature of catechesis and initiation in general.

The impact of performance: initiation imagery and community dynamics

The sermons all start with a discussion of the preparation for baptism as a process that brings candidates to a new status within the community and has an impact on the whole community. The initiation of catechumens, as already stressed in our study of Augustine, had the function of renewing the commitment of all. Although all the sermons are primarily addressed to candidates, they all hint at the fact that the broader community of the faithful was also present and in particular women – often more specifically virgins (*virgines*) – probably an important group within the audience of some of the sermons.⁹¹ The sermons often combine moral exhortations to candidates with references to the community of the baptised, with the aim of creating greater cohesion. *Sy* 1 and 3 start with long exhortations to candidates to renounce spectacles in the circus and the theatre.⁹² While *Sy* 3 briefly asks candidates to put the renunciation into practice by avoiding the bad example of *fideles* who pray in the church and then go to the theatre,⁹³ *Sy* 1 is much more detailed, drawing a comparison, like Augustine often did, between the mundane spectacles in the theatre and the spiritual spectacles in the church.⁹⁴ Thus, looking for remarkable contests in the Old Testament that can compare with

⁹¹ Augustine, *S.* 58, 1.1 similarly notes that everyone is present to hear the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer on Easter Vigil.

⁹² On this theme and the renunciation see van Slyke (2005).

⁹³ *Sy* 3, 1.

⁹⁴ *Sy* 1, 2.

spectacles in the circus, the preacher evokes the fight between Esau and Jacob in Rebekah's womb, where Esau represents the Jews and Jacob the predestined Christians who are received in baptism by the *fideles* as godparents.⁹⁵ In contrast, *Gr* 1 focuses at length on sins arising from the five senses, particularly adultery resulting from sight – although spectacles are also mentioned in contrast to churchgoing – and reflects on Jesus' sayings on cutting off one's limb and plucking out one's eye to avoid temptation (Mt 18, 8-9), complemented with quotations from Paul. The preacher particularly refers to chaste and virgin men and women in the audience (*sancti dei continentis et virgines*) to argue against castration and for a spiritual reading of the New Testament, thus exhorting the audience to cut off evil in themselves rather than harm their body.⁹⁶ *Sy* 3 also directly addresses the virgins in the audience when commenting on Christ's Incarnation and Passion, emphasising the role of Christ as a mediator restoring the fallen man and exhorting virgins to praise virginity and imitate Mary despite the fact that they are not mothers.⁹⁷ The preacher of *Cata* also seems to have had women particularly in mind, his final words focusing on married women and recommending them to avoid wearing precious garments and jewellery.⁹⁸

Gr 2, a continuation of the commentary on the creed started in *Gr* 1, also includes moral exhortations on the rites to be celebrated: the context of war leads the preacher to reply to those who blame God for the difficult times and argue for the necessity to hurry to baptism. Speaking in terms close to Augustine's conceptions, the preacher notes that God is just and can ask for debts of sins at any time since no one is free from sin, but all are sinners after Adam,⁹⁹ further underlining that the exegesis planned in *Gr* 1 on the arch, David and Michal in 2 Samuel 6, 16-23, is most appropriate for the situation, the Flood resembling the

⁹⁵ *Sy* 1, 2. It is difficult here to know whether the preacher only primarily had in mind small children or also adults as *infantes* born in baptism.

⁹⁶ *Gr* 1, 3-7.

⁹⁷ *Sy* 3, 4.

⁹⁸ *Cata* 6.

⁹⁹ *Gr* 2, 3.

current war and the story providing a mysterious figure of the Passion of Christ.¹⁰⁰ In its explanation, *Gr* 2 also includes a discussion of the Eucharist referring to the fact that the faithful (*fideles*) know the rite in contrast to the candidates,¹⁰¹ a kind of veiled allusion to the rite that was common in late antique preaching as we have seen in Chapter Three. It shows that the faithful in the audience served as a way to trigger the curiosity of candidates and their wish to become part of the community of the baptised.

The preacher of *Jud* makes clear that he shall comment on the creed only after having shed light on the renunciation: starting from original sin, *Jud* contains a long admonition to renounce the inheritance of Adam in the expectation of the last Judgment.¹⁰² Drawing a comparison with the contemporary practice of justice, the preacher imagines the last Judgment as a trial opposing human beings as orphans (*pupilli*) and the devil over the debt contracted with the Father, the apostles acting as defence lawyers exhorting all to renounce the devil.¹⁰³ The preacher imagines a discussion between the devil and God, which shall focus on an examination of debts still to repay by each individual and a profession of faith to ascertain whether they shall be given to the devil or to God. *Jud* therefore exhorts the candidates to keep renouncing the devil and adhering to the faith that they have professed after their baptism, avoiding the bad example of some baptised Christians, particularly focusing on those who attend shows in the circus and the amphitheatre.¹⁰⁴

Sy 2 likewise exhorts the audience to penance and good works referring to the trial at the end of times, and to the three days of the resurrection representing the three ages, before the law, under the law and under grace, identifying the current age as the third when penance is needed to be resurrected with Christ.¹⁰⁵ Persevering against sin is also a central concern of *Sy* 1-2-3 in the explanation of the article of the creed on the forgiveness of sin, *Sy* 2 and 3

¹⁰⁰ *Gr* 2, 4-6.

¹⁰¹ *Gr* 2, 9: "In isto autem fidelibus noto iocundoque convivio" (Braun, R., (ed.), *CCSL* 60 (1976), 465).

¹⁰² *Jud* 2-3.

¹⁰³ *Jud* 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Jud* 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Sy* 2, 6 and 8; Augustine, *Qu. eu.* I, 7 commenting on the three days does not have this interpretation.

underlining that baptism shall cleanse candidates from all sins. *Sy* 2 focuses on both original and own sins (*propria*)¹⁰⁶, *Sy* 3 points to the freedom of a new life that they will obtain to fight the devil and *Sy* 1 concentrates on the need to stick to the profession of faith by following God's will until death comes.¹⁰⁷ The exhortative catechesis of *Fer* makes full use of agricultural imagery, starting from the mention of five yokes of oxen in the reading of the day from Lk 14, 15-24 (the parable of the great banquet). The preacher describes his ministry as agriculture, throwing seed, removing thorns through fire and asking for fruits in return.¹⁰⁸ Candidates are exhorted to follow the example of the martyrs Stephen, Cyprian and Lawrence in keeping their faith rather than the bad example of Judas.¹⁰⁹ The preacher is attentive to stress that baptism is meant to forgive all sins and that they should preserve this new state after baptism.¹¹⁰

Cant and *Cata* employ the metaphor of travelling to describe the process of initiation: for *Cant* candidates have begun the new journey leading to the heavenly city and must hold fast to Christ as a pilot (*gubernator*) as they cross the sea, where sins are the main challenge.¹¹¹ The preacher then extends the metaphor of travel, by focusing on those who fear the sea and prefer to travel by land, on horseback. This comparison leads the preacher to focus on Christ as the way, and on fasting as the proper means to tame the horse, thus referring to the collective Lenten practice of fasting.¹¹² *Cata* employs the same imagery of travelling on seas to prepare candidates to receive baptism and to ask them to persevere against sin after

¹⁰⁶ *Sy* 2, 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Sy* 1, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Agricultural imagery is also employed at length in *Sy* 2, 11 comparing the planting of seeds in the field to the transformation brought by God in the resurrection of the flesh. Lk 14, 15-24 is also discussed in Augustine, *S.* 112, 3-4.

¹⁰⁹ *Fer* 4.

¹¹⁰ *Fer* 7.

¹¹¹ *Cant* 2. This imagery is employed as well in AN h Esc 28 (*Inc.*: “Spiritus Dei consilium porrigit”) of the Viennese collection published by Leroy (1999), 188-191 which alludes to the commitment of the profession of faith (“serva promissi fidem”) and the fight against the devil (“pugna cum diabolo”) perhaps hinting at the baptismal preparation. Besides another reference to the sign of the cross (see chapter 4 p. 136 n. 46) there is no other clear evidence in these sermons about the catechumenate.

¹¹² *Cant* 3-4.

baptism.¹¹³ As in other sermons, the preacher sees life as a fight against the devil and rebukes the audience against attending shows and leaving the church empty.¹¹⁴ He also devotes a significant portion of his sermon to demonstrate to candidates that the rites that they prepared for so long and are about to experience are not that unremarkable as it may seem to them.¹¹⁵ The catechesis in this case has the function to anticipate rather than recapitulate the rites: *Cata* provides an explanation of the spiritual meaning of water – a *sacramentum* when consecrated by the ritual words¹¹⁶ – and more broadly the figures of baptism in the Bible, through the exegesis of a set of key passages, in particular the widely attested baptismal interpretation of the crossing of the Red Sea and the origin of baptism from Christ's side on the cross.¹¹⁷

In summary, the sermons aim to show the significance of the rites – either already celebrated or expected – and the new commitment that they entail, employing vivid imagery to convey a sense of the struggle against sin. The faithful have two significant functions in this initiation process: first, they have a supporting role in the rites, witnessing the renunciation and adhesion; second, they serve as examples, either to be followed or avoided by candidates. The candidates are in turn fully part of the community and essential for its cohesion: their initiation, happening in conjunction with the period of liturgical preparation for the Passion and Resurrection, is the final step in their incorporation into the Christian community. Candidates can prepare for baptism only because they have already become members of the community through the sign of the cross on the forehead. *Sy* 1 and 3 both describe the Church as mother and the candidates as babies conceived in the womb during the catechumenate and now about to be born, a theme which has been shown to be often

¹¹³ *Cata* 1. The Eucharist is compared to the *annona*.

¹¹⁴ *Cata* 2.

¹¹⁵ *Cata* 3.

¹¹⁶ *Cata* 3.

¹¹⁷ *Cata* 3-4. See de Simone (1985). On the Red Sea episode figuring baptism see for instance Rufinus, *Origenis in Exodum homiliae* V, 5.

exploited by Augustine.¹¹⁸ Both sermons relate this progressive birth to the cross, strongly echoing Augustine's preaching on the cross on the forehead of catechumens: "You have not yet been reborn through holy baptism, rather through the sign of the cross you have now been conceived in the womb of the holy church".¹¹⁹ "Holy Mother the Church [...] has conceived you in the womb through this most holy sign of the cross".¹²⁰ Such phrases, later employed by John the deacon in his letter to Senarius, well describe the stage in which they have been and from where they continue to process towards a new birth.¹²¹ Similarly, *Cata* mentions the cross on the forehead of candidates as the spiritual transposition of the killing of the lamb for the Jewish Passover in Exodus when doorsteps were marked with blood, and Gal 6, 14 on being proud of Christ's glory – a common interpretation in Augustine as we have seen.¹²² In connection to the metaphor of agriculture, *Fer* also provides a remarkable reference to the cross on the forehead of candidates: they are like earth full of thorns and arid because they are born from sin and need to be prepared by the plough of the cross and heavenly rain to become fertile, these images referring respectively to the sign of the cross put on their forehead and to baptism in Christ's death – quoting Rm 6, 3.¹²³ References to the cross to describe the membership status of Christians find further echo in several of the sermons, and are linked to moral exhortations against "bad" Christians, as often found in Augustine's sermons.¹²⁴ Thus, because Christian identity is shared between the candidates and the baptised, through the initiation process, the preacher more broadly reaches the whole

¹¹⁸ See chapter 3 p. 100 n. 81. On this theme in "Quodvultdeus": Peper, B. M., (2011) *The Development of Mater Ecclesia in North African Ecclesiology* (Vanderbilt University, Nashville TN, PhD Thesis), 204-214.

¹¹⁹ Sy 1, 1 (Finn, Th., (transl., not.), *ACW* 60 (2004), 23).

¹²⁰ Sy 3, 1 (Finn, Th., (transl., not.), *ACW* 60 (2004), 67).

¹²¹ See chapter 6 part II.

¹²² *Cata* 4.

¹²³ *Fer* 1-2.

¹²⁴ Thus, the discussion of the crucifixion leads Sy 3, 5 to argue against those who would be ashamed of the cross, and in the same fashion as Sy 1 to describe the cross as the banner used in the fight against the devil; Sy 2, 5 emphasises shame and the opposition between pride and humility quoting Gal 6, 14 and stresses that the cross is now adopted by kings in the whole world, a theme which is found in *Gr* 1, 9 too against Jews specifying that the cross is on the forehead of kings. *Gr* 1, 9 notes that those who seem pagan are in fact heretics (*perfidus christianos*) as shown by their forehead. The same preacher in *Gr* 2, 1 describes his audience as those who are "found (*invenimini*)" rather than "said (*dicimini*)" Christian (*christiani*). Striking parallels in chapter 4 p. 123-136.

community to explain beliefs and suggest rules of behaviour, and to rebuke members of the faithful. Moreover, candidates going through the font were thought to be closer to the divine, as the calls to candidates to pray for the preacher make clear.¹²⁵ The sermons strive to convince the audience that the initiation rites, which take place during Lent, should be part of a wider effort of the community to do penance, display good Christian conduct and follow ascetic practices. They reveal that the preparation for baptism served as a moment of reflection, assessment and self-definition for the whole Christian community.

Commentaries on the creed and polemical debates

The training of candidates not only consisted in exhortations to follow an impeccable conduct. Polemics against religious opponents were a major stake of the catechesis and were meant to inculcate the “correct” beliefs in candidates and give them tools to recognise heretics and build their Christian identity in opposition to rival groups.¹²⁶ This is a particularly important concern in the six sermons on the creed. However, polemics also feature prominently in the other sermons. In this section, particularly focusing on the commentaries on the creed and comparing them with the other sermons, I explore the polemical character of catechesis and show that each sermon displays different styles and changing emphasis on religious polemics, while most cast light on a tense context of competition for candidates in fifth-century Africa.

All commentaries on the creed broadly share the same structure and purpose, but use different styles of presentation and peculiar emphasis on the contents of the creed. *Sy* 1 is the most linear commentary, systematically referring to each article in full before commenting it. *Sy* 2 is close to *Sy* 1, although it is much shorter and does not refer but only imply the article on the birth of Jesus from the virgin Mary. *Sy* 3 is similarly short but less systematic, as it

¹²⁵ *Cant* 10; *Fer* 7. Augustine refers to newly baptised performing miracles see *Ciu.* XXII, 8.4.

¹²⁶ See Perrin, M.-Y., (2010), ‘The Limits of the Heresiological Ethos in Late Antiquity’, in Bangert, S., Gwynn, D. M., (eds.), (2010), *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity* (Leiden-Boston), 199-227.

directly refers to some articles but often only gives the first words. However, the first articles on the Father and the Son and the Passion and Resurrection are not mentioned. *Jud* comments at length on most articles, although it rarely quotes the creed and dedicates little discussion to the articles on the crucifixion and the Resurrection. *Gr 1* and *Gr 2* are free commentaries, quoting the creed very rarely but following its broad structure. Because of the length of *Gr 1*, the explanation is interrupted as it reaches the articles on the Son and the rest of the creed, which are discussed in *Gr 2*.¹²⁷ *Jud*, *Gr 1* and *2* and *Sy 1* are wordy, strongly polemical, and therefore include a very long discussion of articles that best relate to controversies: more than a third of *Sy 1* is devoted to anti-Arian polemics when discussing the articles: “I believe in God almighty”, “I believe in the holy Spirit” and in a conclusion on “the holy Church”. *Gr 1* is almost entirely focused on the first article on God almighty and on the Incarnation of the Son, the preacher briefly concluding on the articles on Christ and planning to include a detailed commentary on the story of David dancing for Michal (2 Samuel 6, 16-23) that is discussed in *Gr 2*.¹²⁸ *Gr 2*, preached some time later, concentrates as planned on the story in Samuel as a commentary on the remaining articles of the creed, focusing particularly on the Passion. After a long discussion of the first article on the Father against heretics, particularly Arians, *Jud* devotes a significant portion of the sermon on Jesus as son of God and also concentrates on the articles on the Spirit and on the Church, as do *Sy 1* and *Gr 2*, openly attacking Arians.¹²⁹ *Gr 1* and *2*, *Jud* and *Sy 1* all strive to demonstrate the unity of the Trinity as a Catholic doctrine, mostly on the basis of a commentary of key and traditional passages of Scripture that constitute the core of the dispute. However, the commentaries of *Gr 1* and *Jud* slightly differ from *Sy 1*: although devoting significantly more space to Arians,

¹²⁷ The full text of the creed commented in each sermon cannot be reconstructed since none of them quotes all the articles in full. They all only allude to articles in quite different ways. There is no reason to follow Westra (2002), 176 who states that “it seems improbable to assume that Quodvultdeus taught his catechumens three or more different versions of the Creed” and erases differences to suggest a single model creed. There have been many attempts to reconstruct creeds from these sermons, see for instance Hahn, A., (1897), *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche*, 3rd edition (Breslau), 60-61; Kelly, J. N. D., (1972), *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd edition (London), 175-176; recently Mbonigaba (2015), 131.

¹²⁸ *Gr 1*, 8-15 on the first article; 16-19 on Christ.

¹²⁹ *Jud* 5-8 on the Father and the Son; 9-17 on Christ; 19-20 and 22 on the Spirit and the Church.

they include refutations of other groups: *Jud* particularly attacks Manichaeans on the relationship between the Father and the Son, while *Gr* 1 first reproves heretics, pagans and Jews in general – the classic triad of opponents¹³⁰ – before refuting each at a time.¹³¹ Starting with pagan conceptions of God, *Gr* 1 only briefly opposes Jews and concentrates on what is described as a selection of heretics, the Manichaeans, the Sabellians and finally the Arians to demonstrate that they all represent extreme and wrong interpretations of the first article on the Father.¹³²

Jud also argues against Jews, pagans and Arians at length, with a peculiar concern to provide proofs against them of prophecies on the Incarnation of Jesus the Son of God. The preacher therefore compiles long lists of Scriptural proofs and references to Jesus in pagan writings, particularly quoting Virgil's Fourth Eclogue and extracts from the Sibylline Oracles that are borrowed from the eighteenth book of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*.¹³³ It is worth reflecting on the impact of such long quotations on our understanding of the context of preaching: it is possible that *Jud* was dictated to be preached, perhaps as a model, rather than the result of improvisation. This sermon may have been composed in connection to the diffusion of the eighteenth book of the *De civitate Dei* in Carthage amongst catechumens before 426-427.¹³⁴ *Gr* 1 and *Sy* 1, however, include clear references to the hearers: while indulging in long polemical digressions, the preacher of *Sy* 1 seems to have been aware of the fact that the audience only had limited patience.¹³⁵ Likewise, *Gr* 1 spares tired hearers, cutting short the explanation of 2 Samuel 6, 16-23 to be discussed in *Gr* 2.¹³⁶

In contrast to these sermons, *Sy* 2 and 3 prefer short explanations with smooth transitions, have a less marked polemical emphasis against Arians and do not include any anti-

¹³⁰ See Cracco Ruggini, L., (1980), 'Pagani, Ebrei e Cristiani: odio sociologico e odio teologico nel mondo antico', in *Gli Ebrei nell'alto medioevo* 1 (Spoleto), 13-101.

¹³¹ *Jud* 6.

¹³² *Gr* 1, 8-15 (11-15 against Arians).

¹³³ *Jud* 10-18; Augustine, *Ciu.* XVIII, 23.

¹³⁴ See Augustine, *Ep.* 1A* and Pignot (2016). On the Christian use of Virgil's passage see Courcelle, P., (1959), 'Les exégèses chrétiennes de la quatrième eclogue', *REA* 59, 294-319.

¹³⁵ *Sy* 1, 6 referring to the boredom that may arise from a lengthy sermon; see as well *Gr* 1, 19.

¹³⁶ *Gr* 1, 19.

Arian discourse in their explanations of the first articles on the Father and the Son. They both start with a discussion on faith and vision – which again recalls Augustine’s conceptions – that leads to the problem of believing in God invisible, creator of all things. In *Sy* 3 it is discussed by comparing Old Testament extracts with Paul, and solved by rejecting the heretical idea of a corporeal God and suggesting that the Scriptures have to be read through figures (*figuris*) to find the truth.¹³⁷ In *Sy* 2 this leads to a long critique of idolatry as the worship of creatures on the basis of Gen 1, addressed against pagans and unnamed heretics. The preacher lets each worshipped creature speak against such practice, before reaffirming God as creator – demonstrated by a set of biblical quotations – and rejecting pagan deities.¹³⁸ *Sy* 2 is little concerned with Arians: it only polemicises against them in the explanation on the Spirit where it refers to Arians and other heretics to demonstrate the unity of the Trinity with the metaphor of the fire, its flame, brilliance and heat manifested as one light.¹³⁹ *Sy* 3 similarly starts to attack Arians in its commentary on the Spirit and on the Church, when it reaches its polemical climax. As *Gr* 1 and *Sy* 1, it employs biblical references to explain the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and strongly advises the audience to beware of heretics as wolves attacking the sheep in the Church.¹⁴⁰

The three other sermons given to candidates also focus on polemics at length. *Fer* refers to a list of heretics present in Africa, including Manichaeans, Pelagians and Arians, the latter being particularly attacked in the conclusion of the sermon on the Church.¹⁴¹ *Cata* gives a list of opponents as well, this time referring to Donatists, Maximianists, Manichaeans and Pelagians as defeated and Arians as a resurgent heresy.¹⁴² The inclusion of Maximianists in the list is particularly remarkable since it is the only mention found in any sermon outside Augustine, again suggesting a common environment. The sermon then embarks in vivid

¹³⁷ *Sy* 3, 2-3.

¹³⁸ *Sy* 2, 2-3.

¹³⁹ *Sy* 2, 9.

¹⁴⁰ *Sy* 3, 9.

¹⁴¹ *Fer* 6-7.

¹⁴² *Cata* 5.

polemics against heresies as snakes, with reference to the fight of Moses with the Pharaoh's magicians (Ex 7, 9-13). This polemic focuses on Arians again asserting the unity of the Trinity with a set of essential quotations from the Bible.¹⁴³ Extending his exegesis on the basis of Moses staff (*virga*), the preacher sees in it a figure of the cross of Christ in link to Eph 3, 13-18 and in particular Paul's reference to the four dimensions of Christ's love (*quae sit altitudo et latitudo, longitudo et profundum*), and interpreting the cross as a ladder to go to heaven through good works.¹⁴⁴ In *Cant*, three types of individuals are described: those who linger are to be exhorted, those who go back are to be recalled, those who go astray are to be shown the way. For the preacher, those who linger on the way are those who trust in themselves, those who turn back are those who abandon chastity and those who go astray are the heretics.¹⁴⁵ This interesting distinction of potential groups within the audience well highlights the main concerns of the preacher in his catechesis. The refutation against the first group recalls anti-Pelagian ideas that were particularly important in Augustine's circle in the first half of the fifth century. The second puts emphasis on an essential aspect of the preparation, which is particularly emphasised in Augustine's polemical debate *De fide et operibus*. The preacher concentrates on the third aspect in the rest of his sermon, teaching to candidates ways to recognise heretics: Christ should only be preached openly (*palam, publice*) rather than in secret (*occulte*), and through the Scriptures.¹⁴⁶ He more specifically attacks Manichaeans who preach in secret and follow their own *scriptura*, before refuting Arians, who deny that Christ is equal to the Father on the basis of Gen 1, and finally Pelagians (*perversa doctrina*) who have the devil as father as they trust in themselves instead of only glorifying their creator.¹⁴⁷ The preacher

¹⁴³ *Cata* 5.

¹⁴⁴ *Cata* 6. On early Christian discussions of Moses's *virga* see Dulaey, M., (1990), 'Le bâton changé en serpent (Ex 7, 8-13)', in Bruning, B., Lamberigts, M., Houtem, J. van, (eds.), (1990), *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T.J. Van Bavel*, 2 volumes (Leuven), 2, 781-795.

¹⁴⁵ *Cant* 3-4.

¹⁴⁶ *Cant* 5.

¹⁴⁷ *Cant* 6-8.

exhorts candidates to avoid heretics, before concluding on a description of the afterlife of contemplation that is close to Augustine's sermons.¹⁴⁸

The mother Church and the fight for belonging

The nine sermons end with a discussion of the Church, providing a particularly interesting case to assess the special emphasis on anti-Arian polemics: such emphasis is clearly visible in all sermons except *Cant*, *Cata* and *Sy* 2. The polemic particularly plays on the metaphor of the Church as bride of Christ and mother of Christians opposed to the Arian Church as an illegitimate partner of Christ. This has to be set within the background of a recurring interpretation of Jesus' Passion as a wedding with the Church, born out of Jesus' side on the cross as a new Eve, a virgin who gives birth to Christians in baptism, particularly in *Sy* 1 – the theme is also evoked in *Cata*, *Fer*, *Gr* 1, *Jud* and *Sy* 2 and often developed by Augustine.¹⁴⁹ In *Sy* 3 – *Fer* *Gr* 2 and *Jud* drawing similar comparisons – the Church (*ecclesia*) is presented as the bride of Christ, a wife, mistress (*matrona*, *domina*) and queen (*regina*) ruling throughout the world while the community of heretics (*congregatio*) is a concubine and handmaid (*concubina*, *ancilla*) that has to be expelled with their sons who have no right to the inheritance. For *Sy* 3 the faith and good actions of all those who do not have the Church as mother have no value since they cannot have God as Father.¹⁵⁰ *Sy* 1 refers to the fact that a number of members of the community may have passed to the Arians' side but are welcome back, while *Jud* emphasises that those who pass to the Arians' side shall be judged as runaway slaves and be damned, as it is not better to be a heretic than a pagan.¹⁵¹ *Gr* 2, *Fer*, *Jud*, *Sy* 1 and 3 particularly attack the practice of rebaptism:

¹⁴⁸ *Cant* 10; see for instance Aug. *S.* 216, 4.

¹⁴⁹ *Sy* 1, 6; *Cata* 3-4; *Fer* 5; *Gr* 1, 18 *Jud* 10; *Sy* 2, 4. On this interpretation in "Quodvultdeus": Peper (2011), 211-214. In Augustine: Tromp, S., (1932), 'De Nativitate Ecclesiae ex corde Iesu in Cruce', *Gregorianum* 13, 489-527.

¹⁵⁰ *Sy* 3, 13; *Fer* 6-7; *Gr* 2, 13 with similar content adds that the Arians cannot hold the Catholic faith corresponding to the Roman faith. *Jud* 22 opposes his Church as bride and *domina* to the Arian Church as a widow, a stepmother and prostitute, quoting Jer 3, 3 (*turpis vidua; noverca; fornicaria; turpis ancilla*).

¹⁵¹ *Sy* 1, 13; *Jud* 20.

You scorn your mistress, you assail your true mother, in rebaptizing the Catholic, you exsufflate (*exsufflas*) Christ. [...] Some you compel with force, in order to destroy them, on others you press money which results in their death. [...] But you, beloved, who have been nourished from the breasts of Holy Mother the Church in the beginning and have been weaned by her to solid food, remain dwelling in her.¹⁵²

Candidates therefore receive a detailed explanation of the creed in the same fashion as in Augustine's sermons, with, however, a strong emphasis against Arians and the practice of rebaptism, which, as it is the case for Optatus and Augustine against Donatists, is rejected also on the basis of the foreswearing of Christ. It is remarkable that this refers to the fact that Arians, as Donatists before, may have repeated the catechumenate for Catholics that they wanted to rebaptise, thus exsufflating them (*exsufflare*). These sermons show the significance of the catechumenate in polemical debates and the fact that such arguments were used years later against the Arians.¹⁵³ The traditional African imagery of the Church as a mother well represents the significance of baptism as a new birth and serves to build clear boundaries and create cohesion amongst candidates as sons of the same mother. *Cant* also includes such a final warning to candidates against heretics in general and the risk of proselytism (*evangelizare*), but it does not point to Arians in particular.¹⁵⁴ By contrast, the commentary on the Church at the end of *Sy* 2 only concentrates on the Church spread throughout the world (*ubique diffusa*) – perhaps a hint of anti-Arianism – as a fertile and virgin mother giving birth to Christians, before drawing a full list of the different and befitting care provided by the Church to all its members of both sexes, be they infants (*parvuli*), children (*pueri*), adolescents (*adulescentes*), youth (*iuvenes*), old (*senes*) or advanced in age.¹⁵⁵ *Cata* also avoids polemics at the end of the sermon, similarly focusing on a list of exemplary characters from the Bible for both sexes and

¹⁵² *Sy* 1, 13 (Finn, Th., (transl., not.), *ACW* 60 (2004), 49-50 adapted). *Gr* 2, 12 has very similar words. *Fer* 6 lists the pernicious effects of Arian rebaptism as do *Jud* 19: “Vos autem sacrilego ausu [...] in iam baptizatis exsufflatis christum, respuitis spiritum sanctum, et renatum non abluere, sed sordidare [...] contenditis” and *Sy* 3, 13: “quid insultas, quid exsufflas, quid etiam ad tempus multa usurpas?” (Braun, R., (ed.), *CCSL* 60 (1976), 255 and 363).

¹⁵³ On the links between the Donatist and Arian controversies see Whelan (2014 and 2016).

¹⁵⁴ *Cant* 10.

¹⁵⁵ *Sy* 2, 12.

for each age category.¹⁵⁶ All sermons aimed, with different methods, to give a presentation and interpretation of the crucial episodes in sacred history, thus presenting both a set of beliefs and a summary outline of the key events that shaped the relationship between God and man. The conclusions on the Church summarise the immediate objective of the catechesis in the context of the initiation and the Lenten discipline: create cohesion, perseverance and a sense of belonging to the community both for candidates preparing for baptism and for the baptised, in a context of competition.

Conclusion

These sermons provide a remarkable opportunity to follow the initiation of candidates to baptism in late antique North Africa: it was a dramatic process, as individuals were humbled, had to state their radical commitment to a change of life in front of the whole community and learn an unknown text, the creed, to become part of the Christian community of the *fideles*. The enrolment to prepare for baptism, the exorcisms, the single ritual of renunciation and adhesion, the sermon that followed on the creed – which was never to be recited outside the initiation period – the catecheses on a new life, on the Passion and on the hidden meaning of the rite of baptism, were all deeply impressed in the minds of candidates. The significance of polemics in these sermons is a noteworthy demonstration of the context of competition through preaching among religious communities in late antique Africa, and casts light on the fact that the period of preparation to baptism was meant to inculcate to candidates a sense of their exclusive religious identity and at the same time reinforce the boundaries of the whole community. It is worth noting that, as for Canon 3 at the council of Hippo, African sources on the catechumenate are systematically found in a context of religious rivalry. The rules, rites and explanations part of the initiation process were precisely developed to contrast other religious groups and create a distinctive sense of belonging.

¹⁵⁶ *Cata* 6.

Comparing the sermons has also led to a refined understanding of their environment of composition and authorship, beyond their attribution to Quodvultdeus: while similar emphasis on broad themes related to the creed and particularly polemics against heretics are understandable, a common liturgical language may explain why some phrases are repeated almost with the same words.¹⁵⁷ The liturgical quality and the repetitive features of sermons, constituting a distinctive genre, make it difficult to argue for a common authorship on grounds of commonalities, while peculiar elements in each sermon show the creativity within the genre and let us suspect that the sermons could be the work of various preachers, perhaps at different times, in communities that shared theological and cultural references, often in common with Augustine. Only a careful comparison of these sermons with Augustine's *corpus* more broadly may lead to a better understanding of the milieu in which they composed. Research on the central rite of renunciation and adhesion attested in these sermons has shed light on practices not described in Augustine and shown that none of the sermons on the creed can be precisely situated within the baptismal preparation. Our sources stem from a period when the liturgy was not systematically set in writing nor standardised but followed local adaptations. The initiation of catechumens cannot be studied as a fixed process: rites are known through allusions to the lived experience that gave meaning to the catechesis.¹⁵⁸ Preachers, grounding their speech on a shared tradition, adapted the catechesis to fit their concerns and immediate circumstances. Religious polemics were essential in this process, as clerics had constantly to adapt their speech to new adversaries. Initiating new candidates, year after year, meant to constantly reinvent Christian belonging and its ritual performance.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ For instance: Sy 1, 13: "Sancta ecclesia in qua omnis huius sacramenti terminatur auctoritas" very similar to Sy 2, 12 and Sy 3, 13 and quoted by Franes (1920), 26 to suggest common authorship.

¹⁵⁸ On the close connection between catechesis and liturgy see the insightful remarks of Triacca, A. M., (1979), 'Liturgia e catechesi nei padri: note metodologiche', *Salesianum* 41, 257-272.

¹⁵⁹ On the art of catechesis see the insightful synthesis of Harmless (2014), 404-442.

III. Late antique anonymous sermons of uncertain African origin¹⁶⁰

The creativity and variety of practices of initiation in late antiquity can be further demonstrated thanks to an exploration of other little-studied collections of sermons. Many anonymous, dubious or pseudo-epigraphic Latin sermons long attributed in particular to Augustine, John Chrysostom and Fulgentius of Ruspe, have much to offer on rites of initiation and catechesis implemented during the catechumenate. A few of them have been first mentioned in a recent comprehensive synthesis, but mostly in passing.¹⁶¹ More research has been done on the creeds and therefore on sermons on the reception and teaching of the creed,¹⁶² nevertheless, there still is no detailed study of such texts as sources for the catechumenate in late antiquity. Anonymous sermons have often been left out because of their lack of ascribed author, precise dating, and often critical editions. This means that historical studies require preliminary work on their history of transmission and special attention on methodological issues.¹⁶³ Despite this, several sermons were preached in the late antique West and may originate from Africa, as shown by a close analysis of the manuscript transmission, the biblical text used, and other relevant internal evidence. The following study constitutes a first step of a long-term research goal: I shall here carry a preliminary exploration of striking examples in order to show that these sermons sharpen our picture of the catechumenate from better-known sources as a changing organisation.

¹⁶⁰ This section is a much abridged version of my forthcoming article: Pignot (2017).

¹⁶¹ Brakmann-Pasquato (2004), 473-474 and Metzger-Drews-Brakmann (2004), 559-560 both listing some sermons on the catechumenate, discussed in this study. A particularly interesting fragment that could not be considered here is PS-FU s 78 = *CPPM* 4870 = *CPL* 844 (*Inc.*: “Ecce qualiter de praesenti mundo”), comparing the baptismal preparation to the ten plagues of Egypt.

¹⁶² See already Caspari (1869), 224-244 for an edition and study of two sermons on the creed of the Latin pseudo-Chrysostom sermons ‘Universalis ecclesia gaudet’ and ‘Super fabricam totius ecclesiae’. See note 182 in this study for more details. See also Kattenbusch, F., (1894), *Das apostolische Symbol*, volume 1 (Leipzig), 207-209. More recently Westra (2002), 450-452 and 453-456 with further editions of the same texts and bibliography.

¹⁶³ A more comprehensive discussion in Pignot (2017).

Besides rare evidence in sermons on the distinction between *catechumeni* and *fideles* as two stages of progression, employing the imagery of agriculture recalling Augustine's writings and the sermon *Fer* discussed in the previous section,¹⁶⁴ various anonymous sermons also provide valuable evidence for the process of learning and reciting the creed and the Lord's Prayer during the baptismal preparation, complementing the scarce evidence preserved in Augustine and the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus. Several anonymous sermons refer both to the creed and the Lord's Prayer and suggest that the learning and memorisation of both texts may have been widespread in late antique Africa. Thus, sermons of likely African origin include, for instance, two sermons on the creed in the Latin pseudo-Chrysostom known as the 'Morin collection',¹⁶⁵ and a pseudo-Fulgentius published by Morin and recently reconsidered as a perhaps authentic sermon of Fulgentius by Dolbeau.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, several anonymous sermons have been preserved on the Lord's prayer, for instance in the same Latin pseudo-Chrysostom collection, and in the appendix of the Maurist edition of Augustine's sermons.¹⁶⁷ However, besides the creed and the Lord's Prayer, sermons also attest a further ritual, which is not explicitly mentioned in any text securely attributed to African writers: the teaching and learning of psalms before baptism. Two sermons in particular focus on Psalm 22

¹⁶⁴ Pignot (2017) discusses in particular PS-AU s 157 = CPPM 943 (*Inc.*: "Multa sunt et magna venerandae paschae mysteria").

¹⁶⁵ See notes 162 and 182.

¹⁶⁶ PS-FU s Mor = CPPM 4883 = CPL 846 (*Inc.*: "Audite, dilectissimi qui desideratis carere iugum servitutis"), edited by Morin, G., (1923), 'Deux sermons africains du 5e/6e s. avec un texte inédit du Symbole', *RBen* 35, 236-245, and again in Westra (2002), 441-447. Morin rejected the attribution to Fulgentius, but Lemarié's and Dolbeau's recent discoveries brought Dolbeau to conclude that they all the collection of PS-FU s Mor may have been preached by Fulgentius: see chapter 1 note 54. Westra (2002), 318-328 suggests Africa as a likely place of origin, at the earliest in the fifth century. The sermon is attributed to Fulgentius in the early homiliary, Vienna, *Nationalbibl.* 1616 dating from the end of the eighth century.

¹⁶⁷ *Sermo* 28 (27) = JO-N 28 (*Inc.*: "Dominica oratio ex pontificali doctrina electis ad fidem debetur"); PS-AU s 65 = CPPM 850 (*Inc.*: "Quoniam Domino subveniente atque gubernante" preserved in the Lyon collection of Augustine's sermons (see Verbraken (1976), 215-216). Another example is the anonymous homily published by Bouhot (1980), 75-78 (*Inc.*: "Invocare Deum beneficium est Dei"). For Bouhot, the last two are of African origin (*Ibid.* 71).

about the good shepherd. These sermons, which have not received the attention they deserve, provide rare evidence for a specific ritual of preparation.

The first is Sermon 366 in the edition of Augustine's sermons,¹⁶⁸ listed as *dubius* (doubtful attribution).¹⁶⁹ The manuscript transmission is worth noting for its quality: this sermon is transmitted through the *De diversibus rebus* collection preserved in a manuscript from Clairvaux copied in the twelfth century¹⁷⁰ derived from a compilation of earlier collections of Augustine's sermons, which exclusively contains (apparently except for this sermon) authentic sermons of Augustine arranged in two parts, the first containing sermons covering the Old testament, with particular emphasis on psalms.¹⁷¹ In a recent study, Dolbeau identified another collection of sermons on psalms with several analogies to the *De diversis rebus* and suggested that both probably derive from an earlier source, containing authentic sermons of Augustine on psalms.¹⁷² Thus, at first sight, the manuscript evidence seems to argue rather in favour of attributing this sermon to Augustine. However, already in the seventeenth century, the Maurists doubted its attribution to Augustine in manuscripts on grounds of style.¹⁷³ It is possible that the uniqueness of the attested ritual may have inclined them to question the authenticity. The sermon was clearly addressed to candidates as they were preparing for baptism. They were asked to learn by heart Psalm 22 ("*Dominum regit me, et nihil me deerit*" etc.) and received an explanation on it, very much in the same fashion as the explanations of the creed and the Lord's prayer. They most probably recited it from memory at another occasion, which is not specified. The beginning of the sermon clearly points to the ritual: "To you, dearly beloved, who are hastening toward the baptism of Christ, we are handing over this psalm in the name of the Lord, to be learned by heart; so we must explain its inner meaning,

¹⁶⁸ AU s 366 = CPPM 733 ("Psalmum vobis, dilectissimi, qui ad Christi baptismum properatis"), ed. PL 39 (1841), 1646-1650.

¹⁶⁹ A summary of opinions in Verbraken (1976), 151.

¹⁷⁰ Troyes, *Bibl. Mun.*, 40, X.

¹⁷¹ Verbraken (1976), 228-230.

¹⁷² Dolbeau, F., (2012), 'Une collection méconnue de Sermons sur les psaumes', in Dupont, A., Partoens, G., Lamberigts, M., (eds.), (2012), *Tractatio scripturarum. Philological, Exegetical, Rhetorical and Theological Studies on Augustine's Sermons* (Turnhout), 9-39.

¹⁷³ PL 39 (1841), 1647 n. 2.

with divine grace to enlighten us”.¹⁷⁴ As is common in the case of sermons on the creed, particularly Augustine’s, the preacher emphasises that the psalm contains a summary of what candidates need: “It’s a psalm, you see, which in a special way contains the remedy for the fall of the human race, and simultaneously the discipline and the sacraments of holy Church”.¹⁷⁵ The preacher follows the text of the psalm which he quotes and comments as appropriate. For instance, he compares the pastures in the psalm to the commandments of God, which candidates are learning, well summarising the process of conversion transforming candidates into *fideles*: “So then, once you are already enlightened, already converted and turned back to him, already a believer, already fattened on the divine pastures through the water of refreshment, you will say, *He has converted my soul* (Ps 22, 3)”.¹⁷⁶ It is difficult to situate the ceremony within the framework of the catechumenate. The tone of the sermon hints at the fact that candidates are close to baptism and the reception of the Eucharist, thus probably only a few days or weeks before Easter.¹⁷⁷ Edmund Hill, suggested that it was preached during a *redditio symboli*, assuming that the learning of the psalms immediately followed the recitation of the creed by candidates.¹⁷⁸ This assumption is based on the following passage: “This, dearly beloved, is the hope of your faith. You have approached the Lord to believe; make haste, and take pains by good behavior to grasp what you have believed”.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, the preacher speaks of believing (*credere*) and it may well refer to the recitation of the creed. However, he could mean in general terms that, during this process of preparation to baptism, they need both faith and good behaviour, a very common theme in pastoral texts. For instance, the *catechumeni*, long before enrolling and preparing for baptism, were already required to believe

¹⁷⁴ (Augustine), S. 366, 1 (Hill, E. (transl., not.), *WSA III/10* (1995), 288).

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* See on the creed, Augustine, S. 59, 1.1; S. 212, 1; S. 213, 2; S. 214, 1; *Symb. cat.* 1, 1.

¹⁷⁶ (Augustine), S. 366, 4 (Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA III/10* (1995), 290).

¹⁷⁷ For instance (Augustine), S. 366, 7: “Cum vos ergo divina gratia, ad quam properatis, advexerit, cognoscetis mensam spiritualis convivii” (*PL* 39 (1841), 1659).

¹⁷⁸ Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA III/10* (1995), 294, n. 1.

¹⁷⁹ (Augustine), S. 366, 8 (Hill, E., (transl., not.), *WSA III/10* (1995), 293 adapted).

in God, as is often made clear by Augustine.¹⁸⁰ It is not possible, therefore, from this sermon alone, to determine when it was preached.

The second witness of this ritual of teaching and learning Psalm 22 before baptism is a sermon commenting on the same psalm found among the collection of Latin sermons wrongly ascribed to John Chrysostom, today known as the Pseudo-Chrysostom “Morin collection”, since Morin was the first to study the collection as a whole.¹⁸¹ Morin suggested in 1894 that the collection was composed in late antiquity as the work of a single preacher, and attributed it to the bishop John the Mediocre of Naples living in the second third of the sixth century. Already in 1895, however, he revised his opinion and proposed to assign it to a bishop preaching in the fifth or sixth century, perhaps in Naples. Finally, in 1913, he suggested that it was the work of a disciple of Augustine, a bishop exiled from Africa in the fifth century, like Quodvultdeus, Gaudiosus or Priscus, preaching in a good-sized city.¹⁸² These hypotheses were based on a link suggested by Morin between this sermon and early medieval evangeliaries representing the liturgy practiced in Naples, in which readings were listed for a *traditio psalmorum* (explanation on psalms) on the third Sunday of Lent.¹⁸³ This certainly proves that the practice was more widespread than it may seem at first. Nevertheless,

¹⁸⁰ See chapter 3 part I.

¹⁸¹ *Sermo* 30 (29) = JO-N 30 (*Inc.*: “Circulo consecrato, anno revoluto, debitum vobis sermonem electis ad fidem decrevimus”), *PLS* 4 (1967), 824-831.

¹⁸² Morin, G., (1894), ‘Étude sur une série de discours d’un évêque (de Naples?) du VI^e siècle’, *RBen* 11, 385-402; *Id.*, (1895), ‘Un essai d’autocritique’, *RBen* 12, 385-396, at 390-391; *Id.*, (1913), *Études, textes, découvertes* (Maredsous), 37-38. There are thirty sermons, first edited amongst the works of John Chrysostom in a number of sixteenth-century editions and lastly reprinted on the basis of the Paris edition (Claude Chevallon, 1536, the first complete edition of the thirty sermons) by Bouhot, J.-P., as “Collectio Morin”, *PLS* 4 (1967), 741-834 and wrongly listed under the name of the bishop John of Naples in *CPL* 915 and Gryson (2007), II, 592-93 (JO-N), following Morin (1894). The edition in *PLS* and the repertories wrongly count thirty-one homilies, dividing homily 22 in two parts, although most manuscripts transmit it as a single text. For a summary on this collection with suggested corrections to *CPL*, see Leroy, F. J., (2004), ‘Compléments et retouches à la 3^e édition de la Clavis Patrum Latinorum. L’homilétique africaine masquée sous le Chrysostomus Latinus, Sévérien de Céramussa et la catéchèse donatiste de Vienne’, *RHE* 99/2 (, 425-434, esp. 431. Only the two homilies on the creed have since been critically edited (see note 162), corresponding to JO-N 27 and 29.

¹⁸³ Gamber, K., (1968a), *Codices liturgici latini antiquiores*, 2nd edition (Freiburg), nr. 405 and 406: respectively an evangeliary copied at Lindisfarne after 700 using a Neapolitan archetype (London, *British Museum*, Cotton MS Nero D. IV = *CLA* II, 187) and a lectionary from eighth-century Northumbria, maybe a copy of the former (Codex Regius, London, *British Museum*, Royal MS B VII = *CLA* II, 213). On both, see Morin, G., (1891), ‘La liturgie de Naples au temps de Saint Grégoire’, *RBen* 8 (1891), 481-493 and 529-537; Gamber, K., (1962), ‘Die kampanische Lektionsordnung’, *SEJG* 13, 326-352. In relation to the sermons here discussed: Wiegand (1899), 169-177 esp. 171-172; Dondeyne (1932), 19-21.

one should not easily conclude that because the ritual is attested in early medieval documents originating from Naples, the sermons were preached there. Somewhere else in Southern Italy is likewise plausible, as tentatively suggested by Westra in his analysis of the creed contained in one of the sermons of the collection – although no specific south-Italian creed type is available to compare it with.¹⁸⁴ Africa is a likely region of origin, as various scholars suggested examining the text.¹⁸⁵ Further arguments in favour of Africa based on external evidence have been put forward by Bouhot followed by Dolbeau on the grounds that its attribution to John Chrysostom better fits African habits as evidenced from the Wilmart collection of pseudo-Chrysostom sermons, which is linked to the manuscript transmission of the Morin collection.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, although scholars have acknowledged its late antique origin and unity of authorship, there is still great uncertainty about the precise dating of the Morin collection, with hypotheses ranging from the mid-fifth to the late sixth century.¹⁸⁷

In Sermon 30 of the collection – more precisely 29 when counting Sermon 22 as a single text – the preacher comments on Psalm 22 and explains that he is about to hand it over to the elects (*electi*), here clearly referring to candidates preparing for baptism and using a term diverging from Augustine’s *competentes*. He further notes that they have to learn it by heart, repeat it afterwards and put it into practice through good works.¹⁸⁸ As in Sermon 366, the link is made between doing good works and learning texts by heart. Similarly, various passages of

¹⁸⁴ Westra (2002), 338-342, thus following Kattenbusch (1894), 107-109 who also mentions Italy as a possibility. However, Westra also notes that some wordings are only found in the general formulation from Africa.

¹⁸⁵ Caspari (1869), 235-237 already preferred Africa, as did Vaccari, A., (1948), ‘La Bibbia nell’ambiente di S. Benedetto’, *Biblica* 29, 321-344. See also on the anonymous author Lambert, M., (1968), *Une collection homilétique du sixième siècle (Italie du sud). Contribution à l’étude de l’Histoire de la Catéchèse d’Adultes* (Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain, Mémoire présenté pour l’obtention du grade de Licencié en Sciences Catéchétiques), 16-24.

¹⁸⁶ Bouhot, J.-P., (1970), ‘La collection homilétique pseudo-chrysostomienne découverte par Dom Morin’, *REA* 16, 139-146, at 144-6; *Id.* (1980), n. 22; Dolbeau (2012), 26-28. The reprint of the ‘Morin collection’ by J.P. Bouhot, *PLS* 4 (1967), 654 gives a list of the most important manuscripts. The collection was widespread: I have located eighteen manuscripts containing the full collection, which is attributed to “Johannes Chrysostomus”. The oldest is Paris, *BnF*, Lat. 13347 from the ninth century, although the archetype is clearly much older as suggested by the study of Dolbeau (2012), 26-27.

¹⁸⁷ Lastly, Dolbeau (2012), 27 summarising earlier hypotheses, agrees on a late antique origin.

¹⁸⁸ *Sermo* 30 (29): “Ergo de ista charitate compellit nos veritas, ut psalmum vobis electis, et ad fidem concurrentibus exponamus. Hos versiculos psalmi memoria tenete, ore reddite, operibus implete. Non sufficit reddere deo, nisi et cor mundum applicare deo” (*PLS* (1967), 824).

Psalm 22 are quoted and explained with the help of Old Testament extracts (mostly Genesis, Psalms and prophets) and Paul and the Gospels. In general, the preacher is particularly attentive to repeat the words of the psalm, regularly first quoting then explaining each verse, finally repeating the whole verse, probably to help memorisation. However, at the end, the preacher concludes by saying that those who are not ready to recite and memorise Psalm 22 because of its length, can learn the much shorter Psalm 116 instead. He then briefly comments on this other psalm, before concluding with a final exhortation urging his hearers to memorise the psalms.¹⁸⁹ Thus, again, this sermon implies that there was a solemn recitation of psalms which cannot be clearly situated.

These two sermons show that a parallel tradition of teaching, memorising and reciting psalms during initiation existed in late Antiquity. In both cases, from internal evidence alone, it is not possible to date the rites to specific liturgical occasions. Moreover, as the two sermons are unlikely to have been preached by the same author, and although the practice is also clearly attested in liturgical sources from Naples, there is no reason to postulate, following Dondeyne and Quasten, that they both originate from Naples, refer to Neapolitan practice, and should have been taught and recited according to the local calendar.¹⁹⁰ On the contrary, the practice may have been followed elsewhere too. Indeed, Quasten and others have highlighted that Psalm 22 was very often interpreted as a psalm for baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist, because of its reference to the good shepherd, and in particular to the dressing of a divine table and the anointment with oil (Ps 22, 5). It was probably chanted at some point during the initiation, in a number of Eastern and Western late antique communities: among the abundant literary and archaeological evidence, for instance,

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*: “Ecce in quantum ipse praestitit, non quantum debuimus, sed quantum potuimus ipso subministrante et donante expositum psalmum auribus vestris repraesentavimus. [...] Tenete traditum vobis psalmum, ut cum tenueritis, lingua reddideritis, vita, vocibus, et moribus, mereamini audire: *Intrate in gaudium domini vestri* (Mt 25, 21), Amen” (PLS 4 (1967), 830-831).

¹⁹⁰ Dondeyne (1932), 19-21; Quasten, J., (1939), ‘Das Bild des Guten Hirten in den altchristlichen Baptisterien und in den Tauf liturgien des Ostens und Westens’, in Klauser, Th., (ed.), (1939), *Pisciculi. Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums. Franz Joseph Dölger zum sechzigsten Geburtstage dargeboten von Freunden* (Münster), 220-244, at 238. Recently: Gavriljuk (2007), 308-309.

the psalm is mentioned in Eusebius of Caesarea (*Demonstratio evangelica* I, 10), the catecheses of Cyril/John of Jerusalem (*Catecheses* 1, 6 and *Mystagogiae* 4,7) and Ambrose of Milan (*De mysteriis* 8, 43 and *De sacramentis* V, 3.13, the latter of doubtful authenticity), and on inscriptions in baptisteries.¹⁹¹ Moreover, Quasten, followed by Daniélou and Fischer, already related all this evidence to the two sermons here discussed to argue that it was an essential psalm part of the baptismal initiation.¹⁹²

Therefore, instead of concluding with Quasten that it was a local practice, it is more plausible that these sermons are rare witnesses of a more widespread use of psalms in rites of initiation, for which no direct evidence has been preserved in texts of secured authorship. It is worth reflecting on the fact that, as in the case of the Lord's Prayer, there may have been differences in the way initiation was organised, the psalm being taught either before or after baptism.¹⁹³ Further clues can be seen in the use of psalms in a baptismal context in sources from the fifth- and sixth-century West: the *Regula Magistri* contains commentaries both on the Lord's Prayer and two psalms (Ps 14 and Ps 33, 12-16) in a way similar to the anonymous sermon discussed above.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, these two psalms are both linked to baptismal preparation in Jerome and late antique Italian sources,¹⁹⁵ further pointing to the widespread use of a number of psalms for initiation in Christian communities and highlighting that there may have been some room for choice of individual psalms to be taught to candidates.¹⁹⁶ It is

¹⁹¹ See Quasten, J., (1934), 'Der Psalm vom Guten Hirten in altchristlicher Kultmystik und Tauf liturgie', *Liturgisches Leben* 1/3, 132-141; Quasten (1939); Daniélou, J., (1950), 'Le psaume XXII et l'initiation chrétienne', *LMD* 23, 54-69, *Id.*, (1951), *Bible et liturgie: la théologie biblique des sacrements et des fêtes d'après les Pères de l'Eglise* (Paris), 240-258; recently, see the summary in Jensen (2012), 75-78.

¹⁹² Quasten (1934), 139-141 and Quasten (1939), 236-238; Daniélou (1951), 243-244; Fischer, B., (1992), *Redemptionis mysterium. Studien zur Osterfeier und zur christlichen Initiation* (Paderborn-Munich-Vienna-Zurich), 138.

¹⁹³ This is noted in Daniélou (1951), 242-243.

¹⁹⁴ *Regula Magistri*, Vogüé A. de, (ed., transl., not.), *SC* 105 (1964), 316-320 (Ths).

¹⁹⁵ The following were already identified by de Vogüé, A. de, *ibid.* 318 n. 8 and 321 n. 18: Ps 14 commented in Jerome, *Tractatus de psalmo* XIII "in quadragesima ad eos qui ad baptismum accedunt"; Ps 33, 12 chanted to candidates when they receive catechesis before baptism according to Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 62, 1 (on the creed); Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalmorum* 41 refers to this verse being chanted when candidates learn the *fidei rudimenta*. This psalm is also part of the ritual of *apertio aurium* during Lent according to the *Ordo romanus* XI, 42.

¹⁹⁶ More broadly on psalms and Christian initiation: Rose, R., (1966), 'Les psaumes de l'initiation chrétienne', *QL* 47 (1966), 279-292 and 48 (1967), 111-120.

possible that these anonymous sermons teaching psalms were preached in Africa, however it remains difficult to precisely date and localise them before more extensive studies are carried on their manuscript transmission, biblical text and parallels with other late antique evidence. The attribution to Augustine is highly doubtful, but it is possible that Sermon 366 was composed by an African preacher influenced by Augustine. Scholars studying the catechumenate in late roman Africa, often on the basis of Augustine, should thus take into account this evidence showing that there were alternative ritual practices.

These few examples, amongst the many that are available for study, show the significance of these sermons. They corroborate practices attested in well-known evidence and securely attributed sermons, but they also make us reconsider evidence left unnoticed, sometimes challenging our assumptions. Thus, the sermons on psalms demonstrate that an alternative and complementary teaching of psalms to candidates to baptism was organised in a number of communities, although only two sermons preached on that occasion seem to have been preserved. This study suggests that there was a wide range of rites, teaching techniques and contents imparted to catechumens, depending on the choices of local clerics. The extant evidence only represents a very small portion of this variety. The exploration of these neglected sermons restores some of the richness of the initiation practices in late antique Christianity.

Conclusion

African sources, despite their scarcity, provide essential evidence to complement what is known about the catechumenate from Augustine. A comparison of the material leads to a better understanding of how initiation was practised and conceptualised in late antique Africa. The third canon of the council of Hippo, the only legal source on the catechumenate preserved from the period, demonstrates that Augustine's attempts to draw new norms for

the catechumenate fit within the efforts of African bishops more generally in the late fourth century to draw clear differences between catechumens and baptised at a time when Donatists and Catholics fought over new recruits. It is possible that such efforts for setting standards remained limited over the period, although the paucity of the evidence prevents arguments from silence to be effective and the tense religious context suggests that legislation on initiation may have been a recurrent concern. The sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus, apart from corroborating some practices of initiation, as the giving of names at the enrolment for baptism, exorcisms and the teaching and memorisation of the creed, also bear evidence of a prominent rite of renunciation and profession of faith that has no parallel description in Augustine. A close analysis of the evidence suggested that the sermons, which share very similar language features and contexts of preaching, also bear striking differences and were probably preached by a number of different clerics. The analysis demonstrates the changing nature of the rites and the catechesis that resulted from a constantly evolving context of religious controversy. Augustine is put in a wider landscape of African traditions where the catechumenate was crucial for the development of religious belonging in opposition to rival groups. The study of anonymous sermons further shows the extent of diversity and adaptation of the catechesis, despite a shared culture and common structures of initiation. This chapter therefore reinforces the conclusions drawn for Augustine: our sources for the catechumenate are fragments about little-known practices reflecting the choices of clerics with specific agendas in a context of fierce religious disputes. The written remains of these traditions are no standard descriptions of a fixed and institutionalised organisation but snapshots of practices and ideas that varied across time and regions, even on the local level. As doctrinal debates long continued to influence the catechumenate, particularly in the aftermath of the condemnation of Pelagians, these variegated African traditions became an essential source of inspiration for clerics in Africa and in Italy, especially at the turn of the sixth century when renewed attempts were made to draw normative views on initiation.

CHAPTER 6.

From Carthage to Rome: debating the catechumenate in the sixth-century West

At the turn of the sixth century, the catechumenate remained the essential process through which individuals were integrated into Christian communities. The creation of a sense of belonging was essential in a context of renewed polemics and divisions amongst Churches. Ritual practices were still organised locally, both for infants and adults, while the growing importance of the Christian written tradition started to exert a decisive influence on debates about the catechumenate and baptism. Two letters, exchanged between Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe in the early sixth century, address the issue of the validity of emergency baptism and the necessity of the catechumenate in the case of a candidate who had undergone the full baptismal preparation but was unconscious at the time of baptism. These letters are the last available sources to study the catechumenate in Africa during late Antiquity. In the first part of this chapter, I explore these letters to demonstrate that they are attempts at setting clear rules on the necessity and validity of the catechumenate through theological arguments in a polemical context, on the basis of earlier African sources. In the second part, I put this exchange in a broader context by highlighting that a similar process was at work in early sixth-century Rome: in the letter of John the deacon to Senarius, African ideas, particularly Augustine's, were employed to draw similar coherent and normative views on how initiation should be performed and understood, again in a context of polemics with Pelagians.

I argue that these two letter exchanges are part of the same trend towards the development of authoritative syntheses on the catechumenate by leading clerics of the time. These texts not only share the same topic – baptismal liturgy and theology – the same medium – letters – and the same format – questions and answers – but also originate from African and Italian milieus that were closely linked to each other and were deeply influenced by Augustine and other fourth- and fifth-century sources like canon law: Ferrandus and Fulgentius made extensive use of such writings of the past and exchanged letters with leading

Italian figures for the reception of Augustine, in particular Eugippius of Lucullanum. At the same time, in Rome, Boethius, the deacon John and other aristocrats displayed a similarly deep interest in Augustine and other writings of their predecessors. Earlier Christian sources became essential for the refutation of opponents – Arians and Pelagians – and for justifying the practices of the catechumenate for both adults and infants. Drawing on this written tradition as a source of inspiration and authority, clerics developed unprecedented normative views on the catechumenate at a crucial time for the development of liturgy.

By carrying out the first detailed analysis and comparison of both letter exchanges to highlight their common context of writing and their shared concerns, while shedding light on subtle differences, this chapter opens new perspectives on initiation, religious debate and the inheritance of ritual performances and written traditions at the end of Antiquity.¹ The contextualisation of these sources considerably nuances the conclusions drawn by scholars on the supposed shift towards a “medieval” understanding of initiation in this period. Against the traditional reading of John’s letter as evidence for the progressive ritualisation of the catechumenate at the dawn of the middle ages and the shrinking of initiation in favour of infant baptism, I shall show that its focus on rituals is part of the traditional use of liturgical arguments in polemical controversies.² John started from the authority of liturgical performance to justify the necessity of the catechumenate in the footsteps of Augustine, Prosper of Aquitaine and pope Gelasius I (492-496). Thus, the letter exchanges attest the continuity of the African tradition: as for their predecessors explored in previous chapters, the initiation of catechumens still constituted a major stake in doctrinal polemics, requiring clerics to draw clear lines between communities and their members. At the same time, there was still

¹ To my knowledge, Wiegand (1899), 143-145 is the only scholar who briefly compared the two exchanges: while rightly remarking that the letters attempt to define normative practices, Wiegand also aimed at demonstrating the decline and lack of interest in the catechumenate as a process of teaching and conversion and its reduction to a series of rites. In this chapter I defend the opposite thesis.

² For references to the secondary literature on this supposed ritualisation see note 59.

no standard organisation of the catechumenate during this period: the letters are new detailed attempts to set rules on the catechumenate and synthesise diverse practices and ideas.

I. Unconscious catechumens: the debate between Ferrandus and Fulgentius on the validity of emergency baptism

1. The context of the exchange

Fulgentius, bishop of Ruspe in Byzacena, is the best known African writer of the Vandal period. His life coincides with the peak and the end of the Vandal kingdom, from the late fifth century to the 530s. Most evidence on his life and the period comes from the *Vita Fulgentii* written soon after his death probably around 534. The traditional attribution of the *Vita* to the deacon Ferrandus is highly doubtful: it may only be said that the author was a close contemporary who spent most of his life close to Fulgentius.³ The life contains few chronological markers to reconstruct Fulgentius' life.⁴ His paternal grandfather, Gordianus, a senator, was amongst those who fled to Italy after the Vandal conquest of Carthage in 439 under Genseric, while his father resettled in Thelepte in Byzacena where the family received properties back from the king and where Fulgentius was born in 468.⁵ The *Vita* describes how Fulgentius, after pursuing a secular career as a *procurator* (tax collector), decided to convert to

³ The life is the basis for the summary here provided. The authorship, accepted by Lapeyre, G-G., (1929), *Saint Fulgence de Ruspe* (Paris), LIV-LXIII has been rejected by Isola, A., (1986), 'Sulla paternità della Vita Fulgentii', *VetChr* 23, 63-71 reprinted in *Id.*, (2011), *Lente pertexere telam. Saggi di letteratura cristiana tardoantica* (Spoleto), 89-96. Recently in the introduction to the new critical edition of the *Vita* (Isola, A., (ed.), *CCSL* 91F (2016), 7-25), Isola proposes the monk Redemptus who left for Sicily with Fulgentius around 499 as the author, although with not wholly convincing arguments. It is certain, at least, that the author of the *Vita* was influenced by Augustine's writings. On Fulgentius's life here only briefly sketched, see more in: Jourjon, M., (1964), 'Fulgence de Ruspe', *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique* 5, fasc. 37-38, 1612-1615; Langlois, P., (1972), 'Fulgentius', *RAC* 8, 632-661 (esp. 640-661); Schneider, H., (1999), 'Fulgentius', *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, 2nd edition (Freiburg), 241-244; Langlois, P., (2001), 'Africa II (literaturgeschichtlich)', *RAC* Supplement-Band 1, 134-228, at 205-209; Simonetti, M., (2014), 'Fulgentius of Ruspe', in *Encyclopedia of ancient Christianity* (Downers Grove IL), II, 73-74. A good and recent collection of articles including a detailed bibliography: Piras, A., (2010), *Lingua et ingenium: studi su Fulgenzio di Ruspe e il suo contesto* (Ortacesus).

⁴ See 'Fulgentius 2', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 507-513; our summary follows the chronology discussing earlier hypotheses and thoroughly established by Modéran, Y., (1993), 'La chronologie de la Vie de saint Fulgence et ses incidences sur l'histoire de l'Afrique vandale', *MEFRA* 105/1, 135-188, esp. 136-162.

⁵ *Vita Fulgentii* 1.

the ascetic life upon reflecting on Augustine's *Enarratio* 36, and joined, perhaps around 493, the bishop Faustus' monastery.⁶ Despite remarkable differences highlighted by Simonetti, Courcelle has noted the influence of Augustine's *Confessiones* on the writer of the *Vita Fulgentii* and the description that he gives of Fulgentius' conversion to monasticism.⁷ From the 490s to the early 500s, Fulgentius visited monastic communities in Africa and Italy, before founding his own monasteries in Africa to seek more isolation. He was then recalled by his superior Faustus who ordained him before he was made bishop of Ruspe probably in 508.⁸ Soon after he was exiled with other clerics to Sardinia on the orders of the Vandal king Thrasamund (496-523), where he founded monasteries, developing close ties to the Italian coast and writing works which are now lost.⁹ After spending most of his life in Sardinia, except a temporary stay in Carthage to take part in doctrinal debates, he finally returned to Africa after Thrasamund's death in 523. Still longing for the ascetic life in the desert, he nevertheless kept his position as bishop of Ruspe until his death at sixty-five, in 533.¹⁰

Fulgentius wrote a number of treatises which mostly consist in theological expositions of the Christian faith, particularly focusing on Christology in the context of disputes against Arians. The unlikely identification with Fulgentius the mythographer, contemporary author of a number of works on mythology, philosophy and history has been in doubt for centuries.¹¹ The dated works now preserved attributed to the bishop of Ruspe were probably mostly written during his second exile and when he returned to Africa.¹² Apart from these works,

⁶ *Vita Fulgentii* 2-4. On Faustus see the probable identification with 'Faustus 6', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 398.

⁷ Simonetti, M., (1982), 'Note sulla Vita Fulgentii', *AB* 100, 277-289 notes that it is the only other African biography preserved after Possidius' *Vita Augustini* but that it does only contain rare references to Augustine. However, see Courcelle, P., (1958), 'Trois récits de conversion au VI^e siècle, dans la lignée des Confessions de saint Augustin', *HJ* 77 (1958), 451-458, at 453-456 and *Id.*, (1963), *Les Confessions de saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris), 221-224.

⁸ *Vita Fulgentii* 5-16.

⁹ *Vita Fulgentii* 17-19.

¹⁰ *Vita Fulgentii* 20-28. On the return to the desert, see Leyser, C., (2006), 'The Uses of the Desert in the Sixth-Century West', *Church History and Religious Culture* 86, 113-134.

¹¹ See a recent case against it in Hayes, G., (2003), 'The Date and Identity of the Mythographer Fulgentius', *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 13, 163-252.

¹² See dating hypotheses in Lapeyre (1929), 327-330; Langlois (1972), 643-652; 'Fulgentius 1', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 512 ; Schneider (1999), 241-244.

Fulgentius certainly preached regularly: as Augustine before him, he was invited to preach by the bishop of Carthage Bonifatius.¹³ He was still known as a great preacher by Isidore and at least eight extant sermons are today attributed to him – undoubtedly a small fraction of those he preached.¹⁴ Finally, he also maintained a close correspondence – nineteen letters are preserved – with African and Italian aristocrats and clerics, notably the deacon Ferrandus of Carthage, the aristocrat Proba and the monk Eugippius of Lucullanum near Naples, who wrote the first anthology of Augustine’s works addressed to the same Proba, and with whom he exchanged works of Augustine¹⁵

Ferrandus is similarly an important source for this period, but his life is very little known, particularly if one does not consider him as the author of the *Vita Fulgentii*.¹⁶ Ferrandus was deacon of Carthage and is known as the compiler of the widespread *Breviatio canonum*, the first African collection of canons, and for his correspondence with Fulgentius and other clerics – twelve letters are preserved.¹⁷ He died perhaps around 545-546, certainly before April 548.¹⁸ After Fulgentius’ death, he reluctantly succeeded him as the African expert on matters of Christian teaching and theology, responding for instance to queries sent to him by Eugippius on the request of a Gothic *comes*, and completing an unfinished letter of

¹³ *Vita Fulgentii* 27; ‘Bonifatius 26’, *PCBE* 1 (1982), 159-161.

¹⁴ Isidore, *De viris illustribus* 27. For preserved sermons see Langlois (1972), 650-651 and chapter 1 p. 30 n. 54).

¹⁵ For more details: Stevens, S. T., (1982), ‘The Circle of Bishop Fulgentius’, *Traditio* 38, 327-341; Régerat, Ph., (2000), ‘Eugippe et l’église d’Afrique’, in *Romanité et cité chrétienne: permanences et mutations, intégration et exclusion du Ier au VIème siècle. Mélanges en l’honneur d’Yvettes Duval* (Paris), 263-272; Graham, S. R., *The Dissemination of North African Christian and Intellectual Culture in Late Antiquity*, PhD dissertation (Los Angeles, 2005), 39-46.

¹⁶ See note 3.

¹⁷ See Gryson (2007), I, 486-487, *CPL* 848 and our bibliography for editions. On these letters: Régerat (2000), 269-272. On *Ep.* 3 and 5: Simonetti, M., (1981), ‘Ferrando di Cartagine nella controversia teopaschita’, in *Fides sacramenti, sacramentum fidei. Studies in Honour of P. Smulders* (Assen), 219-231. For a preliminary study of the letters towards a new critical edition: Pilla, A. di, (2010), ‘Le epistole di Ferrando di Cartagine: materiali per una nuova edizione’, in Piras (2010), 29-70. On Ferrandus and his writings see Lapeyre, G.-G., (1932), *L’ancienne Église de Carthage. Études et documents*, 2e série, 2 volumes (Paris), II, 153-172.

¹⁸ See ‘Ferrandus’, *PCBE* 1 (1982), 446-450.

Fulgentius to the *dux illustris* Reginus, on the question of the corruptibility of Jesus' body and on the conciliation of military and religious life.¹⁹

2. The letter exchange

In this relatively abundant African *corpus*, two letters exchanged between Ferrandus and Fulgentius – *Ep.* 11 and 12 in Fulgentius' collection – offer rare evidence on the whole process of the catechumenate and baptismal preparation in Africa during the Vandal period. Although several studies have been written on Fulgentius, most focus on the *Vita* and theological works, particularly the Christological controversies in relation to the Arians and the debates against the so-called "semi-Pelagians". Except a short synthesis on Fulgentius' texts on baptism,²⁰ the letter exchange has only been briefly noted in general surveys of the catechumenate and has never been fully translated into English.²¹ It deserves closer study however, as a valuable source bearing interesting echoes of practices and ideas described in African canons and Augustine's and other Africans' sermons and works. It also provides a parallel to similar, but much more studied discussions on the catechumenate in the famous Roman sixth-century letter of John the deacon to Senarius.

The letters exchanged perhaps belong to the last years of Fulgentius' life in Africa, between 523 and his death.²² Two exchanges between Ferrandus and Fulgentius are preserved: each time, Ferrandus asked questions and Fulgentius replied.²³ These questions focus mostly on theological problems: in *Ep.* 11 Ferrandus wrote about the validity of emergency baptism

¹⁹ Ferrandus, *Ep.* 7, 2: "Et ideo [...] Fulgentium pontificem Ruspensi Ecclesiae interrogasti [...]. Modo autem quia semipleni libelli imperfecta dictatio, nihil huic tuae interrogationi conoscitur respondisse" (*PL* 67 (1848), 939). See 'Reginus 3', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 958.

²⁰ Gavigan, J. J., (1947), 'Fulgentius of Ruspe on Baptism', *Traditio* 5, 313-322. Bavaud, G., (1996), 'Le laïc peut-il célébrer l'eucharistie ? (Tertullien, *De exhortatione castitatis* 7, 3)', *REAug* 42, 213-222, at 220-221 includes a discussion on the Eucharist from a section of Fulgentius' *Ep.* 12.

²¹ For instance: Bingham (1840), 277, 283-284, 302, 313, 477-485; Mayer (1868), 108; Weiss (1886), 142; Kraus (1886), 147-152; Wiegand (1899), 143-144; Bareille (1910), 1889; Leclercq (1925), 2567; Dondeyne (1932), 17; Metzger-Dreus-Brakmann (2004), 560; Gavrilyuk (2007), 337-338. Not mentioned in Saxer (1988), Johnson (2007) and Ferguson (2009).

²² Lapeyre (1929), 330; Isola, A. (transl., not.), *Fulgenzio di Ruspe, Le lettere* (Rome), 223-226. Both studies however do not provide arguments for the dating.

²³ Fulgentius *Ep.* 11-14.

and on the necessity of the Eucharist; in *Ep.* 13, he wrote about the relationship between the persons of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ incarnated, the soul of Christ, the shared reign of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and the presence of two chalices in the last supper according to Luke. These letters show Fulgentius' influence in aristocratic and clerical circles: they are learned exchanges in which the correspondent requests detailed explanations from an expert, in a fashion that was widespread in late Antiquity and clearly noticeable for instance in Augustine's correspondence.²⁴ Such exchanges are more than learned discussions, however: in the context of polemical controversies, the *Vita Fulgentii* describes Fulgentius as the defender of the "Catholic" faith against the Arians.²⁵ Although Fulgentius' reply is specifically addressed to Ferrandus and thus falls within the category of "personal letters" as defined by Stevens, it is clear that the answers were meant for a wider public since they addressed questions asked by Ferrandus on behalf of the wider community.²⁶ The main events of Fulgentius' life that have been outlined above, particularly his position of authority as a leading monk and bishop, his knowledge of Augustine's works and his prominent role in controversies against Arians make clear why he was called as an expert to give his views on the catechumenate and why he displayed a strongly polemical tone in his letters. The queries about initiation and baptism also specifically recall Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus* written in reply to Deogratias, another deacon of Carthage who asked about the instruction of catechumens. It is remarkable to see a similar procedure at work more than a century later: clerics of Carthage in charge of teaching catechumens request explanations from experts, Augustine and Fulgentius. Ferrandus perhaps consciously perpetuated and mirrored this tradition, asking Fulgentius, who then enjoyed wide recognition after his return from exile, for a quick informative answer to questions that he thought were "useful to many".²⁷ Thus, Ferrandus expected authoritative statements from Fulgentius that could be used in African Christian communities for the development of

²⁴ See Stevens (1982) for a discussion of this aspect with parallels from Gaul.

²⁵ *Vita Fulgentii* 20.

²⁶ Stevens (1982), 329-330 who acknowledges this point.

²⁷ Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 4.

standard views on initiation and for the refutation of opponents, as it was the case at Augustine's time.

Ferrandus' letter about baptism, however, also develops a peculiar approach: in the prologue, comparing himself to a beggar unable to obtain nourishment from his own study of Scripture because of his many occupations, Ferrandus describes Fulgentius not only as an expert but as a monk who has left all his possessions to gain a new treasure – with echoes of Mt 13, 46-52 on the parable of the pearl and treasures – implying that contrary to him, Fulgentius, as a monk, dedicated himself to such study.²⁸ The reference to Fulgentius as the *paterfamilias* who brings out “what is new and what is old” (Mt 13, 52) shows how the Gospel is increasingly used to portray the bishop as the head of the spiritual household of the Church.²⁹ However, it also contains a request for a new answer on the topic written on the basis of tradition, both the Scriptures and Christian writers. Contrary to Augustine, Fulgentius is presented primarily as an expert monk able to offer a synthesis of tradition, not as a bishop offering a model of catechesis from his own experience.

This approach is crucial to understand the letters. Ferrandus does not focus on ritual actions or teaching to be imparted to catechumens but desires to know on what grounds the catechumenate, emergency baptism and the Eucharist are necessary and efficacious for his congregation. Both Ferrandus' questions and Fulgentius' answers do not simply provide a linear description of rituals that can be used to reconstruct the initiation rites of Carthage.³⁰ The letters, instead, are illuminating accounts about the growing need at the time for standard statements that bring inherited liturgical practices in harmony with written traditions. I shall here first focus on Ferrandus' letter, the description it gives of the catechumenate and the problems that it raises, before examining Fulgentius' reply, the discrepancies between the questions and the answers and the broader picture that can be drawn from the exchange.

²⁸ Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 1.

²⁹ On this trend in Rome during this period see for instance Sessa, K., (2011), *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy* (Cambridge-New York).

³⁰ As assumed in the studies listed in note 21.

After the prologue, Ferrandus' letter describes the issues raised by the initiation of the still unbaptised slave (*famulus*) of a certain religious man (*religiosus vir*) who was still an adolescent (*adolescens*) – thus probably between fifteen and thirty –, with black skin (*colore aethiops*) and brought from some distant region of Africa. Beyond the peculiar reference to black Africans, this is, with John's letter to Senarius, the only other detailed description of the various steps of the catechumenate in any Latin source from the West:

This man then is handed over to the church (*ecclesiam*) to be imbued with the rites of the church (*sacramentis ecclesiasticis imbuendus*) thanks to the care of faithful masters (*dominorum fidelium*); he is made a catechumen (*catechumenus*) according to custom (*ex more*). Then, after some time, with the approach of the Easter feast, he is offered, enrolled and instructed (*offertur, scribitur, eruditur*) amongst the candidates for baptism (*competentes*). When he knows the universal and venerable mysteries (*mysteria*) of the Catholic religion (*religionis catholicae*), having celebrated the examination (*scrutinium*) as usual (*solemniter*), he is protected (*vindicatur*) by exorcism (*per exorcismo*) against the devil; renouncing him openly (*renuntiare constanter*) as use (*consuetudo*) required, he is brought out (*profertur*) to hear the creed (*symbolum*). Moreover, having pronounced the exact words of the holy creed from memory, in a clear voice in the presence of the crowd of the faithful (*fidelis populi*), he received the pious rule of the Lord's Prayer. Comprehending now both what he should believe and what he should pray, he was being prepared for baptism, when suddenly he is smitten by a severe fever [...].³¹

Ferrandus' description provides fresh evidence about little-attested rituals. It is a rare African witness of instruction about Christianity given at the entrance into the catechumenate as described in Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus*, using the same technical terms (*imbuere, catechumenum facere*).³² In Ferrandus' community, as in Augustine's, converts are first made *catechumeni* with the reception of some rites (*sacramenta*) and wait some time before entering the baptismal preparation as *competentes*. The verbs *offere, scribere* and *erudire* generically refer to the inscription of names at the beginning of the preparation, well attested in Augustine and other African sermons, and to some teaching given to the enrolled candidates. The features of the

³¹ Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 2 (translation adapted from Whitaker, E. C., (1960), *Documents of the baptismal liturgy* (London), 98).

³² Compare with Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 1 and *Conf.* VIII, 2 (*imbuere*); *Cresc.* II, 5.7, *F. et op.* 12, 18, *C. litt. Pet.* III, 53.65, *Un. bapt.* 11, 19 (*catechumenum facere*).

preparation – an examination (*scrutinium*), exorcisms, renunciation of the devil preceding the learning and reciting the creed and the Lord’s Prayer in front of the faithful – remarkably recall African sermons. Augustine employs the same terms for the candidates, refers to an examination, exorcisms, and the catechesis on the creed and the Lord’s Prayer. The sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus similarly link the renunciation to the creed, refer to an examination and insist on the fact that candidates are brought out in public to profess the creed.³³ Ferrandus is however a rare witness of the existence of a single examination, while African sermons provide evidence more difficult to interpret.

Nevertheless, the letter cannot be used to reconstruct a precise sequence of initiation: most steps are only briefly alluded to, often pointing to custom or tradition (*ex more, solemniter, consuetudo*). Several elements are certainly left out because Ferrandus’ objective is not to offer a detailed account but to make clear that the correct procedure had been followed. Thus, the focus is on the actions of the local clergy, with the use of the passive voice throughout to describe the rites performed on the candidate. The time that the candidate spent as a catechumen before enrolling for baptism is only evoked (*aliquantum tempus*), while the ritual preparation takes the shape of a list with little evidence on how and when each rite is celebrated. Ferrandus’ account is bound to remain open to interpretation and it would be perilous to draw conclusions on the exact order of the liturgical practices on the basis of the text. It is only clear that candidates received catechesis, probably on the creed and the Lord’s Prayer, learning them towards the end of the initiation process before baptism – Ferrandus situates the emergency baptism of the slave at Easter a few days after he fell unconscious – and after an examination not necessarily restricted to exorcisms and the renunciation of the devil.³⁴ Later in the letter, Ferrandus also indicates that at baptism candidates were required to profess their faith by replying to questions, a practice that is attested in Africa from

³³ See chapter 5, p. 191-196. Ferrandus’ language, particularly the description of the profession of faith, recalls Victorinus’ conversion as told in Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.5.

³⁴ Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 2.

Tertullian's time.³⁵ Fulgentius' reply, mostly focussing on theoretical aspects, nevertheless corroborates the custom of asking questions to candidates at baptism about their faith, called a "second faith" (*secunda credulitas*) and related to the earlier recitation of the creed (*symbolum*).³⁶ Fulgentius also describes the custom (*consuetudo*) mentioned by Ferrandus of the examination, renunciation of the devil and recitation of the creed as pertaining to the Carthaginian church (*ecclesiae carthaginensis*).³⁷ It is possible that in doing so Fulgentius wanted to point to the specific rituals performed there in contrast to diverging practices elsewhere. More generally, the letters display remarkable continuity in terms of the core liturgical practices of initiation and offer valuable evidence for the persistence of the catechumenate for adults in sixth-century Africa, also mentioning the parallel practice of infant baptism, as it was the case in Augustine's time.³⁸

The problems raised by the baptism of unconscious adults

These letters, however, are more than documents for the study of liturgical practices: they are essential witnesses of the gradual creation of normative views on initiation and the liturgy, bringing together inherited practices and written traditions.³⁹ In fact, Ferrandus' interest does not lie in the actions performed during the catechumenate but in obtaining a definitive statement from Fulgentius about important questions regarding the relation between the catechumenate and baptism. The standard description of the usual procedure is the starting point of a broader discussion. Ferrandus tells that after the slave fell unconscious, it was decided to wait until Easter a few days later to administer baptism, at a point when the slave was drawing his last breath. Ferrandus depicts the scene of a candidate, unconscious,

³⁵ Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 2; for instance Tertullian, *De corona* 3.

³⁶ Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 14 and 16.

³⁷ Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 2.

³⁸ Ferrandus then compares the emergency baptism of the candidate to the baptism of infants (*infantes/parvuli*): *Ep.* 11, 2-3. See as well Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 18.

³⁹ On Augustine's influence on Fulgentius see Folliet, G., (1989), 'Fulgence de Ruspe témoin privilégié de l'influence d'Augustin en Sardaigne', in Mastino, A., (ed.), (1989), *L'Africa romana: Atti del vi Convegno di studio, Sassari 16-18 dicembre 1988*, 2 volumes (Sassari), II, 561-569.

unable to speak, move or react and thus reply to the baptismal interrogations, receiving baptism completely unaware of it (*mente absentissimus*), others answering the questions for him. The deacon remarks that this was done almost (*quasi*) in the same way as for infants, shortly before the slave died. The emergency baptism of a candidate who had regularly performed the main rituals of the catechumenate leads Ferrandus to think about the effectiveness of such baptism for adult catechumens, borrowing Augustine's language and echoing debates in his writings.⁴⁰ Moreover, it is possible – besides the parallel with the eunuch in Acts 8, 3 employed by Fulgentius – that the reference to an Ethiopian candidate related to a common topos found in Augustine and other early Christian writers, where the whitening of the black Ethiopian, the paradigmatic pagan, is employed to describe the process of initiation from darkness to light.⁴¹ Thus, the story of the candidate is presented as an exemplary case to reflect on how transformation is enacted during the catechumenate and at baptism, bringing forward essential questions on the necessity and validity of the catechumenate and its relation to baptism to obtain eternal life after death.

Two main questions are asked: first about the consequences and usefulness of emergency baptism, then about the necessity of receiving the Eucharist after baptism. Only the first question is directly relevant for the catechumenate: Ferrandus asks whether emergency baptism of a candidate unable to speak ("*vox ablata*") may harm (*nocere*) his hopes to gain "eternal blessedness".⁴² This broad question is accompanied by his own views and doubts. For Ferrandus, the baptism of an adult catechumen who is unable to speak or show awareness is problematic because of the distinction between adults – who need the cleansing

⁴⁰ Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 2. There is a close parallel between the letter and the emergency baptism of Augustine's Manichaean friend told in Augustine, *Conf.* IV, 4.8: "baptizatus est nesciens" and "mente atque sensu absentissimus" (Verheijen, L., (ed.), *CCSL* 27 (1981), 43-44). *Absentissimus* is extremely rare, only found in Augustine's *Confessiones* and Ferrandus' letter in the *Library of Latin texts A* (<http://www.brepolis.net> consulted 21/07/2016). Augustine, *Adult. coniug.* I, 26.33 precisely discussed the baptism of unconscious adults contrasted to infants, noting that some questioned it and asserting his own view that baptism should always be conferred.

⁴¹ See Poque, S., (1982), *Le langage symbolique dans la prédication d'Augustin d'Hippone*, 2 volumes (Paris), I, 268-269. Ferrandus may have read in particular Augustine, *In Ps.* 73, 16.

⁴² Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 3.

of original and own sins and have reached the age of reason thus being capable of stating their will and confess their beliefs – and small children (*infantes/parvuli*) who are baptised through the will of others for the forgiveness of original sin.⁴³ Significantly, Ferrandus' doubts are not about infants but clearly about the need for a conscious and voluntary belief (*voluntaria credulitas*) in the case of adults. The deacon questions the usefulness of the slave's baptism: equating his physical incapacity to his lack of will (*"nec voluit nec valuit"*), he hesitates to accept that the profession of faith that he performed while fully conscious (*scientis*) granted him the remission of sins when he was unconscious (*nescientis*).⁴⁴ Ferrandus is reluctant to acknowledge that emergency baptism may have purified the slave from his sins on the grounds of the preparatory rituals because he believes that it would send the message that baptism is not needed. As he then explains, while he has been confronted with catechumens that died without baptism although they had demonstrated their commitment, he cannot accept that their ritual preparation would be enough for them to be saved.⁴⁵ Thus, he struggles with any substitute to the regular voluntary baptism of conscious adults.

Through his doubts, the deacon provides a rare reflection on the ambiguity of the status of catechumens, who have undergone a number of rituals but have not been purified through baptism. This is a crucial aspect, often discussed in previous chapters and particularly clear in Augustine. Ferrandus made of this ambiguity a pastoral problem, probably conveying questions that were asked in Carthage, since the death of catechumens before they could be baptised regularly troubled his community. He clearly expected from Fulgentius a theological explanation to guide pastoral care. Significantly, the recourse to Fulgentius as an authority on Christian learning is seen as complementary to Ferrandus' own investigation into African legislation. After raising doubts about emergency baptism, the deacon, well known as a compiler of African proceedings, quotes a canon permitting emergency baptism of individuals

⁴³ Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 3.

⁴⁴ Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 3.

⁴⁵ Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 4.

unable to reply for themselves with the help of witnesses extracted from the *Breviarium Hipponense* and repeated at the council of Carthage in 525.⁴⁶ One may only speculate about the links between the letter and the council. It may have been written in the aftermath of the council asking Fulgentius, who was absent, for precisions on this canon promulgated more than a century earlier under Aurelius' and Augustine's supervision, now not fully understood or accepted – this would also provide clues to date the letter. Despite the significance attributed to canon law, Ferrandus notes that canons only say “what the Church should do (*quid ecclesia facere debeat*)” but not what the dying individual receives (“*quid ille percipiat*”). For Ferrandus, the canon ordered emergency baptism to clear clerics from the accusation of negligence (*culpa negligentiae*), without addressing the question of its usefulness and effectiveness.⁴⁷ Fulgentius' reply is expected to clear these doubts and serve as the necessary complement to interpret narrow and specific conciliar legislation. This sheds light on the problematic reception of African canon law and shows that, like the Bible, it could become a source of authority only when interpreted by an expert.

Fulgentius' reply

Fulgentius gives a quite straightforward answer to Ferrandus. In providing clear-cut views, he satisfies his correspondent. In contrast to the concrete and ambiguous situation on the ground and in the minds of Carthaginians, his letter aims at setting ideal rules. Fulgentius argues for a more positive appraisal of emergency baptism and at the same time for the necessity of the catechumenate: in particular the need to learn the Christian faith and profess it before baptism. However, Fulgentius does not merely answer Ferrandus' questions. He sets his letter within a broader demonstration of the relation between faith and baptism and adopts an openly polemical tone against heretics, who are only generically named but

⁴⁶ Ferrandus refers to *Breviarium Hipponense*, Canon 32, later compiled in the Carthage Register and repeated at the council of Carthage in 525 (Canon 45).

⁴⁷ Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 4.

probably represent the Arians. Thus, after quoting Ferrandus' description about the slave's initiation, the bishop starts with Jesus' last words in Mark 16:15-16 ("*Euntes in mundum uniuersum praedicate euangelium omni creaturae; et qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit, saluus erit; qui uero non crediderit, condemnabitur*") as the key text to answer Ferrandus' question about emergency baptism. He dedicates a significant portion of the letter to the discussion of the meaning of believing and – on the basis of Paul's letters – distinguishes "true" (*vera*) from "fake" (*ficta*) faith, concluding that heretics and pagans cannot be said to believe in God because they have wrong opinions about God.⁴⁸

Fulgentius then addresses Ferrandus' questions drawing a fundamental distinction between the duty (*officium*) and the effect (*effectus*) of baptism, that is on one hand belief (*credulitas*) and profession (*confessio*) of faith (*fides*), and on the other hand the renewal (*regeneratio*) through grace (*gratia*). Fulgentius concludes that when the two are performed, the candidate is saved: the slave performed the *officium* in full conscience, while the *effectus* was granted by the clergy. Thus, Fulgentius dismisses Ferrandus' doubts by stating that the profession of faith and baptism are both necessary and should be performed as a unity.⁴⁹ Particular emphasis is put on the catechumenate as a necessary prerequisite, the part played by candidates, while the ritual efficiency of baptism is conferred by the clergy. Fulgentius sets Ferrandus' story in a Biblical environment in order to write with more authority, finding a fitting parallel in the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch who is asked to believe before being baptised (Acts 8, 3). His letter defines a new rule (*regula*) according to which anyone who has performed the profession of faith and not changed his mind should receive baptism as a reward.⁵⁰ The bishop asserts that as long as the candidate has performed the preliminary rites of the catechumenate, he may be baptised with the help of others even if he is unconscious at

⁴⁸ Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 6-12.

⁴⁹ Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 19.

⁵⁰ Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 13-14.

baptism.⁵¹ The emergency baptism of adults is defended on the basis of the catechumenate, both in the case of the slave who had fulfilled all requirements of the initiation until a few days before baptism, but also more generally for adults, provided that there are witnesses to testify to their commitment, presumably as catechumens.

Fulgentius takes the canon evoked by Ferrandus as authoritative legislation supporting his own views: in contradistinction to the deacon, he firmly asserts that “the pronouncement of the fatherly canons” (*canonum sententia paternorum*) does not contain any ambiguity, but clearly explains “what is done” as well as “what is received”, and should be strictly followed.⁵² Fulgentius notes that the canon would not have been promulgated if emergency baptism had no value for the candidates, and proves his point through a liturgical argument: such rites (*sacramenta*) would not be celebrated in the Church if they were not holding any power (*firmitas*). Bringing together a set of biblical quotations, Fulgentius thus affirms the authority of the rules of the canons and of liturgical practices, dismissing the idea that emergency baptism may be done in vain, notably quoting 1 Cor 3, 7 about the increase given by God in baptism – a key text about baptism used by Optatus and later Augustine against the Donatists’ requirement about the ministers’ worthiness.⁵³

Conclusion

Fulgentius addressed central concerns of the community in Carthage about the fate of catechumens that were probably as widespread at the time as they were a century earlier. The doubts conveyed by Ferrandus about emergency baptism somehow recall Curma’s unconscious and dreamt baptism contrasted by Augustine with the regular procedure followed after he regained health, and Augustine’s own perplexity when witnessing the

⁵¹ Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 16.

⁵² Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 21.

⁵³ Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 20-23.

baptism of his unconscious Manichaean friend.⁵⁴ The tensions created by the death of a catechumen without baptism could come to the forefront at any time. Ferrandus' doubts are to be related to the anxiety that the pastors may be accused of negligence when administering the rites of initiation. Fulgentius wrote to reassure him that there was no room for negligence since the rules set in canons and everything that clerics performed was justified and in accordance with earlier Christian writers. Fulgentius rejects Ferrandus' doubts about the effectiveness of the main rites of catechumenate in cases of emergency baptism, underlining the unity of the ritual preparation that gives meaning and value to baptism, even in emergency. Fulgentius' views are a strong statement in favour of the necessity of the catechumenate: there would be no valid emergency baptism without individuals first being integrated into the Christian community. His views on the necessity of a conscious pre-baptismal commitment are more strict than Augustine, who accepted emergency baptism in all instances. At the same time, however, the similarity between the letter exchange and Augustine's discussion of issues related to the emergency baptism of adult catechumens is striking.⁵⁵ As in Augustine's lifetime, moreover, the discussion gives prominence to the fight against heretics, the efficacy of baptism being reserved for the members of the Catholic Church. The catechumenate remained a central stake for the formation of Christian communities in late antique Africa.

Thus, the letters show remarkable continuity in terms of ritual practices and pastoral concerns, still centred on adult baptism rather than infants. The letter exchange is the continuation of a long tradition: Fulgentius' expertise, like Augustine's before him, was required to write authoritative summaries meant to solve recurrent tensions arising from diverging opinions and practices in African communities regarding baptism. At the same time, however, his letter develops unprecedented views and goes much further than Augustine,

⁵⁴ See Augustine, *Cura mort.* 12, 15; *Conf.* IV, 4.8. On Curma: chapter 3 p. 85 n. 18.

⁵⁵ See Augustine, *Adult. coniug.* I, 26.33-28.35, who notes that others hold more strict views and require proof of pre-baptismal commitment. Augustine's statement thus leaves room for disagreement. It would be worth investigating the influence of this work on African milieus.

bringing together for the first time biblical texts, liturgical practices and African authorities of the past, both Christian writers and church legislation. Sermon 272 of the bishop of Hippo to the neophytes is quoted at length for Ferrandus' second question about the Eucharist, putting Augustine among the *sancti patres*.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, while Augustine, and after him pope Gelasius, had clearly argued that the Eucharist was as necessary as baptism, Fulgentius distinguished them and only asserted the necessity of baptism.⁵⁷ The letter thus takes the African written tradition as the starting point to create new normative rules on the requirements for the efficacy of baptism, in a polemical context against heretics. The distinction made between the *officium* and the *effectus* of baptism is a unique synthesis negotiating a working balance for the initiation process, defining the position and duties of the converts and the clergy: the first are asked to follow the required preparation, the latter grant the reward of baptism in exchange. Far from witnessing a "Medieval ritualisation" of practices or the generalisation of infant baptism, these African sources both demonstrate continuity and the inventive inheritance of the writings and practices of the past.

II. Defending the Roman catechumenate in Ostrogothic Italy: John the deacon to Senarius

The growing need for clear statements on the necessity and utility of the catechumenate that is seen in the letter exchange between Ferrandus and Fulgentius finds remarkable parallels in the well-known exchange between Senarius and John the Deacon in Rome. John's letter, in contrast to its African counterpart, is examined in virtually every study of the catechumenate in the West after the fifth century, as it is the only detailed description about the initiation in Rome in late antiquity.⁵⁸ Despite its significance, scholars have often

⁵⁶ Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 24-26; see Folliet (1989), 567-569.

⁵⁷ On Augustine see Bavaud (1996), 220-221. For Gelasius see *Ep.* 6, 5 (numbering according to Thiel's edition, see note 102).

⁵⁸ The following studies discuss the letter in some detail: de Puniet (1925), 2604-2605; Dondeyne (1932), 751-759; Capelle, B., (1933b), 'Les *Tractatus de baptismo* attribués à saint Maxime de Turin', *QL* 18, 108-

developed quite negative views of John's letter, seeing it as the proof for the decay of the catechumenate due to the generalisation of infant baptism. John and his contemporaries would only still perform on babies a sort of "ritual" catechumenate that they did not even understand, without any teaching dimension, far from the ancient lengthy catechetical and ritual preparation, which was, according to Angenendt (for instance), typical of the supposed ritualisation of Christianity in the early middle ages.⁵⁹ Although useful to show the extent to which John's letter offers a peculiar description of the catechumenate, such studies have not set his letter in its context of writing, perhaps because they were the work of scholars interested in reconstructing liturgical practices.⁶⁰ However, I shall show that John's letter, like the exchange between Ferrandus and Fulgentius, is not simply a description of the rites of the catechumenate but a normative statement justifying the existence of the catechumenate in a polemical context, based on the authority of the "forefathers". In fact, it is in continuity with earlier sources, synthesising arguments based on the rites of initiation for the refutation of heretics.

1. Author and context of composition

Discovered by Mabillon⁶¹ in the only preserved manuscript fragment *Vat. Reg.* 1709A, f. 24r-31v – the final lines of the text are missing – written in Gaul in the mid-ninth century,

118; Chavasse (1948a, 1948b, 1951); Stenzel (1958), 201-209; Kretschmar (1970), 249-257; Righetti (1988), IV, 51-91; Saxer (1988), 589-595; Sobrero, G., (1992), *Anonimo Veronese. Omelie mistagogiche e catechetiche. Edizione critica e studio* (Rome), 188-195; Willis, G. G., (1994), *A history of early roman liturgy to the death of pope Gregory the Great* (London), 118-127; Cavallotto (1996), 224-236; Gillett, A., (2003), *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 411-533* (Cambridge), 214-218; Fisher, J. D. C., (2004), *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West. A study in the Disintegration of the primitive rite of initiation*, 2nd edition (London), 5-7; Brakmann-Pasquato (2004), 474-475; Metzger-Drews-Brakmann (2004), 564; Johnson (2007), 164-168; Ferguson (2009), 766-769.

⁵⁹ Wiegand (1899), 144-145; Dondeyne (1932), esp. 754-757; Stenzel (1958), 201-209; Saxer (1988), 590-591 and 626; Sobrero (1992), 189; Cavallotto (1996), 237-238; Fisher (2004), 5-7. For the ritualisation of Christianity see Angenendt, A., (1984), *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe* (Berlin-New York), 21-32 and 45-57. This trend in scholarship is not limited to medieval Christianity: similar widespread negative views of Roman religion as purely ritualistic have been successfully dismissed by Scheid, J., (2005), *Quand faire c'est croire. Les rites sacrificiels des Romains* (Paris).

⁶⁰ Saxer (1988), 589 and Johnson (2007), 164-165, amongst others, simply accept the dating of "around 500 AD" without any mention of the historical data about the individuals involved in the exchange.

⁶¹ Mabillon, J., (1724), *Museum Italicum*, volume 1 *pars altera* (Paris), 69-76 (edition) and 76-78 (comments).

the letter has been edited by Wilmart together with a Carolingian *florilegium* on baptism which extensively borrowed from it and served as complementary evidence on the text.⁶² The letter was written by a certain deacon John who replied to a lost letter of a *vir illustris* named Senarius, through an intermediary, the *vir spectabilis* Renatus.⁶³ Senarius is the most easily identifiable individual, because of the rarity of his name.⁶⁴ He was a court official and legate for King Theoderic (493-526 AD) in Ravenna, attested in the 500s and 510s and in charge of several embassies in the East and West as clear from the *Variae* of Cassiodorus and his extant epitaph.⁶⁵ He also was a relative and correspondent of Ennodius of Pavia and Faustus Niger and was in close contact to prominent officials and aristocrats in Ravenna.⁶⁶ John's letter to Senarius was written close to that period, certainly after 1 September 509, when Senarius was promoted to the post of *comes patrimonii* by Theoderic – in charge of the government income – and to membership of the Senate, and was thus first called *vir illustris*.⁶⁷ His involvement in diplomatic affairs from Gaul to the pope and the Church in Constantinople was such that the bishop Avitus of Vienne wrote to him in 515-516 to obtain information from pope Hormisdas about the embassy sent from Rome to Constantinople in 515 to put an end to the Acacian schism.⁶⁸

Renatus, who carried Senarius' letter from Ravenna, is more difficult to identify but perhaps he was the *vir clarissimus et spectabilis* Martius Novatus Renatus, an Italian aristocrat

⁶² John, *Epistula ad Senarium* (Wilmart, A., (ed.), *Analecta reginensia* (Vatican City), 158-179). Dating and localisation according to Wilmart. Digitised at http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.lat.1709.pt.A (consulted 20/07/2016).

⁶³ *Ep. ad Sen.* 1: "Domino merito inlustri semperque magnifico filio Senario, Iohannes diaconus. Sublimitatis vestrae paginam filio nostro spectabili viro Renato deferente suscepimus" (Wilmart (1933), 170).

⁶⁴ It has been suggested that his name may be of Gothic origin, however there is no clear evidence to support this claim. See Sundwall, J., (1919), *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte des ausgehenden Römertums* (Helsinki), 153; Amory, P., (2003), *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554* (Cambridge), 413; Gillett (2003), 198 n. 73-75.

⁶⁵ Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV, 3.7.11.13. For his epitaph: text in Mommsen, Th., (ed.), *MGH, AA, XII*, 499 (index under 'Senarius') and translation in Gillett (2003), 194-195. See for more on Senarius: Sundwall (1919), 153-154; *PLRE* 2 (1980), 988-989; 'Senarius', *PCBE* 2 (1999), 2020-2021; Amory (2003), 413; Gillett (2003), 190-219.

⁶⁶ Ennodius, *Ep.* I, 23; III, 11 and 34; IV, 27 and 33; V, 15; VI, 8, 12 and 27; VII, 5; VIII, 7. See Gillett (2003), 200-204. On Faustus: Sundwall (1919), 117-120; *PLRE* 2 (1980), 454; 'Faustus 4', *PCBE* 2 (1999), 756-759.

⁶⁷ Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV, 3 (to Senarius) and 4 (to the Senate).

⁶⁸ Avitus of Vienne, *Ep.* 39 [36] around 515-516 to Senarius.

fluent in Greek who travelled to Constantinople where he was involved in theological debates, and who possessed and revised manuscripts of Boethius' works on dialectic between the 510s and the 520s.⁶⁹

It is thus very likely that John has to be identified with the deacon and friend of Boethius, who, in the 510s, acted as reviewer and transcriber of Boethius' works – notably the *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* – and then asked him a number of theological questions on Trinitarian debates that triggered the composition of treatises like the *De persona et duabus naturis* and the *Quomodo substantiae in eo quod sint, bonae sint*.⁷⁰ He may perhaps also be identified with the future pope John I (523-526), in which case the letter should date between 509 and 523, although there is no way to prove this identification.⁷¹ Boethius' request that John should send a list of corrections and otherwise put the work *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* among those under his name in his library ("mei nominis hoc quoque inseras chartis"), presupposes that John had a prominent position as a scholar but also in the Roman Church, with access to a library and the staff and material required for copying manuscripts.⁷²

All this gives some insights to understand John's remark in the prologue of his letter to Senarius, and more broadly to shed light about the context of composition: he starts his letter noting that Senarius asked him to write something and to transcribe works for him (*dirigi transcripta*). Together with the usual statement of modesty and unworthiness to accomplish the task and complaints about his poor health, John also remarks that a sound answer requires time to consult the books of the forefathers (*maiorum volumina*).⁷³ The deacon concludes the

⁶⁹ See Jahn, O., (1851), 'Über die Subskriptionen in den Handschriften römischer Classiker', *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologisch-Historische Classe* 3, 354-355; Sundwall (1919), 151. For the likely identification with the Renatus in Severus of Antioch see 'Martius Novatus Renatus 1', *PLRE* 2 (1980), 939 and 'Renatus 3', *PCBE* 2 (1999), 1888-1889. Another contemporary who revised manuscripts of Boethius was perhaps Flavius Theodorus ('Fl. Theodorus 63', *PLRE* 2 (1980), 1098).

⁷⁰ On the relations between Boethius and John see Rand, E. K., (1901), 'Der dem Boethius zugeschriebene Traktat de fide catholica', *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie, Supplementband* 26 (Leipzig), 407-461, at 442-446.

⁷¹ See 'Iohannes 26', *PCBE* 2.1 (1999), 1074-1075.

⁷² Boethius, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium, Proem*.

⁷³ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 1.

prologue noting that he shall not follow the order of Senarius' letter but instead divide the topic as he sees fit. Thus, as in the case of the exchanges with Boethius, John is solicited both because of his skills and because of the library and staff at his disposal. The answer he provides is therefore intended as a summary of tradition on broad topics addressed by Senarius and serves as a complement to the transcription of works sent with the letter.

2. Senarius' questions and their background

All of Senarius' questions focus on liturgical practices performed during the Lenten and Easter periods. He asked for the reasons behind the performance of the catechumenate, why there was an episcopal privilege of conferring the chrism, why the Catholic Church did not rebaptise heretics, what the difference was between the exorcists and the acolytes, why there were seven altars consecrated in Rome at Easter, why milk and honey were mixed for the Eucharist at Easter, why the Alleluia was chanted after Easter until Pentecost in Rome, and finally whether dying without receiving the chrism was harmful.⁷⁴ Thus, while Senarius expected an explanation on the meaning of some rites or technical words used, his interest in the letter primarily rested in the reasons for the liturgy in place in Rome. John's answer focuses on a defence of Roman practices on the basis of the Bible and the writings of the forefathers (*maiores*).⁷⁵ The letter serves as a complement to the works sent to Senarius, notably a book "On heresies" which is apparently sent together with the letter as mentioned by John, but which cannot be easily identified.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 2.7.9-14.

⁷⁵ John employs the term quite frequently: *Ep. ad Sen.* 1 ('maiorum volumina'), 11 ('maiores nostri', 'maioribus tradita', 'maiorum ratio'), 13 ('maioribus tradita'), 14 ('a maioribus dictum est'), Wilmart (1933), 171, 177-178.

⁷⁶ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 9. It perhaps corresponds to Augustine's *De haeresibus* including the later addition of the appendix, see Gillett (2003), 214-215 n. 146.

Senarius may have relayed questions that were asked by new converts or potential converts, as suggested by Gillett.⁷⁷ However, John's reply is not simply a manual of rites, but an argued synthesis on Roman practices attentive to theological controversies and aimed at a learned Christian audience. It is worth reflecting about the possible political implications of Senarius' queries: in the context of the Gothic kingdom and its relations with the Byzantine East, his questions about rebaptism and Roman liturgical practices and John's reference to the difficult situation in Africa preventing bishops from claiming the privilege of conferring the chrism all relate well to the contemporary controversy with Arians both in Africa and Italy. They also fit more broadly within a well-documented context of contemporary epistolary exchanges between Italian aristocrats and clerics about theological controversies which deeply influenced church politics.⁷⁸ Despite the fact that it is sent to a layman, the letter may also be compared to some extent to papal decretals enforcing Roman liturgical practices and replying to queries of their correspondents, for which there is a number of examples in the fourth and fifth century.⁷⁹ The letter itself, however, does not provide any information about its background, John only noting that Senarius was guided by his "*catholica sollicitudo*" when he wrote to him, suggesting that Senarius himself was a Catholic.⁸⁰ It is clear that, if unanswered, Senarius' questions could become a challenge for Catholics in Rome, who were expected, in John's name, to justify the customs of their Church.

⁷⁷ Gillett (2003), 214-218.

⁷⁸ A good example is Faustus – probably Faustus Niger, a correspondent of Senarius – who solicited a letter from the priest Trifolius: *Ep. ad beatum Faustum senatorem contra Ioannem Scytham monachum* (ed. F. Glorie CCSL 85 (1972), 137-141). Trifolius' letter discussed the theopaschite formula of Scythian monks from Constantinople debated in the late 510s – see more in this chapter on the related letter to the African bishops – and prompting pope Hormisdas' decision to expel the monks (see 'Faustus 4', PCBE 2.1 (1999), 756-759 and 'Trifolius', *ibid.* 2.2, 2213-2214; Blaudeau, Ph., (2012), *Le siège de Rome et l'Orient (488-536). Étude géo-ecclésiologique* (Rome), 188-191). John the Deacon asked Boethius about the same topic, who replied with the treatise *Utrum Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus de divinitate substantialiter praedicentur*. For more on the exchanges between the clergy and the aristocracy in Italy see Pietri, Ch., (1997a), 'Aristocratie et société cléricale dans l'Italie chrétienne au temps d'Odoacre et de Théodoric', in *Id.*, (1997b), *Christiana Respublica* 3 volumes (Rome), II, 1007-1057, esp. 1027-1033.

⁷⁹ See the letters mentioned in notes 86 and 87.

⁸⁰ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 1. See further references on Senarius as a Catholic in Gillett (2003), 217 n. 157.

Thus, the purpose of John's letter is not to offer a linear description of the liturgy, but to show why practices are authoritative and on what basis. A significant portion of the letter focusses on the catechumenate and addresses Senarius' questions, which are the only ones to be quoted in detail:

You ask me to tell you why before a man is baptised he must first become a catechumen (*catechumenus fiat*); or what the meaning is of the word or of the word "catechizing" (*catechizatio*); in what rule (*regula*) of the Old Testament it is set out; or whether indeed the rule is a new one, deriving rather from the New Testament. Also you ask what a scrutiny (*scrutinium*) is, and why infants are scrutinised (*scrutinentur infantes*) three times before the Pascha: and what purpose is served by this care and preoccupation with these scrutinies (*scrutaminis*).⁸¹

Senarius, like Ferrandus, did not expect from John a detailed description of the actions performed during catechumenate. Taken literally, his questions would mean that he did not understand the catechumenate and that, as a Christian himself, he failed to receive any explanation on the rites that he received or witnessed. However, a closer look shows that his questions are subtler: the focus is not simply on the rites themselves, but on the interpretation and justification of catechumenal practices for small children – the admission into the catechumenate, the teaching and examination of candidates before baptism – on the basis of biblical rules, old or new. Instead of answering these specific questions only, John provides a summary of the catechumenate, from the admission process to baptism, also including a description of postbaptismal rites.

3. John's answer

The rites of the catechumenate

John starts his reply with a recapitulation of the history of mankind, the fall through original sin and the captivity endured at the hands of the devil. The catechumenate is required to snatch candidates from the devil:

⁸¹ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 2 (Whitaker (1960), 144).

There cannot therefore be any doubt that before a man is reborn in Christ he is held close in the power of the devil: and unless he is extricated from the devil's toils, renouncing him among the first beginnings of faith with a true confession, he cannot approach the grace of the saving laver. And therefore he must first enter the classroom of the catechumens. *Catechesis* is the Greek word for instruction. He is instructed through the Church's ministry, by the blessing of one laying his hand [upon his head], that he may know who he is and who he shall be: in other words, that from being one of the damned he becomes holy, from unrighteousness he appears as righteous, and finally, from being a servant he becomes a son [...]. He receives therefore exsufflation and exorcism, in order that the devil may be put to flight and an entrance prepared for Christ our God: so that being delivered from the power of darkness he may be *translated to the kingdom* (Co. 1, 13) of the glory of the love of God. [...] The catechumen receives blessed salt also, to signify that just as all flesh is kept healthy by salt the mind which is drenched and weakened by the waves of this world is held steady by the salt of wisdom and of the preaching of the word of God.⁸²

The practices of the catechumenate witnessed by Senarius and John recall earlier sources: although there is no securely dated source for the Roman liturgy before John, his description of the entrance into the catechumenate mentions an instruction and rites that are all attested in Augustine's writings: laying of hands repeated over time, exorcism and exsufflation as two distinct gestures, the giving of salt.⁸³ After discussing the entrance, John also refers to the second phase of the catechumenate, the baptismal preparation, employing the technical terms *competens* and *electus* to refer to the candidates, and mentioning the key rites of the renunciation to the devil and the learning and reciting of the creed.⁸⁴ He describes the process of initiation with the imagery of the growth within the womb of the Church, particularly common in earlier African texts.⁸⁵ John gives the only detailed presentation of the scrutiny (*scrutinium*) in any preserved source from the West: it is repeated three times in Rome and takes place before Easter as noted by Senarius, perhaps in accordance with earlier Roman sources and certainly in contrast to a single session mentioned in Ferrandus' account.⁸⁶ Senarius and/or the deacon

⁸² John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 3 (Whitaker (1960), 144-145).

⁸³ See chapter 3 part I.

⁸⁴ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 4.

⁸⁵ For instance: Augustine, *S.* 216, 7; *S.* 352A (=Dolbeau 14), 3; (Quodvultdeus), *Sy* 1, 1.

⁸⁶ The only Roman source mentioning a third scrutiny ("tertio scrutinius scrutatus") is the papal decretal *Ad Gallos* written by Damasus or Siricius (see Duval, Y.-M., (2005), *La décrétale Ad gallos episcopos: son texte et son auteur. Texte critique, traduction française et commentaire* (Leiden-Boston), 1-18 arguing for

had perhaps read the papal decretals of the fourth and fifth centuries generically referring to the necessity of performing scrutinies before Easter.⁸⁷ John however describes them in more detail as an examination of faith to ascertain that the candidates have renounced the devil, perhaps hinting at the recitation of the creed, with reference to Romans 10, 10 and 10, 17, both key texts often quoted in sermons on the creed in Africa and Italy.⁸⁸ Before discussing the baptismal rites, the deacon finally outlines the pre-baptismal rite of anointment of the ears and nostrils (*apertio aurium*), which is unknown in Africa, but interpreted in different ways by Ambrose and a probably late fifth-century Italian pseudo-Augustinian sermon, both close to John's description.⁸⁹

Justifying the catechumenate for adults and infants: the combination of liturgical performance and written traditions

John's summary has often been deemed to excessively focus on ritual actions, particularly his presentation of catechesis as a laying of hands, and often interpreted as evidence that he reduced the catechumenate to a series of rites without any attention to the conversion process, supposedly because most candidates were small children.⁹⁰ Although Senarius' questions focussed on small children (*infantes*), it is clear that John's reply is much broader, summarising the main steps of the catechumenate for adults as witnessed in several sources from late Antiquity and thus perfectly fitting with a situation in which both adults and

the attribution to Damasus and presenting contrasting viewpoints, and 38-39 for the edition of the passage on the scrutiny). For scrutinies in early medieval liturgy see Dondeyne (1932), 751-787 and Fisher (2004), 2-47.

⁸⁷ See the decretal *Ad Gallos*; Siricius, *Ep.* 1, 3 (to Himerius of Tarragona) and Leo the Great, *Ep.* 16, 6 (to the bishops of Sicily). He may have used other decretals, particularly a passage of Innocentius' letter to Decentius of Gubbio on the episcopal privilege of conferring the chrism (*Ep.* 25: see Connell, M. F., *Church and Worship in Fifth-Century Rome: The Letter of Innocent I to Decentius of Gubbio* (Cambridge, 2002), 28-33).

⁸⁸ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 4; Augustine, *Symb. Cat.*; Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon* 18, 8; AN Veron 5, 2 = PS-MAX tr 1 = CPPM 1117 (*Inc.*: "Omnis quidem Dei sermo, fratres charissimi", attributed to Augustine in the earliest manuscripts). His description of the examination of hearts also recalls Augustine, *S.* 216, 6.

⁸⁹ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 4-6; Ambrose, *De Mysteriis* I, 2 and *De Sacramentis* I, 2; AN Veron 5 (see the attempt of demonstrating John's borrowing in Sobrero (1992), 187-195; for the opposite thesis: Capelle (1933b), 112-114). Another description is given in a pseudo-Maximus sermon published by Étaix, R., (1996), 'Catéchèse inédite sur Ephpheta', *REAug* 42, 65-70.

⁹⁰ See note 59.

children were initiated.⁹¹ Moreover, a remark in his letter shows that he was aware that his summary of the catechumenate was intended more broadly for adults and children alike: “I must say plainly and at once, in case I seem to have overlooked the point, that all these things are done even to infants (*parvuli*) [...]”.⁹² It would be reductive to follow Dondeyne and Fisher when they state that John’s definition of the scrutiny as an examination with a public renunciation and profession of faith implies adult candidates only because John’s synthesis was “the work of a learned man, who admits that he has made use of earlier documents”.⁹³

In fact, the focus on rituals and the reception of written traditions has to be understood within the objective of his text: demonstrating the necessity of the catechumenate and on what basis it has been established. The rites performed are systematically related to their origin and meaning in the history of salvation, that is the relationship between God and man as narrated in the Bible from the time of creation. For John the ritual performance is a mirror of this history. While John is attentive to the existence of liturgical diversity, notably when discussing specifically Roman practices,⁹⁴ he nevertheless also insists, in the same way as Fulgentius did, on the fact that liturgical performances witnessed by everyone and which have become part of custom cannot be done in vain.⁹⁵ Concerning the catechumenate in particular, John’s answer does not even contemplate the possibility that the rites performed may not be necessary, but on the contrary it takes the rites as the basis for demonstrating their usefulness, when correctly interpreted. John openly makes use, not only of the Bible and salvation

⁹¹ *Infans* is better interpreted as referring to small children rather than a figurative use for newly born Christians: Senarius’ question is about the catechumenate and not post-baptismal rites, thus it would make little sense to describe candidates as “reborn”.

⁹² John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 2 (Whitaker (1960), 147).

⁹³ Quotation from Fisher (2004), 7 who himself referred to Dondeyne (1932), 757. Fisher, among others, argued that the scrutinies were limited to exorcisms, although it is clearly against John’s definition. A broader understanding of the word, adopted by Dondeyne (1932), as referring to meetings when candidates were taught, examined and performed rites would be more accurate.

⁹⁴ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 7 and 13: there is no episcopal privilege of the chrism in Africa at the time because of necessity; chanting the Alleluia until Pentecost is a Roman custom not necessarily to be followed elsewhere. John also distinguishes between what is shared by Christians everywhere on the basis of the Scriptures, the teaching of the Fathers (“*instituta patrum*”) and the canons of Nicea, and local practices inherited from the forefathers (“*maioribus tradita*”).

⁹⁵ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 11 on the consecration of seven altars.

history, but of the Christian written tradition (*maiorum volumina*) as a source of inspiration to interpret the rites. However, in contradistinction to Isidore of Seville, who would later write a short definition of catechumens as pagans converting to Christianity,⁹⁶ for John the catechumenate is a necessary ritual cleansing to obtain grace at baptism. Crucially therefore, John's reply is not an artificial synthesis on the rites of the catechumenate based on earlier documents – akin to modern scholarly work reconstructing ancient liturgy – but instead it combines first-hand experience of liturgical performances of initiation – perhaps particularly as a deacon in charge of initiating catechumens – with the theological interpretations of Christian writers of the past found in his library. The rites practiced at his time and the inherited written interpretations reinforce each other to argue for the necessity of the catechumenate in a context of polemics.

4. John's use of the liturgical argument in polemics against Pelagians

The context of divisions within Christianity and the need to argue for “Catholic” practices and interpretations permeates John's endeavour and helps further explain his focus. Indeed, Senarius' questions necessarily offered a doctrinal challenge to John, requiring him to show that the Roman Church that he represented was able to offer a convincing synthesis of tradition. In particular, Senarius' question about the necessity of the catechumenate for infants seems to relate it to the Pelagian controversy, as made particularly clear from John's answer. John follows argumentative techniques inherited from the preceding century and near contemporaries, close parallels in his text even pinpointing specific contacts that shed light on his argumentation. While the prologue on original sin and the captivity of mankind finds parallels in Augustine, Leo the Great and the *De fide catholica* attributed to Boethius – but

⁹⁶ Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II, 21: “Caticumini sunt qui primum de gentilitate veniunt habentes voluntatem credendi in Christo [...]” (Lawson, C. W., (ed.), *CCSL* 113 (1989), 95-96).

perhaps written by John himself – ⁹⁷ the reply to Senarius’ question seems to adopt Augustine’s argument against Pelagians when it explains the necessity of pre-baptismal purification through the rites of exorcism and *exsufflatio* with the quotation from Col 1, 13. Indeed, as we have seen, the bishop of Hippo repeatedly referred to these rites that he said were performed on infants as well – more specifically the combination of the verbs *exorcizare* and *exsufflare* – as evidence for original sin and the necessity of infant baptism, also quoting the same passage from Colossians.⁹⁸ Thus, far from simply witnessing the existence of similar rites in Africa and Italy, as liturgists have assumed, John’s closely followed an approach already developed in Augustine.⁹⁹

However, other fifth-century sources also made use of Augustine’s arguments and seem to have inspired John’s account. A few years after Augustine’s death, Prosper of Aquitaine wrote the *Praeteritorum Sedis Apostolicae episcoporum auctoritates de gratia Dei* – wrongly attributed to pope Celestinus – to refute Julian of Eclanum, on the basis of Augustine’s arguments.¹⁰⁰ In particular, Prosper employed Augustine’s argument that the prayers made at the altar for each category of people (pagans, catechumens, penitents, faithful) are proofs of the fact that purification from sin is needed and only granted by the grace of God and not simply thanks to individual effort.¹⁰¹ For the purposes of this broader demonstration, he also

⁹⁷ *Ep. ad Sen.* 3: for “praevaricatione primi hominis” see Boethius, *De fide catholica* 114 and 234; for “homo [...] fieri non est dedignatus in tempore” see Leo the Great, *Sermo XXII*, 1 (*De Natale Domini*, Chavasse, A. (ed.), *CCSL* 138 (1973), 91-92 repeated in the *Tomus ad Flavianum* (= Leo, *Ep.* 28). For “ex sola matre fieri” see Augustine, *S.* 126, 5. See more generally Augustine, *Ep.* 157, 3. For John as author of the *De fide catholica* see Rand (1901), 442-446.

⁹⁸ See chapter 3 p. 97 n. 72 for references.

⁹⁹ Saxer (1988), 591 for instance only notes the similarities in the rites of purification mentioned.

¹⁰⁰ See Villegas Marín, R., (2003), ‘En polémica con Julián de Eclanum: por una nueva lectura del *Syllabus de gratia* de Próspero de Aquitania’, *Augustinianum* 43, 81-124 suggesting its composition in 439.

¹⁰¹ *Praeteritorum Sedis Apostolicae episcoporum auctoritates de gratia dei* (PL 51 (1846), 210 and (Celestinus), *Ep.* 21, 12 (PL 50 (1846), 536), 8-9: “Cum enim sanctorum plebium praesules mandata sibimet legatione fundantur apud divinam clementiam, humani generis agunt causam, et tota secum Ecclesia congemiscens, postulant ut infidelibus donetur fides [...] ut denique, catechumenis ad regenerationis sacramenta perductis, coelestis misericordiae aula reseretur. Haec autem non perfunctorie neque inaniter a Domino peti, rerum ipsarum monstrat effectus: quandoquidem ex omni errorum genere plurimos Deus dignatur attrahere, quos erutos de potestate tenebrarum, transferat in regnum filii charitatis suae (cf. Col 1, 13) et ex vasis irae faciat vasa misericordiae (cf. Rm 9, 22)”. On this passage and the inheritance of Augustine’s argument see Villegas Marín (2003), 91-94. For Clerck, P. de, (1978), “‘Lex

borrowed Augustine's argument based on exorcisms and exsufflations performed on infants, but significantly extended it to include *iuvēnes* who seek baptism.¹⁰² Later, pope Gelasius I (492-496) used the same liturgical argument of Augustine and Prosper, with the same biblical quotation from Colossians against Pelagians to enforce infant baptism for the cleansing of original sin in a letter to the bishops of Picenum sent on 1 November 493.¹⁰³ John, like Prosper and Gelasius, is a witness of the influence of Augustine's liturgical argument against Pelagians in later discussions of the catechumenate and baptism. He appears to be particularly close to Prosper since he employs the argument made from the rites performed on infants to more broadly justify the necessity of the catechumenate for adults and infants alike. He applied the argument to demonstrate the existence of original sin, the pervasiveness of sin and the need for purification through baptism.

A comparison between John's and Gelasius' letters and the other cited sources in which the liturgical argument is displayed shows a remarkable difference that may help shed further light on John's peculiar description of the catechesis. Gelasius used the verbs *exsufflare* and *catechizare*, thus employing *catechizare*, a word meant to refer to oral instruction, instead of *exorcizare* as in Augustine and Prosper.¹⁰⁴ This, of course, recalls John's emphasis on rituals in his description of the catechesis. The different terminology shows that while both borrowed from Augustine or later fifth-century sources, they also developed a more flexible use of the terms pertaining to catechesis. *Catechizare* could be applied both to infants and adults : while infants were brought to baptism by godparents who would receive the catechesis in their

orandi, lex credendi": Sens originel et avatars historiques d'un adage équivoque', *QL* 59, 193-212, at 203-204 Prosper may have borrowed from Augustine, *Ep.* 217.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 9: "Illud etiam quod circa baptizandos in universo mundo sancta Ecclesia uniformiter agit, non otioso contemplatur intuitu. Cum sive parvuli, sive iuvenes ad regenerationis veniunt sacramentum, non prius fontem vitae adeunt quam exorcismis et exsufflationibus clericorum spiritus ab eis immundus abigatur [...]"

¹⁰³ Gelasius, *Ep.* 6, 5 (= Jaffé 621; numbering according to Thiel's edition): "Hinc est, quod exsufflantur et catechizantur infantes, [...] *eruti de potestate tenebrarum* (Col 1, 13), sicut docet apostolus, ad Filii Dei sortem purgationemque legitimam transferuntur" (Thiel, A., (ed.), (1867-1868), *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum a S. Hilario usque ad Pelag. II*, volume 1 (Brumberg), 330).

¹⁰⁴ Later, Bede (or pseudo-Bede since the attribution is doubtful) would similarly borrow from Prosper' passage, with the same substitution of *catechizare* (*In primam partem Samuhelis* 3, 17).

place,¹⁰⁵ in late antiquity, more broadly, there was clearly an intimate link between the oral instruction and the rites performed, as is clear from all the African sermons to catechumens examined in this thesis. Both exorcism and catechesis are words spoken meant to separate the hearers from the devil and enact a transformation in them, be they adults or infants. The instruction given to candidates in the form of catechesis could perfectly be described as a ritual performance related to exorcism. Thus, it is too restrictive to strictly distinguish catechesis from rituals and instruction for adults from instructions for infants: Gelasius' and John's description of the catechesis were not necessarily breaking with tradition, but only closely associated oral instruction with rites of purification, in the same way as preachers did before them.

It remains unsure, however, whether John borrowed directly from Augustine, from later sources, or both. It should be noted that Prosper's liturgical argument – listing catechumens amongst other groups, with the quotation from Colossians¹⁰⁶ – was also included in a letter sent from Rome around 519 by the deacon Peter and other Scythian monks to the African bishops exiled in Cagliari.¹⁰⁷ John's and Peter's letters both originate from Rome in the same period : it is worth hypothesising that Prosper's text was readily available in Rome and had become the authoritative statement of the pope of Rome against Pelagianism. Since the extract from Prosper precisely included an argument mentioning catechumens, it likely was a main source for John.

¹⁰⁵ John mentions godparents, see *Ep. ad Sen.* 7. For an overview of godparenthood in the West until the sixth century see Dujarier (1962), 37-67; Lynch (1986), 83-140.

¹⁰⁶ See note 101.

¹⁰⁷ Peter (and others), *Epistula Petri diaconi et aliorum qui in causa fidei Romam directi fuerant* 27 (see Fraipont, J., (ed.), *CCSL* 91A (1968), 551-562, at 561-62 (reply at 563-615) and Glorie, F., (ed.), *CCSL* 85A (1978), 157-172, at 171-72). Later sources from the seventh century similarly copied the whole passage on the liturgical argument from Prosper's text, including the conclusion on exorcism: Cresconius Africanus, *Concordia canonum* 296-298 and the augmented version of Gennadius' *Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatum* 31 (*PL* 58 (1847), 987-988) perhaps to be attributed to the Spanish bishop Brachiarus (see *CPL* 958a). Part of the passage is also copied in a Latin pseudo-Chrysostom sermon, probably as a later interpolation to the original text: JO-N 23 (*Inc.*: “Deus noster faciens hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem suam (Gn 1, 26), dedit praeceptum in creatura”). Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II, 21 recapitulates the tradition, using John's letter, amongst others.

The polemical background of John's borrowings opens new perspectives concerning the letter: Senarius' questions were related to the Pelagian controversy at least as much as to the context of rivalry with Arians. It seems reductive to state with Gillett that Senarius' questions were prompted by the desire to proselytise among Goths and that John's focus was on "liturgy" rather than "theology" and apologetics.¹⁰⁸ John, contrary to other contemporary writers borrowing from Augustine, Prosper, and other authorities, remained totally silent about the sources used in his synthesis: however, the polemical background of his presentation of the catechumenate appears clearly. John only mentioned the *maiores* perhaps because he mainly drew from sources found in his library in Rome, like Prosper's *Auctoritates*, that he considered part of the heritage of his Church, or perhaps because he preferred to avoid naming authorities that would make him more vulnerable to criticism.¹⁰⁹ It is possible that Senarius' letter was sent in the same troubled context as Peter's letter to African bishops, during the visit of Scythian monks to Rome in the late 510s, and that John's letter was expected to clear the doubts raised by these monks and provide a clear statement of the Roman position on the catechumenate and baptism. John used his letter to circulate a synthesis on the catechumenate, while, as he said to Senarius, a more thorough refutation of Pelagians and other heretics was given in the anonymous treatise on heresies that he sent with his letter.¹¹⁰ The letter to Senarius is therefore much more than a list of the rites of the catechumenate and other liturgical customs. It is a justification of the catechumenate against opponents employing ritual customs and Christian writings of the past. John's letter shows that the catechumenate remained an important stake in doctrinal debates and even deserved detailed discussion in aristocratic circles in a period of growing need for authoritative summaries on the Christian liturgy. Augustine and his followers had a deep influence on this process in Italy perhaps as much as in Africa.

¹⁰⁸ Gillett (2003), 217-218.

¹⁰⁹ See note 94 for the distinction between the *maiores* and foreign authorities.

¹¹⁰ John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 9: "De Pelagianis autem, Eutycianis sive Nestorianis aperta et vulgata sunt omnia, quae, in libro de haeresibus cum legeritis, plenius poteritis advertere" (Wilmart (1933), 176).

Conclusion

Despite differences arising from their context of composition, the two letter exchanges explored share essential preoccupations and address the problems raised in a similar way. Ferrandus' letter and Fulgentius' reply are learned conversations between clerics about pastoral problems arising from the administration of the rites of initiation, attempting to draft a clear response from the church authorities. By contrast, John's letter is a justification and defence of Roman liturgical practices during the Lenten and Easter periods in reply to the questions of a powerful layman. However, both exchanges, in the form of questions and answers, aim at drawing syntheses on the catechumenate to justify the existence of liturgical practices, their necessity and utility, on the basis of authorities of the past in a context of polemics against adversaries, in this case Arians and Pelagians. Thus, clerics replying to consultations developed normative stances on the catechumenate through the recourse to a shared tradition. Far from ritualising the catechumenate, John, Ferrandus and Fulgentius used the liturgy, as Augustine, Prosper and Gelasius did, as the basis to argue fundamental points, raise issues, convince correspondents and refute opponents.

In early sixth-century Carthage and Rome, liturgical practices of initiation were under the spotlight and at the centre of doctrinal controversies. It is speculative to draw any general conclusion on the basis of a handful of letters; however, it is still tempting to suggest that the early sixth-century represented a time of particularly intense debate and reflection on the liturgy of initiation. As Brown put it: "We are dealing with persons who were deeply committed to bringing the Early Christian past into the present. They wished to make it available in the condensed form of digests, anthologies, and encyclopaedic compilations; to turn the recommendations of ancient Christian authors and the rules of former Christian councils into a finely calibrated system of rules, adjusted to the needs of pastoral guidance".¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Brown (2013), 25.

As in the preceding century, in a context of renewed division, laymen and clerics alike required written commentaries and rules on the liturgy to give authority and unity to their religious community. Divisions, local diversity and change were significant challenges: while writing to defend and explain inherited traditions, clerics brought together their immediate experience of the liturgy and the writings of their predecessors to develop new comprehensive statements on the catechumenate that helped stabilise these traditions into a coherent set of rules.

The progressive crystallisation of practices and ideas in a polemical context is perhaps the most accurate way of describing the evolution of the catechumenate at the dawn of the middle ages. When comparing this material to the evidence explored for fifth-century Africa, contrary to what scholars have assumed, there seems to be no fundamental “break with tradition.”¹¹² Both exchanges show that adults and infants alike were initiated, while practices varied locally, were questioned and subject to polemical debates. In the early sixth century, the catechumenate still represented a crucial stake for the formation of Christian communities. Despite common assumptions, thus, John’s letter, its focus on rituals and its anti-Pelagian tone, cannot be used as evidence for the generalisation of infant baptism. The Pelagian controversy revolved around broader issues: John’s and Fulgentius’ letters provided syntheses to demonstrate the need for ritual cleansing through clerical performance in order to obtain eternal life. They dealt with the same recurrent pastoral problems of earlier generations. However, the summaries provided to solve these problems were also part of a new trend: the progressive fixing of ritual practices in written form and the growing recourse to Christian authorities of the past. Their combination led to the creation of an authoritative tradition and created the premises for greater uniformity of practices and theological interpretations. There is no extant African source for the catechumenate after Fulgentius; however, most of the copies today preserved of African texts discussed in this thesis were written in the Carolingian

¹¹² Stenzel (1958), 204 employs the phrase twice about John’s letter.

period by and for clerics striving to promote standard baptismal practices across the Empire. Augustine's writings, and more broadly African texts, were widely read and influential for centuries, playing a crucial role in successive attempts to bring greater uniformity to initiation practices from the middle ages through to the present day.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has offered the first broad historical investigation on the catechumenate in late antique Africa, considering it as both a progressive initiation process and a peculiar way of being Christian. Starting from the experience of Augustine himself as a *catechumenus*, I have extended research to a broader corpus of texts for Augustine and put his literary production in a wider African context. Paying constant attention to the context of composition of each source and adopting a longer chronology from the fourth to the sixth century, I have shown that in late antiquity belonging was progressively acquired with a number of specific rituals for catechumens and debated in polemics, while practices varied widely even within Africa, precisely at a time when first attempts were made to set new normative rules.

The catechumenate enabled a progressive integration of converts and brought the broader community to redefine itself as it welcomed new members. This organisation was the outcome of an effective compromise: converts gradually learnt about their new religion and tested their commitment, while religious communities monitored the integration process and constantly reflected on the core beliefs and practices that would lead their community to stand out and attract converts. This compromise had downsides for clerics like Augustine who aimed at building a united community and imposing strict rules: the liminal status of catechumens meant that they were less liable to religious authority and could more easily change sides. Thus, they constituted an essential stake in a context of divisions and polemics between Christian communities.

As particularly shown for Augustine and sixth-century letters, the views of clerics were not simply imposed on the audience but were a matter of intense debate and dialogue, both with catechumens and with other clerics and laymen attempting to define alternative rules at a time of varying practices and religious polemics. Augustine's writings and contemporary

canonical legislation show that clerics notably aimed to draw a clear distinction between the *catechumeni* and the *fideles* in terms of rituals and set high requirements in matters of behaviour. The objective was to draw boundaries and at the same time bring *catechumeni* to ask for baptism to share the benefits of the *fideles*. Canonical legislation however already suggests that beyond strict regulations, *catechumeni* could be initiated more freely than generally assumed. On the other hand, Augustine's writings shed light on the fact that catechumens could both genuinely assert their Christian belonging and have an open understanding of it, hoping to share benefits beyond strict control from church authorities, rules of behaviour and baptism.

Clerics however, as demonstrated in our investigation of Augustine's writings and contemporary sermons, saw the liminality of catechumens as a tool for renewing the commitment of the wider community and to define Christian membership against opponents. Augustine strove to impose discipline from the very beginning of the catechumenate, employing the foundational rite of the cross on the forehead to bring cohesion to the community and setting a number of rules of admission for catechumens before they could be baptised in the *De fide et operibus*. Similarly contemporary fifth-century sermons show that the baptismal preparation was meant to develop a distinctive sense of belonging through major rituals of renunciation of the devil and profession of faith, coupled with extensive catecheses reinforcing the boundaries of the community against rival churches. From the fourth to the sixth century, in prominent cities like Carthage and Rome in particular, Augustine, Fulgentius and John acted as experts, employing their skills to rally catechumens to their party thanks to authoritative syntheses.

From the example of Augustine himself, particularly in the *Confessiones*, to the emergency baptism of a slave narrated in Ferrandus' letter, this investigation has shown both the fluid nature of Christian membership and the problems that it raised, as repeated attempts were made to develop clerical authority over catechumens in a context of widespread division. In turn, the competition for members fuelled the creativity of clerics and explains the variety

of the preserved evidence on the catechumenate. The study of fifth-century sermons shows that variations and originality in terms of rites and catecheses resist any attempt to reconstruct a standard organisation of the initiation, even within a single region like Africa.

Moreover, the continuous importance of the catechumenate as a way of being Christian and the resurgence of pastoral problems raised since Augustine's time lead us to reconsider modern assumptions about the supposed "ritualisation" of early medieval Christianity. Tracing the development of liturgical arguments from Augustine to the sixth century, this thesis has provided a better explanation of the significance of rituals, identifying their major role in controversies as trustworthy sources of authority. Augustine was the first to systematically employ the practices of catechumens as an argument to reject opponents and define the boundaries of his community, first against the Donatists to strengthen his condemnation of rebaptism, then against Pelagians, repeatedly resorting to the rites of exorcism during the catechumenate to demonstrate the necessity of the forgiveness of sins for infants. Fifth-century sermons inherited the anti-Donatist argument and applied it against Arians, while sixth-century letters founded their demonstrations of the necessity and efficacy of the catechumenate in ritual practices, paired with Biblical interpretations and the creative reception of a Christian written tradition, in which Augustine features prominently. Thus, this thesis has shown that the catechumenate is of crucial importance to study the process of Christianisation and the dynamics behind the formation, internal organisation and interaction of Christian communities in a context of changing ritual practices and polemical debates.

The two-fold division between the catechumens and the baptised is a major feature of Christian communities that largely nuances the widespread assumption that becoming a Christian meant to adopt a single uniform identity. New light may be shed on the spread of Christianity by integrating this internal complexity of Christian communities in broader overviews. This thesis is the starting point for other regional studies on catechumens and the catechumenate in the East (Greece, Anatolia, Near East and Egypt) and in the West (Italy,

Gaul, Spain), examining a broad range of sources and adopting a historical perspective over a long chronological span. Such detailed regional studies are required to reach a better understanding of the catechumenate and critically compare the evidence. A careful analysis of each source in its specific context shall provide further ground to identify common patterns and highlight the variety of local practices against any unwarranted standardisation.

While there are no African sources on the catechumenate beyond the sixth century, this thesis provides the basis to explore the historical evolution of initiation in the West until the ninth century at least. The development in the sixth century of new authoritative syntheses setting norms for the initiation was only the beginning of an evolution that would reach its peak in later centuries. As I started this project some years ago, I envisaged an exploration of this later evolution on a larger scale, embracing Africa and Italy until the ninth century, to understand how initiation evolved from antiquity to the early middle ages. The outcomes of this thesis show that early medieval sources are better understood by evaluating what they owe to their late antique predecessors in terms of their interest in Christian initiation and baptism. I have particularly stressed that the catechumenate was not only an initiation process comprising a number of rituals but also a peculiar way of being Christian, that was at the centre of polemical controversies. The straightforward narrative of the decline of the catechumenate with the generalisation of infant baptism delineates too neat a break between antiquity and the middle ages, failing to provide answers on the continued importance of the catechumenate in late antique sources. The results of this investigation suggest that infant baptism had yet to become the norm in the sixth century, and that it did not simply replace the catechumenate. Indeed, infant baptism, a one-time performance and the starting point of religious membership, could not concretely replace the catechumenate as a way of being Christian and acquiring a sense of religious belonging through teaching and rituals. One would now learn about religion and progress in terms of religious commitment only after baptism.

Research is needed on how and when this two-fold organisation progressively gave way to new models for acquiring and manifesting religious belonging. Institutions developed to address this new situation. In the West, the development of monasticism may have provided a response to infant baptism, when a new hierarchy of progressive commitment to Christianity was transferred from Christian communities to the more restricted circle of the monastery. Such an investigation would renew the field by connecting late antique evidence to its reception in Carolingian times. The spread of Augustine's works pertaining to the catechumenate may also be further traced in the manuscript evidence and in literary borrowings in later centuries, particularly in a monastic context, to assess to what extent and how his works were read in the early middle ages. Comparative studies beyond Christianity provide another main field for future research. Two-fold memberships with corresponding degrees of commitment and ritual participation, attested notably amongst Manichaeans and Jews, may be beneficially compared to the catechumenate, leading to a better understanding of how religious communities negotiated the integration of new members in late antiquity and beyond.

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