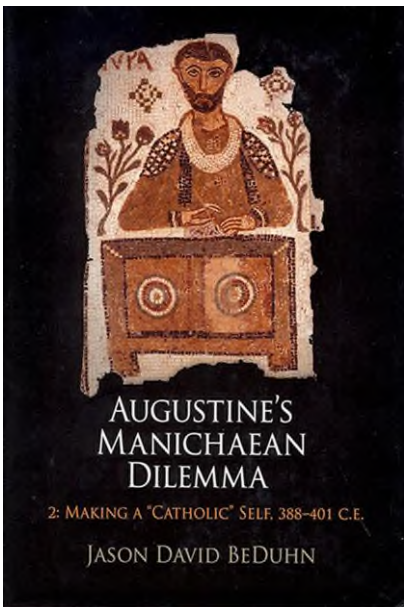
(BOOK REVIEW) Jason David BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma, 2: Making a "Catholic" Self 388-401 C.E.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. 552 pages. $79.95



Manichaeism has often been viewed as a minor transitional theme in Augustine's early life. Having left behind Manichaean materialism, it is argued, Augustine was able to discover first Christian Platonism and then the Pauline doctrine of grace. In a series of recent publications, Jason BeDuhn has offered a considerably more complex and nuanced account of Augustine's relation to Manichaeism. As BeDuhn notes, Manichaeism was not something Augustine could simply leave behind. Manichaeism had become an important part of Augustine's life because it proposed to answer questions that continued to be of central importance to Augustine. The Manichaean movement also promoted ascetic practices that aimed to address experiences of inner conflict and weakness of will (impairment of rational control over action), experiences that deeply troubled Augustine. Thus, even after Augustine had ceased his affiliation with the Manichaean community, he continued to wrestle with the theological issues raised by the Manichaeans. Given Augustine's own Manichaean past and his continuing need to address Manichaean interlocutors, this discussion required an ongoing personal engagement that ultimately shaped the development of Augustine's theology.

The present book (the second in a three volume series) examines the differing ways in which Manichaeans and Catholics selectively drew upon and reinterpreted early Christian texts and practices and how these differing patterns of reception ultimately shaped the trajectory of Augustine's own development. In discussing Augustine's reception of pre-existing ideas, BeDuhn focuses his discussion on three key themes: "the fragmentedness and disability of human will, the centrality of confession to defining the self in its relation to God, [and] the necessity of divine grace" (404). Each of these will be discussed in turn.

As Paul had noted in Romans 7, when one is considering different courses of action, it is possible to experience inner conflict as to what should be done. In some cases, inner conflict may even lead one to do not what one approves, but some other action that one claims to despise. The question for later interpreters of Paul was how such conflicts and failures (weakness of will) should be understood. For the Manichaean tradition, inner conflict arose from the presence of an alien other, an irredeemably evil nature connected with matter and the cravings arising from one's mortal body. The good mind could therefore be submerged and overwhelmed by the greater quantity of darkness associated with the body. As a result, liberation could occur only

when divine enlightenment restored the mind of a chosen individual, making it possible again to will rightly.

After his conversion to Christian Platonism, Augustine's criticism of the Manichaean account of evil had followed the familiar lines of earlier Christian anti-gnostic and anti-Manichaean polemic: There is no inherently, irredeemably evil nature that compels one to sinful action. Actions performed under the constraint of necessity are done through no fault of one's own and cannot be considered sin. Instead, each rational being possesses free will. Only where one possesses free will can moral responsibility (and hence, sinfulness) exist. Any impairment of rational control over action is temporary and remediable, arising from habits that developed when one was negligent, having allowed bodily desire to motivate action before rational evaluation was employed.

Augustine's debate with the Manichaean Fortunatus in 392 forced Augustine to consider whether the free will defense he had previously offered was truly compatible with Pauline texts like Romans 7 and Ephesians 2, which, as Fortunatus had noted, appeared to emphasize the conflicts and inability of the human will. Fortunatus's arguments led Augustine to study more closely these controverted passages in Paul's letters. Augustine recognized that Manichaeism had "kept alive aspects of early Christianity that the `orthodox' tradition had come to neglect . . . Augustine found that he could not rest content within the form of faith to which he had converted, because it had not yet been endowed with answers to the sort of questions Manichaeism brought" (404 405). In developing his teaching on sin and grace, Augustine therefore sought to retain valid but neglected aspects of the earlier Christian tradition; stripped of their Manichaean reformulation and given a new rationale, they could be used to develop a vision of the Christian faith which would be appealing not only to Catholics, but also to prospective converts from Manichaeism.

In developing a new and more comprehensive Catholic vision that could respond to Manichaean questions, Augustine was obliged to draw upon interpreters of Paul from outside the Catholic tradition. Following the Donatist Tyconius, Augustine conceded that under the Law no human being could be justified by works, for the Law was given to show human beings their subjection to sin and their inability to be saved by their own actions. This led Augustine to make a subtle but important shift. Augustine's earlier free will position had understood the will as a *will to do good.* Following Tyconius, Augustine now saw the will as a *will to depend on God.* Augustine also followed Tyconius in making a sharp distinction in salvation history between a time under the law and a time under grace, but, unlike Tyconius, applied this distinction to the individual's experience of salvation. Having tied together the various functions of the Law and linked them to the individual's pre-conversion state, in which one was unable to do good works, Augustine had prepared the way for a new account of sin that radically qualified the freedom and efficacy of the will.

Augustine's next step was even more novel. In the pre-conversion state, he argued, sensual desire existed as an irrational internal compulsion, exercising a blind, coercive power that consistently subverted rational autonomy. In conceiving of sensual desire (concupiscence) as an efficacious indwelling power of sin for which one is nonetheless liable, Augustine offered a model of the individual's pre-conversion life that more nearly resembled the view held by the Manichaeans than that held by the earlier Catholic commentators on Paul's letters. Nonetheless, where the Manichaeans had seen two separate and wholly different principles contending for dominance, Augustine saw a single will divided against itself. Conflict did not arise from an intrusion upon the self of some alien, unrelated principle, as the Manichaeans argued; instead, such conflict revealed the corruption and weakness of the will that comprised one's true self.

As the will's division and weakness became more important to Augustine, he also found a new role for confession in the Christian life. Once the transition from sin to grace was understood through the lens of the individual's own experience, it became possible to see all the events of that person's life as occurring within a providential plan through which God was leading that individual toward salvation. Since every soul shared a similar experience of bondage under sin and was led toward salvation by broadly similar means, confession was not simply an individual act (purging and cleansing the self from a past evil in which it was entangled), but also became a public confession of the grace of God (showing others how past evils are healed by grace and a conflicted self is reunified).

BeDuhn suggests that Augustine became aware of the possibilities inherent in confession when he was forced to defend himself against the accusations of Mega-lius, the primate of Numidia, who in 395 had objected to Augustine's ordination. Augustine's need to defend himself required him to engage in introspection, self-scrutiny and self-censorship, offering a "selective and strategic account of himself' (269). By telling the story of his servitude prior to being liberated by the power of grace, Augustine was able to confess his past failures and his questionable association with the Manichaeans. Confession narrated and pronounced divine absolution over his past, leaving himself ultimately beyond any human judgment. The mundane practice of confession, which Augustine had observed as a Manichaean and then discarded, was given a new rationale and came to serve a broader purpose. Confession became an important means of editing, reshaping and disclosing the self, allowing Augustine to create "an internal portrait that determined his motives and priorities in his future conduct" (270). In this new account of confession, Augustine was able to take a practice routine among Manichaeans but then rare among Catholics and give it a new purpose and a new rationale. In confession, prospective converts from Manichaeism could therefore discover the "fulfillment of Manichaean expectations through the agency of the Catholic system" (357).

By revealing the individual's inability, confession underlined the created soul's distance and dissimilarity from God and the necessity of unmerited divine grace, which alone could keep the created soul from falling into nothingness. The Man-ichaean teaching of the soul's consubstantiality with God and natural reascent to the divine realm must therefore be abandoned and replaced with narratives of the created soul's radical dependence upon God. This confession of dependence revealed both the soul's distance and dissimilarity from God and the ultimate ability of divine grace to achieve its purposes, creating faith where independent human consent and cooperation were lacking. Here faith comes as a gift, with the human response following automatically upon the divine call. Conversion is therefore not a product and consequence of effective human agency (as Augustine's earlier freewill position had contended); conversion is instead the *beginning* of such agency.

Augustine's need to respond to Manichaean readings of Paul thus had a ripple effect, bringing about further developments in Augustine's theology. Accepting the fallen soul's inability (the failure of the will to do good) led him to see confession as of central importance in defining the self and the self's relation to God. Confession involved not only a sifting of one's memories and scrutiny of one's past actions, but also a discovery of God's efficacious, providential action, which alone can create faith and restore humans to effective agency. Precedents existed in Manichaeism for each of these three major themes (division and inability of the will, confession, and the sufficiency and efficacy of divine grace to create faith). In each case, Augustine was forced to reexamine the biblical roots of these ideas and to produce new understandings, discarding beliefs peculiar to Manichaeism and giving pre-existing practices a new meaning and function. The Manichaean past that Augustine had previously rejected now became an impetus and resource for the renewal of the Catholic faith, producing a new account of the faith that could appeal to Manichaeans and invite them to enter the Catholic community.

The arguments BeDuhn presents in the book are compelling. Fortunatus's discussion of Romans 7 clearly forced Augustine to reread the Pauline Epistles and arrive at new interpretations that transcended the conventional anti-Gnostic freewill defense. BeDuhn's chapter "The Problem of Paul" (192-238), which forms the heart of the book, is a brilliant piece of work that should be required reading in any graduate seminar on Augustine.

BeDuhn's familiarity with Manichaean texts and practices is impressive, although at times one might wish for more citation and discussion of Manichaean primary sources within the monograph. For example, it is quite possible, as BeDuhn suggests, that the Manichaean practice of confession provided the background for Augustine's development of confession as a way of identifying and forming the self. The argument given in the book would be more compelling, however, if it included a detailed reconstruction of the Manichaean practice of confession in the Latin West.

The book's discussion of the Platonic tradition is less persuasive. For example, at several points in the book, the author argues that the Platonic view of evil as a diminishing of the good (a view which Augustine shares) is confused and internally contradictory. The author's arguments can be divided into two parts. First, he asks, is not a diminished good still a good and not an evil (114)? How then could the Platonic notion of a diminished good ever adequately capture the idea of evil as *contrary* to the good and thus resisting and opposing the good? Second, assuming that there are a variety of goods, why does Augustine treat the choice of a lesser good as something evil (45)?

The first criticism overlooks the essential connection in the Platonic tradition between goodness and order, i.e., intelligible structure that is connected with the achievement of certain goals related to life or existence. To speak of a good being diminished also means that the order connected with this good is corrupted; where order is corrupted, there is resistance that may prevent a thing from performing its proper function or achieving its purpose. To give a modern illustration, a cancer cell might still possess the good of being alive and retaining some degree of order. Due to the corruption of its internal structure, however, the cell cannot perform its proper function but instead causes harm and diminishes and destroys life, so it is fittingly regarded as an evil. There is thus no contradiction between possessing some good and still being harmful and evil in a properly robust sense.

The close link in the Platonic tradition between goodness, order and proper function may also help to answer BeDuhn's second criticism. To speak of a lesser good implies that some goals are more closely related to a thing's identity and function than other goals are. To the extent that the pursuit of a secondary goal conflicts with or excludes the pursuit of a primary goal, the lesser good can become an evil. For example, nutrition is a function necessary to human life; considered by itself, it is good. Nutrition, however, is not the purpose of human life; the goal of human life is to be ordered by reason with a view to attaining virtue. To reject a life of reason and seek only nutrition would be to refuse the principal good and proper function of human life, which is the pursuit of virtue. It is clear then that a lesser good can indeed become an evil when it is pursued to the exclusion of humanity's principal good.

Despite these minor criticisms, BeDuhn's book is a compelling study of the role played by Manichaeism in Augustine's theological development and will provide an important point of departure for future research in this area.