
Saint Augustine Lecture 2009

**The Role of Scripture in
Augustine's Controversy with Porphyry**

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Introduction¹

In 1959, Paul Henry² inaugurated the “Saint Augustine Lecture Series.” On the 50th anniversary of those lectures, it is a great honor for me to open this conference dedicated to the thought and heritage of Augustine. I would like to thank its organizers, beginning with Fr. Thomas Martin, O.S.A., who, despite his premature passing, provided so much fresh impetus to Villanova’s *Augustinian Institute*, and Fr. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A., who has now assumed the directorship of the *Institute*, in addition to that of *Augustinian Studies*.

Paul Henry, in *Plotin et l’Occident*,³ claimed that Augustine first read Plotinus with great enthusiasm and later criticized himself for having excessively praised “these impious men.”⁴ This claim continues to provoke numerous discussions: What were the *libri Platoniorum* read by Augustine at the time of his conversion? Were they those of Plotinus or of Porphyry? Could they have been of Plotinus and of Porphyry?

In what follows, my intention is not to re-open the debate that was highlighted by Robert J. O’Connell⁵ in this very place in 1981. Nor will I seek to establish the philosophical framework through which Augustine understood Scripture.⁶ On the contrary, I would like to concentrate on Scripture itself and the place it held in the confrontation between Augustine and Neo-Platonism. On at least one point, there can be no dispute: it was with the thought of Porphyry and his disciples that Augustine was in dialogue, and it was particularly against Porphyry that Augustine had to “defend Christian doctrine.”⁷ To my knowledge, this question has never been the subject of a specific study, even if the themes covered in this debate have been. This essay will readdress points treated by Henri-Irénée Marrou in his 1965 lecture entitled *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine’s Theology of Human Values*,⁸ and

1 This essay was translated from the French by Gerhard Schmezer. Many thanks are due to him.

2 *Saint Augustine on Personality* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960).

3 *Plotin et l’Occident. Firmicus Maternus, Marius Victorinus, Saint Augustin et Macrobe* (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1934), 73 and pp. 90–91. A few years later, P. Courcelle questioned the validity of such an hypothesis; see his *Les Lettres grecques en Occident. De Macrobe à Cassiodore* (Paris: Éd. de Boccard, 1943), p. 168.

4 *Retr.* I,1,4 (BA 12, pp. 282–283).

5 Cf. his *Saint Augustine’s Platonism* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1984), pp. 24–25.

6 As did O’Connell. Cf. *ibid.* p. 23: “the whole question of the framework for his understanding of Scripture is now the issue . . .”

7 *Retr.* I,1,4 (BA 12, pp. 282–283): “Praesertim contra quorum errores magnos defendenda est christiana doctrina.”

8 *The Resurrection and St. Augustine’s Theology of Human Values* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1966).

by A. Hilary Armstrong in his 1966 lecture entitled *Saint Augustine and Christian Platonism*.⁹ And, in a sense, this talk is a continuation of G. Matthew's of 2008. In the conclusion of that lecture, which was devoted to Book XI of the *conf.*, he claimed: "This Augustine uses philosophy to buttress the claim that Scripture, including the Genesis account of creation, is worthy of serious intellectual scrutiny."¹⁰ In short, I will try to show how Augustine defends the consistency and the value of Scripture against the attacks of the person he calls "the most learned philosopher, albeit also the most bitter enemy of Christians."¹¹

To avoid speaking in generalities about a subject so infrequently treated in its own right, I will concentrate my analysis on a treatise that I consider central to this confrontation: the *Quaestiones expositae contra paganos, numero sex*, according to the title given in *retr.* II,31, or the *Quaestiones contra Porphyrium expositae sex*, according to the title given in the *Indiculum* (cf. I,21). Several arguments have led me to focus my attention on this text: first, Porphyry is mentioned in it by name; second, the six questions addressed all involve Scripture; and, third, no detailed study of it has been published thus far.¹² I am also convinced that these *quaestiones* served as a preparation for the writing of *civ. Dei*.

A convenient point of departure is the explanation given by Augustine in the *retr.*: "Meanwhile, these six questions were sent to me from Carthage; a certain friend whom I wanted to become a Christian proposed them. They were sent to me as an answer against the pagans, not least because he said that some of them had been posed by the philosopher Porphyry."¹³ We do not know the identity of this pagan friend. A.-M. La Bonnardière¹⁴ has provisionally suggested the name of Volusianus, but nothing permits us to accept this with any certainty. G. Madec has more cautiously indicated that this pagan friend "shared the ideas of 'the circle of

9. *Saint Augustine and Christian Platonism* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1967). I am particularly interested in the last two points he discussed: (1) the attitude regarding the body (cf. pp. 9–24) and (2) God's will to save all humanity (cf. pp. 24–31).

10. "Augustine on Reading Scripture as Doing Philosophy," *Augustinian Studies* 39 (2008): p. 161.

11. *Civ. Dei* XIX,22 (BA 37, pp. 146–147): "doctissimus philosophorum, quamvis Christianorum acerrimus inimicus."

12. Cf., however, the unpublished Master's thesis of J. Larrieu-Regnault: "Saint Augustin, *Lettre* 102. *Exposition de six questions contre les païens*, Présentation et traduction" (Paris IV-Sorbonne: 2004).

13. *Retr.* II,31 (BA 12, pp. 504–505): "Inter haec missae sunt mihi a Carthagine quaestiones sex, quas proposuit amicus quidam, quem cupiebam fieri christianum, ut contra paganos soluerentur, praesertim quia nonnullas earum a Porphyrio philosopho propositas dixit."

14. *Biblia Augustiniana. A. T.—Les douze petits prophètes* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1963), p. 29.

Volusianus', even if he was not a part of it."¹⁵ A letter¹⁶ was later attached near the beginning of this book which corresponds to §1 of *ep.*102 to Deogratias; the rest of *ep.*102 contains the treatise. The reference to the work in the *retr.* (cf. II,31), appearing as it does after that of *Cresc.* (cf. II,26), a composition which mentions the laws of 405 against the Donatists, and before that of *pecc. mer.* (cf. II,33), that is, the first work directed against the Pelagians, leads us to date the treatise "between February 405 and June 411";¹⁷ G. Madec estimates that it was written around 408.¹⁸

These six questions successively treat "the resurrection," "the period when the Christian religion appeared," "the differences in the sacrifices," "on what is written in Scripture: 'With the measure you use, it will be measured out to you'," "the Son of God according to Solomon," and, finally, "the prophet Jonah."¹⁹ Both the centrality of Scripture for the *quaestiones* and their relationship to Scripture are clear. It is also worth noting that Augustine concluded his treatise by exhorting his readers not to wait "to have resolved the problems raised by the Holy Books" before becoming Christians.²⁰

A difficulty arises, however, from the comments found in the *retr.*: after having said that, according to his pagan friend, "some of them were proposed by the philosopher Porphyry," Augustine, in effect, adds: "but I do not judge him to be that Sicilian Porphyry whose reputation is very widespread."²¹ Interestingly, this reservation did not prevent A. von Harnack from including the six *quaestiones*

15. *Introduction aux "Révisions" et à la lecture des œuvres de saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1996), p. 99.

16. *Retr.* II,31 (BA 12, pp. 506–507): "Hic liber, post epistolam quae postmodum a capite addita est, sic incipit . . ."

17. A. Mandouze, ed., *Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne (303–553)* (Paris: CNRS, 1982), p. 272. Goldbacher (CSEL 58, p. 31) dates it to between 406 and 412.

18. Cf. "Le Christ des païens d'après le *De consensu euangelistarum* de saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 26 (1992): p. 66 and n. 286. The PL suggests 408 or the beginning of 409 (cf. PL 33, cols. 367 and 370). This is the most commonly accepted date.

19. *Retr.* II,31 (BA 12, pp. 504–507): "Earum autem, prima est 'de resurrectione,' secunda 'de tempore christianae temporis,' tertia 'de sacrificiorum distinctione,' quarta, 'de eo quod scriptum est: "In qua mensura mensi fueritis, remetietur uobis," quinta 'de Filio Dei secundum Salomonem,' sexta 'de Iona propheta.'"

20. *Ep.* 102,6,38 (CSEL 34/2, p. 577): "sed ille, qui proposuit, iam sit Christianus, ne forte, cum expectat ante librorum sanctorum finire quaestiones, prius finiat istam uitam, quam transeat a morte ad uitam." In what follows and with occasional modifications, I will use the trans. of R. Teske. See *Letters 100–155, WSA II/2* (New York, New City Press, 2003), pp. 21–39.

21. *Retr.* II,31 (BA 12, pp. 504–505): "Sed non eum esse arbitror Porphyrium Siculum illum, cuius celeberrima est fama."

in his edition of the fragments of *Contra Christianos*.²² What should we make of this situation?

Before studying these *quaestiones* in their own right, it will be necessary to enquire into their source: can we really attribute them to Porphyry or, at least, suppose that they are of Porphyrian origin? To answer this question, I will examine how these questions are presented, first, in *ep.* 102, second in the *Indiculum*, third, in Augustine's later works and in a letter addressed to Augustine by Hilary in 429. After that, it will also be possible to study the internal contents of these *quaestiones*, their critique of Scripture, and to compare them with what we know about Porphyry from other sources. This, in turn, will allow us to address the question of whether their internal contents are such as to make a Porphyrian origin plausible.

The second part of this study will be devoted to Augustine's response. I will analyze the way Augustine defends Scripture against the criticisms raised by his pagan friend. It will be necessary to see how he presents it, interprets it, or uses it to challenge or to persuade his correspondent. Through these responses, Augustine offers a completely different conception of religion, of God and of salvation from that which is presupposed by the *quaestiones* attributed to Porphyry.

The Questions Attributed to Porphyry

A preliminary remark will be necessary: I will take for granted the independent existence of Porphyry's treatise *Against the Christians*. The analyses of R. Goulet²³ seem to have refuted convincingly the rather risky hypotheses of P. F. Beatrice, who claims that "Porphyry never composed a treatise entitled *Against the Christians*" and that he "had to have developed, instead, these destructive accusations against Christianity only in certain parts of his *Philosophy from Oracles*, and this in the larger context of the elaboration of a philosophy of the salvation of the soul."²⁴

22. Porphyrius, "Gegen die Christen," 15 Bücher. Zeugnisse, Fragmente und Referate, ed. A. von Harnack, (Berlin: Verlag der königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1916). See fragments 46, 79, 81, 85, 91 and 92.

23. "Hypothèses récentes sur le traité de Porphyre *Contre les chrétiens*," in *Hellénisme et christianisme*, ed. M. Narcy and É. Rebillard, (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004), pp. 61–109.

24. Balz, Horst Robert, Gerhard Krause, and Gerhard Müller, eds., *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Band 27 (Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 1997); s.v. "Porphyrius," by P. F. Beatrice (here, p. 56). This was quoted by R. Goulet, "Hypothèses récentes," p. 63 and n. 5 (n. 23).

That Porphyry's *Contra Christianos* has recently become the object of new research is evidenced by the international conference²⁵ that was held in Paris on September 8–9, 2009 and that was entirely devoted to it. *Inter alia*, this conference confirmed that A. von Harnack's edition needs to be revised. This is so, first, because it contains texts whose Porphyrian origin has since been contested²⁶ and, second, because it is incomplete: new fragments continue to be discovered.²⁷ Several translations²⁸ of fragments of *Contra Christianos* based on Harnack's edition have also been published recently, but their authors draw different conclusions—often without any justification—regarding the attribution to Porphyry of the fragments retained by Harnack. This is particularly true for the fragments found in Augustine's *ep.* 102.

A careful examination of the indications relative to the fragments of *Contra Christianos* retained by Harnack and which are found in Augustine's corpus also leads one to notice that contradictory judgments have been made both in the past and in the present. While L. Vaganay²⁹ and P. Courcelle³⁰ maintain that most, if not all of the *quaestiones* from *ep.* 102 come from *Contra Christianos*, P. Labriolle³¹ only retains questions 1, 2 and 3 as certainly Porphyrian and even these he only

25. *Le traité de Porphyre contre les chrétiens. Un siècle de recherches, nouvelles questions. Actes du Colloque international organisé à Paris les 8–9 Septembre 2009*, ed. S. Morlet (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, forthcoming).

26. Cf. T. D. Barnes, "Porphyry's *Against the Christians*: Date and the Attribution of Fragments," *Journal of Theological Studies* 24 (1973): pp. 424–442; A. Benoît, "Le 'Contra Christianos' de Porphyre: où en est la collecte des fragments?" in *Paganisme, judaïsme et christianisme: influences et affrontements dans le monde antique. Mélanges offerts à M. Simon*, ed. A. Benoît (Paris, De Boccard, 1978), pp. 261–275; P. F. Beatrice, "Towards a New Edition of Porphyry's *Fragments Against the Christians*," *ΣΟΦΙΗΣ ΜΑΙΗΤΟΠΕΣ*; "Chercheurs de sagesse," *Hommage à Jean Pépin*, ed. M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, G. Madec and D. O'Brien (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1992), pp. 347–355. For Macarios of Magnesia, see the *status quaestionis* assembled by R. Goulet in Macarios de Magnésie, *Le Monogènes, Tome I* (Paris: Vrin, 2003), pp. 112–149.

27. See, e.g., S. Morlet, "Un nouveau témoignage sur le *Contra Christianos* de Porphyre," *Semitica et classica* 1 (2008): pp. 157–166 and R. Goulet, "Cinq nouveaux fragments nominaux du traité de Porphyre 'Contre les chrétiens,'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 64 (2010): pp. 140–159.

28. Cf. Porphyry, *Against the Christians*, R. M. Berchman, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Porfirio, *Contra los Cristianos*, ed. E. A. Ramos Jurado et al. (Cádiz: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Cádiz, 2006); Porfirio, *Contro i Cristiani*, ed. G. Muscolino (Milano: Bompiani, 2009).

29. B. Loth, ed., *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 22 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1935), s.v. "Porphyre" by L. Vaganay (here, col. 2569).

30. *Les Lettres grecques*, p. 175 and n. 8, as well as p. 197 and n. 2 (n. 3); see also idem, "Propos antichrétiens rapportés par saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958): pp. 185–186, and n. 190.

31. *La réaction païenne. Études sur la polémique antichrétienne du I^{er} au VI^e siècle* (Paris: L'artisan du livre, 1934), p. 250, and n. 3, 277, and pp. 440–442.

accepts with reservations! J. Pépin,³² G. Madec³³ and, more recently, G. Rinaldi³⁴ thinks that the objections raised in *ep.* 102 are indeed Porphyrian, while simultaneously entertaining doubts about Question 6. On the other hand, R. Goulet³⁵ seems to be much more critical: he maintains that questions 1, 3, 4 and 6 correspond to the “objections of a non-identified pagan”; nevertheless, he classifies Question 5 among the “citations of Porphyry or allusions without mentioning the cited work,” and Question 2 to the “fragments attributed to the ‘disciples’ of Porphyry.” C. Moreschini and J. Larrieu-Regnault³⁶ believe that the first four questions are, in all probability, attributable to Porphyry but that the last two are not.

It will be necessary, then, to carefully examine all the data and to employ all of the tools at our disposal to see whether or not it is legitimate to affirm that the *quaestiones* of *ep.* 102 depend, more or less directly, on Porphyry's *Contra Christianos*. It is certain that Augustine never read *Contra Christianos*, just as it is also certain that he never read the Greek refutations.³⁷ Therefore, if he has managed to transmit one or more portions of the *Contra Christianos*, it can only have been done indirectly through the Latin *excerptor* known to his pagan friend. Only a careful study of Augustine's presentation of the *quaestiones* as transmitted by his friend and an examination of their content will allow us to form a sound judgment regarding the possibility of their Porphyrian origin.

The Presentation of these Quaestiones

I will first examine the references to Porphyry in the treatise of Augustine; then I will consider the subsequent references to this text in his work, in his correspondence and in the *Indiculum* of Hippo.”

32. *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne* (Ambroise, *Exam. I 1–4*) (Paris: PUF, 1964), p. 460, and n. 3.

33. “Augustin et Porphyre. Ébauche d’un bilan des recherches et des conjectures,” in *ΣΟΦΙΗΣ ΜΑΙΗΤΟΠΕΣ*, pp. 376–377 (n. 26).

34. *La Bibbia di Pagani, 2. Testi e Documenti* (Bologne: EDB, 1998), pp. 383–389, 392–396, 165–167, 409–410, 191–192, and 244–246.

35. *Macarios de Magnésie, Le Monogénès, Tome I*, p. 132 and *Tome II*, p. 380 (n. 26). Note too that *Tome II*, p. 380 is more affirmative regarding Question 2 than is *Tome I*, p. 132.

36. C. Moreschini, *Storia della filosofia patristica* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2004), pp. 267–271; and J. Larrieu-Regnault, “Saint Augustin, *Lettre 102. Exposition de six questions contre les païens*,” pp. 25–27, 39–42, 54–55, 66–67, 78–79, and 91 (n. 12).

37. As Harnack has rightly noted. Cf. his Porphyrius, *Gegen die Christen*, p. 39 (n. 22): “Augustin hat andere Schriften des Porphyrius in Händen gehabt, aber niemals das Werk gegen die Christen; er kannte auch die griechischen Gegenschriften nicht.”

The References to Porphyry in Letter 102

Ep. 102's first reference to Porphyry is simultaneously the most decisive and the most difficult to interpret. Because of the enormous divergence among the various published translations, I will cite the Latin: "Item alia proposuerunt, quae dicerent de Porphyrio contra Christianos tamquam ualidiora decerpta."³⁸ And, as a prelude to my own translation, I will discuss this text's many interpretive challenges and difficulties.

Most basically, one must ask: Is this a reference to the original title of a treatise as given by Porphyry or is it simply an indication of the work's anti-Christian theme? According to P. F. Beatrice, "it simply reveals the anti-Christian intention of the objections attributed to Porphyry."³⁹ I will not go into the details of his argument, which examines the other references to Porphyry in the tradition, since it has already been decisively refuted by R. Goulet.⁴⁰ It is certainly possible to understand the expression *de Porphyrio contra Christianos* in a weak sense,⁴¹ but there is also nothing here to prevent us from recognizing these words as attesting to the title of Porphyry's work something that J. Pépin,⁴² G. Madec⁴³ and R. Goulet⁴⁴ all have suggested.

The expression *tamquam ualidiora decerpta* is equally problematic. Does the phrase mean that "they claimed [these objections] were taken from Porphyry's *Contra Christianos* to give them more weight," or, should we understand, as does R. Goulet,⁴⁵ that "they raised still other [objections?] which they said were taken from Porphyry's *Contra Christianos*, as if they were really pertinent"? In the first hypothesis, the attribution of these objections to *Contra Christianos* is a way of making them appear stronger: the expression leads us to believe that this attribution is perhaps not well-founded and has only polemical value. In the second hypothesis, it is precisely the value of these objections which is called into question: are they

38. Ep. 102,2,8 (CSEL 34/2, p. 551).

39. "On the title of Porphyry's treatise against the Christians," in *ΑΓΑΘΗ ΕΛΠΙΣ: studi storico-religiosi in onore di Ugo Bianchi*, ed. G. Sfameni Gasparro (Roma: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1994), p. 223.

40. Cf. "Hypothèses récentes sur le traité de Porphyre *Contre les chrétiens*," pp. 68–76 (n. 23).

41. This choice was made in the Spanish translation (cf. Porfirio, *Contra los Cristianos*, ed. E. A. Ramos Jurado et al., p. 92 (n. 28)): "Plantearon también otras cuestiones significativas de la polémica anticristiana de Porfirio, seleccionadas por su mayor solidez."

42. Cf. *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne*, p. 460 and n. 3 (n. 32).

43. Cf. "Augustin et Porphyre," p. 377 (n. 33).

44. Cf. "Hypothèses récentes sur le traité de Porphyre *Contre les chrétiens*," p. 68 (n. 23).

45. Ibid. (n. 23).

really that strong? The expression might suggest that by attributing them to Porphyry their strength is supposed implicitly, but this is not the case. Moreover, should the word *tamquam* be translated by “as if”? The word might simply mean “as”: if the latter is preferred, the sentence would establish a simple correlation between the Porphyrian origin and the strength of the objections.⁴⁶ It seems to me, however, that the possible polemical character of Augustine's sentence should not be excluded: while admitting that the question might come from Porphyry, he immediately wishes to downplay its importance. (A similar remark concerning Question 4 has led me to this conclusion.)

Finally, this raises a question regarding the expression *item alia*: how should the word *item* be understood? In other words, should Question 1 be included among the objections that the pagan friend took from *Contra Christianos*? *Item* is often used to add other things to something of the same type,⁴⁷ which leads us to believe that Question 1 comes from Porphyry in much the same way as does Question 2. However, it is only an examination of the content of Question 1 that will really allow us to decide this point.

I propose, then, that the aforementioned sentence be translated as follows: “They presented other questions, which they said were taken from Porphyry's *Contra Christianos*, as if they were particularly strong.”

Augustine's response to Question 4 begins with a somewhat veiled allusion to Porphyry: “Istam quaestionem a qualicumque philosopho esse obiectam atque propositam difficile est credere.”⁴⁸ I translate this as: “That this question was advanced and presented by a philosopher, whoever he was, is difficult to believe.” Is this a way of casting doubt on the Porphyrian origin of the objection, or was it, as before, a way of reducing its value for polemical purposes? As the following will show, the second hypothesis seems more probable.

Augustine introduces Question 5 as follows: “Post hanc quaestionem, qui eas ex Porphyrio proposuit, hoc adiunxit.”⁴⁹ I translate this as: “After this question, the one who presented these objections taken from Porphyry added this.” Augustine, then, does not really challenge the Porphyrian origin of the questions raised; the plural *eas* includes at least Questions 2, 3, and 4, and, undoubtedly, Question 1

46. Muscolino's recent Italian translation offers the following: “Hanno proposto altre domande, per così dire (le) più importanti, che dicono tratte dal *Contra Christianos* di Porfirio.” See Porfirio, *Contro i Cristiani*, ed. G. Muscolino, p. 361 (n. 28).

47. F. Gaffiot, *Dictionnaire illustré Latin Français* (Paris: Hachette, 1934), p. 862.

48. *Ep.* 102,4,23 (CSEL 34/2, p. 564).

49. *Ep.* 102,5,28 (CSEL 34/2, p. 569).

as well. But what about Question 5? Is it an addition made by the pagan friend, or, through it, does Augustine continue to present the objections taken from Porphyry? Augustine seems to suppose that it is rather a personal addition from the pagan friend.⁵⁰

As for Question 6, Augustine explicitly challenges its Porphyrian origin. Indeed, he introduces it with: “Postrema quaestio proposita est de Iona nec ipsa quasi ex Porphyrio sed tamquam ex inrisione paganorum: sic enim posita est. . . .”⁵¹ That is: “The last question raised concerns Jonah. It does not seem to come from Porphyry, but from the mockery of pagans. For it is stated as follows” It seems that we are dealing with a deduction on the part of Augustine (“sic enim posita est”): the formulation of the question seems so ridiculous to him that he cannot seriously attribute it to Porphyry! Moreover, one has to wonder where the objection ends: does the last sentence belong to the question, as A. Goldbacher supposes, or is it a comment by Augustine, as understood by the Maurists? I quote: “Hoc enim genus quaestionis multo cachinno a paganis grautier inrisum animaduerti”;⁵² that is: “Indeed, I noticed that this type of question was made to look ridiculous by the pagan in a great roar of laughter.” If the sentence corresponds to a comment by Augustine, this confirms that we are dealing with a deduction made by Augustine upon reading the objection. On the other hand, even if this last sentence is part of the question, this still does not exclude that the presentation of Question 6 is also a deduction on the part of Augustine. The importance that he gives to the pagans’ laughter in his response leads me to think that the sentence was part of the transmitted *quaestio*.

Examining the introductory formulae of the *quaestiones* leads us to distinguish the way that the pagan friend presented the questions as coming indistinctly from Porphyry—“qui eas ex Porphyrio proposuit”—from Augustine’s judgment of this attribution. He does not rule out the first four objections as coming from Porphyry, even as he questions their relevance and ironically emphasizes that the fourth question is hardly worthy of a philosopher. The fifth, however, appears to him as an addition of his friend. Finally, he presents the sixth as a common pagan objection and, hence, as too crude to be attributed to Porphyry.

50. Cf. C. Moreschini, *Storia della filosofia patristica*, pp. 267–270 (n. 36). In fact, the sentence may also mean that the pagan friend continues to present Porphyry’s objections: the fact that Augustine discusses Question 6 as if it cannot be attributed to Porphyry implies that the other five do come from him. But it must be acknowledged that Question 5, unlike the first four, is not taken up in the *civ. Dei*. In my view, this confirms that Augustine did not consider it to be Porphyrian.

51. *Ep.* 102,6,30 (CSEL 34/2, p. 570).

52. *Ibid.* (CSEL 34/2, p. 570).

The References in Works Composed after this Treatise

Let us now examine the subsequent references in chronological order. The first mention is that found in the *Indiculum*. Following the work of A. Mutzenbecher, F. Dolbeau⁵³ has recently shown that “two strata” must be distinguished in the writing of the *Indiculum*. The oldest undoubtedly dates from around 420 and, given the substantial number of errors it contains, it cannot be the work of Augustine himself. However, it probably does come from an inventory of the manuscripts in Hippo that was made by a secretary at the request of Augustine.⁵⁴ The mention of our treatise under the title *Quaestiones contra Porphyrium expositae sex*⁵⁵ undoubtedly belongs to this first stratum of the *Indiculum*.

The title of the work retained by Augustine in the *retr.*⁵⁶ is different: *Quaestiones expositae contra paganos, numero sex*. Augustine seems to have wanted to correct the earlier title, but the question is: Why? He was probably concerned to be as accurate as possible. In any case, an even more interesting question is: Was this because he no longer thought that the *quaestiones* were from the philosopher Porphyry? Or, was this because he now thought that only “certain ones (*nonnullas*)” among them could be attributed to him?⁵⁷ The reservations regarding Question 6 certainly suffice to make the second hypothesis plausible. Yet, the first hypothesis cannot be excluded, for, as we have seen, Augustine is quite specific: “But I do not think that he was that Sicilian Porphyry whose reputation is very widespread.” Augustine seems to distinguish here between two “Porphyrys” and excludes the possibility that it is the philosopher Porphyry who lived in Sicily⁵⁸ and who wrote a certain number of his philosophical works there.⁵⁹

53. “La survie des œuvres d’Augustin. Remarques sur l’*Indiculum* attribué à Possidius et sur la bibliothèque d’Anséglise,” in *Du copiste au collectionneur. Mélanges d’histoire des textes et des bibliothèques en l’honneur d’André Vernet*, ed. D. Nebbiai-Dalla Guarda and J.-F. Genest (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 3–22; esp. 6–7 and 12–13.

54. An inference that may be drawn from *retr.* II,41 (BA 12, pp. 522–523).

55. *Indiculum* [I],21. For this text, see *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, vol. 2, *Studi Agostiniani* (Roma: Tipografia poliglotta Vaticana, 1931), pp. 162–163.

56. *Retr.* II,31 (BA 12, pp. 504–505).

57. This hypothesis was retained by G. Madec in “Possidius de Calama et les listes des œuvres d’Augustin,” in *Titres et articulations du texte dans les œuvres antiques*, ed. J.-C. Fredouille, M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, P. Hoffmann, and P. Petitmengin (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1997), p. 437.

58. Cf. Porphyrius, *Vie de Plotin* 6, *Tome II* (Paris: Vrin, 1992), pp. 144–145 and 152–155.

59. According to J. Pépin, *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne*, p. 459 (n. 32), Augustine was probably not unaware that Porphyry had written his *Contra christianos* in Sicily; however, such an assertion is disputable and an allusion to the philosophical works composed by Porphyry seems more consistent and more probable in this context. I would like to thank S. Morlet for bringing this detail to my attention.

This phrase has given rise to various interpretations. According to Harnack,⁶⁰ the remark is insignificant and can be explained by Augustine's high esteem for Porphyry. J. Pépin⁶¹ has suggested that it may simply be a question of "feigned denial where esteem for the *philosophus nobilis* and reprobation for the anti-Christian polemicist combine." Pépin goes on to compare Augustine's phrase to Boileau's similar expression: "I no longer recognize the author of the *Misanthrope*." J. Pépin's interpretation is debatable: indeed, in the *retr.*, Augustine tries to correct his earlier errors or remove the ambiguity of certain expressions. Therefore, this does not seem to be a case of "feigned denial," but, rather, Augustine's sincere opinion at that point in time. Like Harnack, however, I tend to believe that, at least here, he was mistaken.

In 429, Hilary, one of Augustine's correspondents, refers to Question 2 as "what your Holiness wrote in the question against Porphyry concerning the time when the Christian religion appeared."⁶² Augustine does not correct this mention when he refers to Hilary's letter in *praed. sanct.*:⁶³ "But that which you remember my saying in a small treatise of mine against Porphyry, under the title of *The Time of the Christian Religion*." Shortly after this, however, he refers to the same text in *persev.*:⁶⁴ "Shall we consider what I wrote in my book *On Six Questions from the Pagans . . .*?" I do not think by saying this he objects to the Porphyrian origin of Question 2; rather, he refers to the entire work by the title he gave it in the *retr.*

So, what shall we conclude from this? It seems safe to say that the treatise must have circulated under the title *Quaestiones contra Porphyrium expositae sex*, even if Augustine chose to correct the title in the *retr.* For Augustine, this correction does not seem to call into question the Porphyrian origin of certain questions, especially Question 2. His recurring reservations regarding this attribution, both in the treatise itself and in the *retr.*, can be easily explained: how could Augustine recognize the philosopher he admires and to whom he owes so much in the objections of the polemicist? These reservations are, moreover, a way of diminishing their relevance.

60. Cf. Porphyrius, *Gegen die Christen*, p. 39 (n. 22): "Seine Bemerkung: 'Non esse arbitror Porphyrium Siculum', ist daher wertlos und aus seiner Hochschätzung des Philosophen Porphyrius zu erklären."

61. *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne*, p. 460 and n. 1 (Citing Boileau, *Art poétique*, l. 400) (n. 32).

62. *Ep.* 226,3 (CSEL 57, p. 471): "... quod dixit sanctitas tua in quaestione contra Porphyrium de tempore christianae religionis ..."

63. *Praed. sanct.* 9,17 (BA 24, pp. 514–515): "Illud autem quod in opusculo meo quodam contra Porphyrium sub titulo: de tempore christianae religionis, medixisse recolitis ..."

64. *Persev.* 9,23 (BA 24, pp. 644–645): "Numquid dicturi sumus, quod in libro illo dixi, ubi sex quibusdam quaestionibus paganorum ...?"

The Content of the *quaestiones*

An examination of the content of the *quaestiones* is indispensable for completing the aforementioned inquiry: it will both allow us to specify the points of Scripture that generated the difficulties and it will highlight all the elements necessary for confirming or disconfirming the Porphyrian origin of the *quaestiones*.

Question 1: de resurrectione

Question 1 presupposes a very thorough knowledge of Scripture.⁶⁵ The argumentation is complex: first, the author of the question challenges the models that can be evoked from the Gospels in favor of our own resurrection; and, second, the author exposes a contradiction between what is said about the post-resurrection state and the accounts of the appearances of the resurrected Christ to his disciples.

The first part seeks to show the impossibility of our own resurrection, playing on the differences between us and Christ on the one hand and between us and Lazarus on the other: the first was born without seed (*nulla seminis condicione natus est*), while we were “born of seed (*natorum ex semine*)”;⁶⁶ the second was resurrected although his body had not yet decomposed (*de corpore nondum tabescente*), while ours will only be resurrected out of a decomposed and disintegrated state (*ex confuso*).

The second part of the *quaestio* leads to a dilemma: either the state of the body after the resurrection is not a state of bliss or Christ was merely pretending when he ate and showed his wounds! This line of argument demonstrates a detailed knowledge of the accounts of Christ's appearances to his disciples after the resurrection (cf. Lk. 24:30; 24:39–43; Jn. 20:20; 20:27; 21:13) and of the account of the resurrection of Lazarus (cf. Jn. 11:39–44); it also presupposes knowledge of the conception of Christ by a virgin and the claims of Scripture regarding the state of the resurrected body and the connection between Christ's resurrection and ours (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:20–23 and 42–44).

Is this question consistent with what we know about Porphyry from elsewhere? In reference to this last dilemma, Harnack noticed that Porphyry enjoyed such

65. *Ep.* 102,1,2 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 545–546).

66. I have therefore chosen, with P. Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, p. 277 and n. 2 (n. 31) and against Harnack, Porphyrius, *Gegen die Christen*, fragm. 92, p. 100 (n. 22), to connect *eius qui* to *haec*, and not to *semine*. § 3 makes it clear that this is how Augustine understood the text: “sic non pertinet ad resurrectionem differentia natiuitatis Christi et nostrae, quod ille sine uirili semine nos autem ex uiro et femina creati sumus . . .” (emphasis added; cf. *ep.* 102,1,3 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 546–547)).

enigmas;⁶⁷ and the new fragments of the *Contra Christianos* discovered by R. Goulet⁶⁸ in the theological works of Michel Psellus do provide a new example concerning the Johannine Logos. One also notices that the preserved table of contents from book II of the *Monogenes* of Macarius⁶⁹ contains a question regarding Lazarus: “[III. How] could Lazarus have been raised from the dead on the fourth day?” Book IV also contains a long development relative to the resurrection: the pagan objects that “this story of the resurrection is complete rubbish”: if one imagines that a shipwrecked person dies and is then eaten by fish, who are then caught and eaten by human beings who, in turn, are devoured by dogs, who, once dead, become the prey of crows and vultures, “how will the body of the shipwrecked sailor be reassembled after having been dissolved into and literally becoming part of so many animals?”⁷⁰ The objection develops in more detail what is suggested by the question: How can a given body be reconstituted from such a mixture of elements?

Another rather obvious connection can be made: Augustine's *s.* 242⁷¹ explains two difficulties exactly like those developed at the end of Question 1. The first concerns “the corruption [people] undergo in their flesh”: will it exist at the resurrection? The negative response is followed by a dilemma: “If there will not be any corruption, why eat?” Or, if we no will no longer eat, why, after the resurrection, did the Lord eat?”⁷² The second difficulty relates to the wounds shown by the risen Christ: if one claims that the defects of the human body will not subsist after the resurrection, “why, then, is the Lord resurrected with the scars from his wounds?”⁷³ It is also important to note that at the end of *s.* 241, which was preached one day prior to *s.* 242, Augustine, after having refuted the theses of the Platonists—and especially those of Porphyry on the fate of the soul after death—will respond the next day to the objections that these philosophers raised concerning the resurrection of the

67. Cf. Porphyrius, *Gegen die Christen*, fragm. 92, p. 101 (n. 22): “Solche Dilemmata liebt Porph.”

68. Cf. “Cinq nouveaux fragments,” pp. 141–148 (n. 27).

69. *Macarios de Magnésie*, *Le Monogénès*, *Tome II*, pp. 8–9 (n. 26).

70. *Ibid.*, IV, 24, 3 (*Tome II*, pp. 316–317) (n. 26). This text is quite close to *civ. Dei* XXII, 12, 2 (BA 37, pp. 612–613).

71. *Ss.* 240, 241 and 242 were probably preached on April 8, 9 and 10 of 418. Cf. I. Bochet, “Réurrection et réincarnation. La polémique d'Augustin contre les platoniciens et contre Porphyre dans les *Sermons* 240–242,” in *Ministerium sermonis. Philological, Historical, and Theological Studies on Augustine's Sermones ad populum*, ed. G. Partoens, A. Dupont, and M. Lamberigts (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 267–298.

72. *S.* 242, 2, 2 (PL 38, col. 1139): “Si corruptio non erit, quare manducabitur? Aut si non manducabitur, quare post resurrectionem Dominus manducauit?”

73. *Ibid.*, 2, 3 (PL 38, col. 1140): “Respondemus: Non resurgent uitia. Et dicitur nobis: Quare ergo Dominus cum suorum uulnerum cicatricibus resurrexit?”

body.⁷⁴ The very end of *s.* 241 even contains citations from Porphyry, which A. Smith reproduced in his edition of the *Fragmenta*.⁷⁵ There, Augustine discusses at length Porphyry's claim: *Corpus est omne fugiendum*.⁷⁶ *S.* 242, in addition to the difficulties already mentioned, contains a long discussion explaining that the hierarchy of the elements makes it impossible for the resurrected body to rise up to heaven: according to J. Pépin,⁷⁷ there are grounds for thinking that the objection based on the order of the elements—which is also present in *civ. Dei* XXII⁷⁸ and in the *Monogenes*⁷⁹ of Macarius—comes from the *Contra Christianos*. Therefore, it seems to me that the tight parallel that can be established between Question 1 and *s.* 242 confirms that Augustine accepted the Porphyrian origin of the objection, albeit tacitly. However, if the difficulty presented remains similar, the comparison between the two texts shows that Augustine chose to simplify the objection in his preaching.⁸⁰

Question 2: de tempore christianae religionis

Question 2 begins as follows: “They say, ‘If Christ says that he is the way to salvation, grace, and truth, he locates in himself alone the return of souls who believe in him. What did people do for so many ages before Christ?’”⁸¹

The formulation of the question associates the Johannine reminiscences with the Porphyrian themes of the “way of salvation” and the “return of the soul.” The author of the question does not cite the Gospel of John word-for-word: in fact, he combines Jn. 14:6: “I am the way, the truth and the life; no one goes to the Father except through me” with the expression that the Prologue applies to the Son, “full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). The tight

74. Cf. *s.* 241,8,8 (PL 38, col. 1138).

75. *Porphyrii philosophi fragmenta*, ed. A. Smith (Stuttgart-Leipzig: Bibliotheca Teubneriana, 1993). See the fragments ? 297cF (= Aug. *s.*241,7 (PL 38, col. 1137)), ? 299F (= Aug. *s.*241,6 (PL 38 cols. 1136–1137)) and 438F (= Aug. *s.*241,7 (PL 38, cols. 1137–1138)).

76. *S.*241,7 (PL 38, col. 1137 (= fragm. Smith ? 297cF, [see n. 75])); cf. fragm. Smith 301aF (the text from this fragment is cited in n. 82 *infra*). On the meaning of this statement in Porphyry's thought, see A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 20–39.

77. Cf. *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne*, pp. 433–461 (n. 32).

78. Cf. *civ. Dei* XXII,11 (BA 37, pp. 600–606).

79. Cf. IV,2. Cf. *Macarios de Magnésie*, Le Monogénès, *Tome II*, pp. 242–245 (n. 26). R. Goulet suggests the same connection as does J. Pépin (see *ibid.*, *Tome I*, pp. 273–275).

80. Elsewhere I have shown that *s.* 241 simplifies for the congregation the positions of the Platonists that Augustine explains in *civ. Dei* XIII. Cf. “Résurrection et incarnation,” pp. 281–282 and n. 65 (n. 71).

81. *Ep.*102,2,8 (CSEL 34/2, p. 551): “‘Si Christus’, inquiunt, ‘salutis se uiam dicit, gratiam et ueritatem in seque solo ponit animis sibi credentibus reditum, quid egerunt tot saeculorum homines ante Christum?’” See Teske, *WSA II/2*, pp. 24–25 (n. 20).

link between salvation and faith is also a Johannine theme (cf. Jn. 3:15–17). The mention of the “return” of the soul undoubtedly recalls the *De regressu animae*, a composition in which Porphyry reflects on the way in which the soul could be released from its connection to the body and definitively return to the Father.⁸² According to Augustine’s account in Book X of *civ. Dei*,⁸³ Porphyry was looking for “a universal way of the soul’s liberation”:

And when Porphyry says, towards the end of the first book *De Regressu Animae*, that no system of doctrine which furnishes the universal way for delivering the soul has as yet been received, either from the truest philosophy or from the ideas and practices of the Indians or from the reasoning of the Chaldaeans or from any source whatever and that no historical reading had made him acquainted with that way, he manifestly acknowledges that there is such a way, but that as yet he was not acquainted with it.

This extract from *De regressu animae* is perfectly consistent with the objection raised by Question 2. What is challenged by Question 2 is the alleged exclusivity of the Christian religion. How can Christ be said to be the only way to salvation when he came so late? The objection concerning the tardiness of Christ’s advent is very frequent in Antiquity.⁸⁴ The newness of the Christian religion is itself a

82. Cf. fragm. Smith 301aF (n. 75) (= *civ. Dei* XIII,19,41–49): “uerum etiam sapientium animas ita uoluisse de corporeis nexibus liberari, ut corpus omne fugientes beatae apud patrem sine fine teneantur. Itaque ne a Christo uinci uideretur uitam sanctis pollicente perpetuam, etiam ipse purgatas animas sine ullo ad miserias pristinas reditu in aeterna felicitate constituit; et ut Christo aduersaretur, resurrectionem incorruptibilium corporum negans non solum sine terrenis, sed sine ullis omnino corporibus eas adseruit in sempiternum esse uicturas.” For all citations of *civ. Dei* in what follows, I will use, with occasional modifications, the translation of M. Dods. For this see *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, NPNF, vol. II (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871).

83. *Civ. Dei* X,32,1 (BA 34, pp. 546–547 = *De regressu*, fragm. Smith 302F (n. 75)): “Cum autem dicit Porphyrius in primo iuxta finem de regressu animae libro nondum receptum in unam quandam sectam, quod uniuersalem contineat uiam animae liberandae, uel a philosophia uerissima aliqua uel ab Indorum moribus ac disciplina, aut inductione Chaldaeorum aut alia qualibet uia, nondumque in suam notitiam eandem uiam historiali cognitione perlatam: procul dubio confitetur esse aliquam, sed nondum suam uenisse notitiam.” For this translation, see Dods, NPNF, vol. II, p. 202 (n. 82). On the qualified sense in which Porphyry appears to have understood “universal way of salvation,” see A. Smith, *Porphyry’s Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 136–139; I. Bochet, “Le Firmament de l’Écriture.” *L’herméneutique augustinienne* (Paris, Études Augustiniennes, 2004), pp. 456–461; G. Clark, “Augustine’s Porphyry and the Universal Way of Salvation,” in *Studies on Porphyry*, ed. G. Karamanolis and A. Sheppard, The Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, supplementary volume 98 (London: The University of London. Institute of Classical Studies, 2007), pp. 127–140; M. B. Simmons, “Porphyrian Universalism: A Tripartite Soteriology and Eusebius’s Response,” *Harvard Theological Review* 102 (2009): pp. 169–192.

84. This is found, e.g., in Irenaeus, *Adu. Haer.* IV,6,2 (SC 100, p. 439), Celsus (Origen, *C. Cels.* IV,7 (SC 136, p. 202); VI,78 (SC 147, p. 374), Arnobius, *Adu. nat.* II,63 (CSEL 4, p. 98), etc. See also the texts gathered by R. Goulet in *Macarios de Magnésie, Le Monogénès, Tome II*, pp. 380–381 (n. 26).

problem for the ancient mentality. It is not surprising then to see that the author of Question 2 argues methodically to highlight the fact that pagan worship is older and more widespread—before the foundation of Alba, to Alba, to Rome, and from there, to the entire world—in contrast with the very narrow spatial-temporal limits in which the Christian religion is placed. Anticipating a possible objection on the part of Christians, i.e., “lest they say that the human race was cared for by the old Jewish law . . . ,”⁸⁵ the question’s author immediately and ironically responds in a way that also emphasizes the narrow initial location of the Jewish religion (*angusta Syriae regione*) and the difficulties and slowness with which it finally spread as far as Italy, “though it later crept even into the boundaries of Italy, but only after Gaius Caesar or, at the earliest, during his reign.”⁸⁶ According to the author of Question 2, the fact that the Christian religion is rooted in history and at a very particular time is diametrically opposed to the universality of the salvation it claims to offer. Furthermore, the author adds that, if true, Christianity would be guilty of injustice towards “countless such souls who were without any sin at all, since the one in whom they could have believed had not yet offered his coming to human beings.”⁸⁷

In order to refer to Christianity, Question 2 uses the expression *lex christiana*: J. G. Cook⁸⁸ has pointed out that the expression is very rare both in Augustine’s writings and in the whole of patristic literature. It seems to have been coined by Porphyry on the basis of his knowledge of the *lex iudaica*, which is mentioned twice in the text. Here, “Christian law” is opposed to temple worship (*religiones ritusque templorum*)⁸⁹ and by this, at least indirectly, to the law of the Roman Empire for which it constitutes a threat. This theme appears in other texts of Porphyry. In *De*

85. *Ep.* 102,2,8 (CSEL 34/2, p. 551): “Sed ne dicant, inquit, lege Iudaica uetere hominum curatum genus” See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 25 (n. 20).

86. *Ibid.* (CSEL 34/2, pp. 551–552): “. . . longo post tempore lex Iudaeorum apparuit ac uiguit angusta Syriae regione, postea uero prorepsit etiam in fines Italos, sed post Caesarem Gaium aut certe ipso imperante” See Teske, *WSA* I/2, p. 25 (n. 20). The end of the sentence obviously concerns Christianity and not the Jewish religion.

87. *Ibid.* (CSEL 34/2, pp. 551): “quid, inquit, actum de tam innumeris animis, quae omnino in culpa nulla sunt, si quidem is, cui credi posset, nondum aduentum suum hominibus commodarat?” See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 25 (n. 20).

88. Cf. “Porphyry’s *Contra Christianos* and the *crimen nominis Christianorum*,” *Le traité de Porphyre contre les chrétiens. Un siècle de recherches, nouvelles questions. Actes du Colloque international organisé à Paris les 8–9 Septembre 2009*, ed. S. Morlet (Paris, Études Augustiniennes, forthcoming).

89. *Ep.* 102,2,8 (CSEL 34/2, p. 551): “In ipso Latio ante Albam dii culti sunt. In Alba aequae religiones ritusque ualuerunt templorum. Non paucioribus saeculis ipsa Roma longo saeculorum tractu sine Christiana lege fuit.”

abstinentia,⁹⁰ for example, he emphasizes that the recommended sacrifice does not abolish the local laws that are in force. In a fragment of *Contra Christianos*,⁹¹ he criticizes Origen, who, in becoming a Christian, has adopted a way of living that is “contrary to the laws,” while, by sharp contrast, Ammonius, by turning away from Christianity, has chosen a “way of life in conformity with the laws.” These various connections, all of which were suggested by J. G. Cook, show the extent to which the themes of law and worship are linked in the philosophical thought of Porphyry. And in doing this they confirm the Porphyrian origin of Question 2.

Nevertheless, one is rightly surprised that the author of Question 2 would choose Latium as his point of reference and appear to be confused regarding the chronology of the Jewish and Christian religions: How could this be the case if Porphyry were the author? According to Harnack, these points could be explained by the intervention of the Latin *excerptor*⁹² and, therefore, do not suffice to call into question the Porphyrian origin of the objection. The comparison of our text to the objection raised by Macarius (*Monogenes* I,5) and to Jerome’s *Letter to Ctesiphon* (*ep.* 133,9 = fragm. 82) further confirms the Porphyrian authenticity of the objection.⁹³ The objection which Jerome explicitly attributes to Porphyry is formulated as follows:

Or lastly make your own the favorite objection of your associate Porphyry, and ask how God can be described as pitiful and of great mercy when from Adam to Moses and from Moses to the coming of Christ He has suffered all nations to die in ignorance of the Law and of His commandments. For Britain, that province so fertile in despots, the Scottish tribes, and all the barbarians round about as far as the ocean were alike without knowledge of Moses and the prophets. Why should Christ’s coming have been delayed to the last times? Why should He not have come before so vast a number had perished?⁹⁴

One recognizes the same insistence on the lateness of Christ’s coming and on the multitude of people in the course of history who could not have been saved by him;

90. Cf. II,33,1. The edition employed here is *Porphyre: De l’Abstinence*, ed. J. Bouffartigue and M. Patillon (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1979). For II,33,1, cf. p. 100.

91. Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* VI,19,2–9 (SC 41, pp. 113–116; fragm. 39 Harnack (n. 22)); see also VI,19,7 (SC 41, p. 115).

92. Cf. Porphyrius, *Gegen die Christen*, fragm. 81, p. 95 (n. 22).

93. R. Goulet, who makes this parallel to evaluate the objections of *Monogenes*, remains cautious: he considers that the excerpts from Jerome and Augustine are “d’une authenticité porphyrienne conjecturale.” For this, see Macarios de Magnésie, *Macarios de Magnésie, Le Monogénès, Tome I*, p. 133 and pp. 275–276 (n. 26).

94. *Ep.* 133,9. See *Saint Jérôme, Lettres*. Tome 8, ed. J. Labourt, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1963), 63. The trans. given here is that of W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W. G. Martley, NPNF II/6 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893, p. 278).

one also notices a similar mention of the ignorance of the law by the nations prior to Christ's coming. On the other hand, Jerome's formulation emphasizes particularly the contradiction which results in the representation of God—how, if he is “clement and merciful,” can he tolerate the eternal death of so many people?—while Question 2 insists on the contradiction between the claim of the Christian religion's universality and its late origin, contrasting it with the age and near-universality of pagan worship.

Question 3: de sacrificiorum distinctione

Question 3 addresses the difference in the sacrifices: “The Christians blame the rites of sacrifice, the victims, the incense, and the other things that the worship in our temples uses, though,” he says, “the same worship was done in earlier times by them or by the God whom they worship, when God is shown to have needed the first fruits.”⁹⁵

At first glance, it is difficult to see the connection between the question and Scripture. Augustine, however, is quick to establish this: “We reply to this that this question was taken from that passage in our scriptures where it is written that Cain offered a gift to God from the fruits of the earth, but Abel from the firstborn of the sheep.”⁹⁶

Again, we see the intent to show an internal contradiction in the Christian religion: it prohibits a form of worship that it also requires!⁹⁷ This contradiction is only valid if there is an identity between the sacrifices of pagans and Jews; an identity that is affirmed here. The question also implicitly objects to the (alleged) contradiction between the worship programs of the Old and the New Testaments.⁹⁸ It does this by assuming that the Christian religion is identical to

95. *Ep.* 102,3,16 (CSEL 34/2, p. 558): “‘Accusant’, inquit, ‘ritus sacrorum, hostias, tura et cetera, quae templorum cultus exercuit, cum idem cultus ab ipsis, inquit, uel a Deo, quem colunt, exorsus est temporibus priscis, cum inducitur Deus primitiis eguisse.’” See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 29 (n. 20).

96. *Ibid.*, 3,17 (CSEL 34/2, p. 558): “Huic respondetur, quoniam ex illo scripturarum nostrarum loco haec quaestio proposita agnoscitur, ubi scriptum est Cain ex fructibus terrae Abel autem ex primitiis ouium obtulisse munus Deo . . .” See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 29 (n. 20). In passing, allow me to note that the reference to Gn. 4:3–4 seems to be much more appropriate here than does Harnack's proposal that it is Dt. 18:4 that is in view. Cf. Porphyrius, *Gegen die Christen*, fragm. 79, p. 94 (n. 22).

97. Augustine fictitiously attributes to a pagan an identical objection in *c. Faust.* XXII,17 (CSEL 25/1, p. 604): “De sacrificiis uero nihil aliud mihi paganus obiceret, nisi cur apud eos illa reprehendamus, cum in nostris ueteribus libris talia sibi Deus noster iussisse legeretur offerri.”

98. This aspect of the objection is central in *ep.* 136,2. Written by Marcellinus, it apprises Augustine of the objections of the pagan Volusianus (CSEL 44, pp. 94–95): “Dicebat enim, quod, etsi sibi

the Jewish religion, an assumption which, in turn, allows Porphyry to denounce this incoherence. It also challenges this particular representation of God by presenting him as "having needed first fruits." These objections all lead to the following conclusion: does not this particular form of worship have a purely human origin?

If Question 3 is understood as a way of defending animal sacrifices, we must suppose that it does not come from Porphyry. Indeed, we know from *De abstinentia* that Porphyry objected to animal sacrifices; in Book II, he deplores that offerings of "small plants" have been replaced by extremely cruel sacrifices in which "men have begun cutting the throats of their victims and covering the altars with blood";⁹⁹ now the sacrifice of Abel, to which Question 3 refers, is an offering of the first fruits of his flock! The *Letter to Anebon*, which Augustine uses in Book X of the *civ. Dei*, also rejects the representation of the gods as "attracted by the fumes of sacrifices and other exhalations."¹⁰⁰ The *De abstinentia* specifies that offerings of "anything that is sensible" should not be made "to the supreme God . . . neither holocaust nor word".¹⁰¹ "our only homage is pure silence and pure thoughts concerning him." Indeed, "the supreme God needs nothing that comes from the outside."¹⁰² In fairness, however, it must be noted that Porphyry knows quite well that certain people offer living sacrifices to demons.¹⁰³

But the important thing to remember is that the purpose of Question 3 is certainly not to defend animal sacrifices: it seeks to denounce an internal contradiction in the Christian religion. Similarly, when Julian paradoxically defends Scripture, showing that God rightly favors the sacrifice of Abel, he tries to show the contradictory nature of the Christians' position.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, this reasoning is not enough to rule out the Porphyrian origin of Question 3.

hodie incarnationis dominicae ratio redderetur, reddi uix ad liquidum possit, cur hic Deus, qui et ueteris testamenti Deus esse firmatur, spretis ueteribus sacrificiis delectatus sit nouis."

99. *De abst.* II,5,2, and II,7,2, t. II, pp. 75 and 77; see also II,12, pp. 81–82 (n. 90).

100. *Civ. Dei* X,11,2 (BA 34, pp. 466–467): ". . . ipsi uero et aliis uaporibus inliciantur et nidoribus hostiarum." See Dods, NPNF, vol. II, p. 187 (n. 82). Cf. *Ad Aneb.* 2,8b, ed. A. R. Sodano, pp. 19–20 and Eusebius, *Praep. euang.* V,10,2 (SC 262, pp. 304–305).

101. *De abst.* II,34,2, t. II, p. 101 (n. 90); cf. Porphyrius, *Ad Marc.* 19, ed. E. des Places (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982), p. 117.

102. *Ibid.* II,37,1, t. II, p. 103 (n. 90); see also *Ad Marc.* 11, p. 112 (n. 101).

103. *Ibid.* II,36,5, t. II, p. 103–104 (n. 90).

104. Cf. *C. Galil.*, fragm. 84, ed. E. Masaracchia (Roma: Ed. dell'Ateneo, 1990), pp. 178–179; and cf. L. Perrone, "Echi della polemica pagana sulla Bibbia negli scritti esegetici fra IV e V secolo: Le *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* dell'Ambrosiaster," *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 11 (1994): p. 181. It should be noted, however, that the position of Julian on the sacrifices is differ-

*Question 4: de eo quod scriptum est:
"in qua mensura mensi fueritis, in ea remetietur uobis"*

Question 4¹⁰⁵ is based on a verse from the gospel tradition: "With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured out to you" (Mt. 7:2). Here again, the author of the question proceeds by demonstrating a contradiction: the idea of measure expressed in Mt. 7:2 is incompatible with the threat of eternal punishment for those who do not believe in Christ—in reference, perhaps, to Mk. 16:16 and Jn. 3:18, which associate condemnation with the absence of faith, or to Mt. 25:46, which explicitly mentions eternal punishment. Beyond the exegetical contradiction, what is challenged is the injustice of eternal suffering applied to temporal wrongs: the two are disproportionate. Even more radically, it is undoubtedly the idea of unending punishment itself which is problematic.

Augustine comes back to this question in Book XXI of the *civ. Dei*, where he once again cites Mt. 7:2:¹⁰⁶ "How, then, they say, is that true which your Christ says, 'For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured out to you?,' if the retribution for a temporal sin is eternal punishment?" The objection is attributed to a certain one "against whom we defend the City of God."¹⁰⁷ A bit later in Book XXI, Augustine explains that "The Platonists, indeed, while they maintain that no sins are unpunished, suppose that all punishment is administered for remedial purposes, be it inflicted by human or divine law, in this life or after death."¹⁰⁸ Punishment administered for remedial purposes necessarily has an end, as opposed to the "eternal suffering" with which Christ threatens (*minae infiniti supplicii*) in Question 4. Understood in this way, the question is consistent with the way Porphyry imagines the fate of the soul after death: on many occasions, Augustine emphasizes that, unlike other Platonists, he

ent than that of Porphyry. This is an idea clearly noted by G. Rinaldi, *La Bibbia dei pagani. Vol. 2: Testi e documenti* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1998), pp. 166–167.

105. *Ep.* 102,4,22 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 563–564). See Teske, *WSA II/2*, pp. 31–32 (n. 20).

106. *Civ. Dei* XXI,11 (BA 37, pp. 432–433): "quo modo ergo uerum est, inquit, quod ait Christus uester: 'in qua mensura mensi fueritis, in ea remetietur uobis', si temporale peccatum supplicio punitur aeterno?" See Dods, *NPNF*, vol. II, p. 463 (n. 82). The connection between these two texts is obvious since (1) the citation of Mt. 7:2 is very rare in Augustine and (2) the argumentation is similar in both cases.

107. *Ibid.* (BA 37, pp. 428–429): "eorum contra quos defendimus ciuitatem Dei." See Dods, *NPNF*, vol. II, p. 187 (n. 82).

108. *Ibid.* XXI,13 (BA 37, pp. 434–435): "Platonici quidem, quamuis impunita nulla uelint esse peccata, tamen omnes poenas emendationi adhiberi putant, uel humanis inflictas legibus uel diuinis, siue in hac uita siue post mortem . . ." See Dods, *NPNF*, vol. II, p. 463 (n. 82).

admits that the soul, once purified, could escape the cycles of reincarnation and return to the Father “never again exposed to such” ordeals;¹⁰⁹ this definitive escape, however, is only possible through philosophy, and, therefore, is only accessible to the elite few.¹¹⁰

Question 5: de filio Dei secundum Salomonem

Question 5¹¹¹ is very short: “‘You will, of course, be so kind as to instruct me,’ he said, ‘about this next point, namely, whether Solomon really said, ‘God does not have a son.’” According to Harnack,¹¹² the author of the question could be referring to Eccl. 4:8. It is, in fact, not impossible to take the verse out of context and apply it to God: “There is one, and there is no second, and truly, son and brother, he does not have.”¹¹³ Ambrose,¹¹⁴ for example, keeping only the beginning of the verse, applies it to the Son, who is alone and has no second; from there, he emphasizes the unity of the Trinity: there is only one God.

Unlike the preceding questions, Question 5 appears as a request for information; however, the request implies a criticism: in this case, Solomon would be in explicit contradiction with the Gospel and it would be logical to conclude that Christ is not the Son of God. For the pagan, such a challenge is not surprising. Ambrosiaster’s *Question 114* presents the following objection which it attributes to a pagan: “Faith

109. Ibid. XII,21,3 (BA 35, pp. 222–225 (= Porphyrius, *De regressu*, fragm. Smith 298bF): “Si enim de istis circuitibus et sine cessatione alternantibus itionibus et reditionibus animarum Porphyrius Platonius suorum opinionem sequi noluisset, siue ipsius rei uanitate permotus siue iam tempora Christiana reueritus, et . . . dicere maluit *animam propter cognoscenda mala traditam mundo, ut ab eis liberata atque purgata, cum ad Patrem redierit, nihil ulterius tale patiatur*.” See Dods, NPNF, vol. II, p. 240 (n. 82). Cf. ibid. pp. X, 30 (BA 34, pp. 540–543 (= fragm. Smith 298F)); ibid. XXII, 27 (BA 37, pp. 682–683 (= fragm. Smith 298cF)). According to Smith, “it seems likely that this is Augustine’s own interpretation rather than an explicit statement of Porphyry” (cf. *Porphyry’s Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition*, p. 57 (n. 83)).

110. Cf. *civ. Dei* X,27 (BA 34, pp. 540–543) (= Porphyrius, *De regressu*, fragm. Smith 287F).

111. *Ep.* 102,5,28 (CSEL 34/2, p. 569): “‘Sane etiam de illo’, inquit, ‘me dignaberis instruere, si uere dixit Salomon: Filium Deus non habet’.” See Teske, WSA II/2, p. 34 (n. 20).

112. Cf. Porphyrius, *Gegen die Christen*, fragm. 85, p. 96 (n. 22).

113. *L’Ecclesiaste*, trans. and annotated by F. Vinet, *La Bible d’Alexandrie LXX, Tome 18* (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, 2002), p. 128.

114. Cf. *De inst. uirg.* 10,64 (PL 16, cols. 321–322): “Quis hoc dicit, nisi ille de quo dixit Ecclesiastes: ‘Est unus et non est secundus’ (Eccl. 4:8)? Quis est iste, nisi ille de quo dictum est: ‘Magister uester unus est Christus’ (Mt. 23:10)? Unus est, quia unigenitus Dei filius: quia solus, ut scriptum est: ‘Quia expandit caelum solus et ambulat sicut in terra super mare’ (Job 9:8). Hic ergo non secundus, quia primus est: non est secundus, quia unus est: ‘Unus Deus pater, ex quo omnia, et nos in illo: et unus Dominus Iesus Christus, per quem omnia, et nos per ipsum’ (1 Cor 8:6).”

is something stupid. It is irrational that God would have a son and that dead and decomposed bodies would come back to life."¹¹⁵

But can Question 5 be connected to the claims of Porphyry? At first, this seems doubtful. Indeed, if we believe Augustine, Porphyry himself spoke of "God the Father" and of "God" the Son that he calls in Greek "Paternal Intelligence" or "Paternal Spirit."¹¹⁶ So why call into question the existence of the Son of God? However, in two new fragments of *Contra Christianos* identified by R. Goulet, Porphyry seeks to show that the Johannine doctrine of the Logos leads to an unresolvable dilemma: "If he is Logos," he says, "he is either expressed or interior. But if he is expressed, he is not substantial, for as soon as he is proclaimed he disappears; but if he is interior, he is inseparable from the nature of the Father. How then could he have separated from him and then descend into the world?"¹¹⁷

This Porphyrian dilemma is reported to us in two distinct texts by Michel Psellus which include an explicit mention of Porphyry. It is also explicitly attributed to Porphyry by Theophylactus¹¹⁸ in a fragment already cited by Harnack (fragm. 86). Its Porphyrian authenticity is therefore well established. Of course, any such objection regarding the relationship between the Logos and the Father may be consonant with Question 5, which, in fact, is designed to question the very possibility that God could have a Son.¹¹⁹ Thus, the Porphyrian origin of Question 5 does not seem impossible.

115. *Quaest. Vet. et Novi Testamenti*, q.114,18 (CSEL 50, p. 311): "'Sed,' aiunt e contra, 'stultum est quod creditur; non enim ratione subsistit Deum habere filium neque emortua et dissoluta corpora rursus reparari ad uitam.'" Cf. q.97,12 (CSEL 50, p. 180). On this see P. Courcelle, "Critiques exégétiques et arguments antichrétiens rapportés par Ambrosiaster," *Vigiliae Christianae* 13 (1959): p. 137 and n. 20. However, see also the reservations regarding Courcelle's positions expressed by L. Perrone in "Echi della polemica pagana sulla Bibbia . . .," pp. 170–172 (n. 104).

116. Porphyre, *De regressu*, fragm. Smith 284F (cf. *civ. Dei* X,23 (BA 34, pp. 504–505)): "Dicit enim deum patrem et deum filium, quem Graece appellat *paternum intellectum* uel *paternam mentem*." In fragment 18 of his *Philosophical History*, Porphyry also speaks about the Son and the Father: the Intellect, he says, is "Son and Father of himself. Indeed, the procession did not take place because the God-cause would have moved himself to beget, but because the Intellect itself advanced begetting itself outside of God" (cf. P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, Tome I (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1968), p. 311).

117. Michel Psellus, "Opusc. Theol. 75," in *Michaelis Pselli theologica*, Vol. I, ed. P. Gautier, (Leipzig/Stuttgart: Bibliotheca Teubneriana, 1989), p. 301. Cf. also the second fragment taken from Michel Psellus, *Opusc. Theol.* 97, in *ibid.*, p. 379. This translation is that of R. Goulet; see "Cinq nouveaux fragments," pp. 141–145 (n. 27).

118. Cf. Theophylactus, *Enarr. in Ioh.* (PG 123, col.1141).

119. It is also well established that Porphyry criticized Christians for honoring Christ as the Son of God. See, e.g., the oracle of Hecate regarding Christ that Porphyry reports in the *Philosophy from Oracles*: "Piissimum igitur uirum, inquit, eum dixit et eius animam, sicut et aliorum piorum, post

Question 6: de Iona propheta

Question 6 underscores the improbability of the story of Jonah, while, at the same time, considering its symbolic meaning. The author only retains two details of the biblical account: the three days and nights spent by a fully-clothed Jonah in the belly of the monster (Jon. 2:1 LXX) and “the gourd plant [that] sprung up over Jonah after he had been spit out” (Jon. 4:6).¹²⁰ The association of the two elements forms a summary since, in the account, the gourd plant only springs up after the preaching in Nineveh: Y.-M. Duval¹²¹ concludes that this question is better explained by the figurative representations than by a reading of Jon. The writing of Origen’s *In Ionom*, twenty years before *Contra Christianos*, and the silence of Jerome, who presents the same question without explicitly attacking Porphyry by name, leads him to exclude “the strictly Porphyrian origin of the objection raised by the pagans of Carthage.”¹²²

Opposed to this is Harnack’s assertion that the objection was of Porphyrian origin. He thought that Augustine’s view, i.e., that this question is presented, “not as taken from Porphyry, but as coming from the mockery of pagans,” has little to commend it and that it is best explained by his intention to exonerate a philosopher for whom he had great esteem.¹²³ According to P. Courcelle, who has been followed by J. Pépin, Augustine’s remark is due to the fact that he did not know about the Porphyrian origin of the question, since, in the inventory, “the origin of each question was not specified each time.”¹²⁴ What should we make of this?

obitum immortalitate dignatam et hanc colere Christianos ignorantes” (fragm. Smith 345aF = *civ. Dei* XIX,23,2 (BA 37, pp. 150–151)). Or see the instructions to the *retr.* relative to *cons. ev* (cf. *retr.* II,16 (BA 12, pp. 478–479)). This, in turn, may be compared to *cons. ev.* I,15,23 (CSEL 43, p. 22). Cf. G. Madec, “Le Christ des païens,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 26 (1992): pp. 57–58 and 62–64.

120. *Ep.* 102,6,30 (CSEL 34/2, p. 570): “Deinde quid sentire,” inquit, “debemus de Iona, qui dicitur in uentre ceti triduo fuisse? Quod satis ἀπίθανον est et incredibile transuoratum cum ueste hominem fuisse in corde piscis; aut si figura est, hanc dignaberis pandere? Deinde quid sibi etiam uult supra euomitum Ionom cucurbitam natam?”

121. Cf. *Le livre de Jonas dans la littérature chrétienne grecque et latine. Sources et influences du Commentaire sur Jonas de saint Jérôme, Tome I* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1973), p. 28 (with reference to Origen, *C. Cels.* VII,53 (SC 150, pp. 140–141)).

122. *Ibid.*, I, p. 18 and n. 33. Y.-M. Duval makes reference to Jérôme, *In Ionom* 2,2 (SC 323, pp. 224–225). Cf. also Porphyrius, *Gegen die Christen*, fragm. 46, p. 74 (n. 22).

123. Cf. Porphyrius, *Gegen die Christen*, p. 74 (n. 22): “Die Meinung Augustins, dies stamme nicht von Porphyrius, ist schwerlich von Belang; er suchte den von ihm als Philosophen hochgeschätzten Gelehrten zu entlasten.”

124. *Les Lettres grecques en Occident*, p. 197 and n. 2. Cf. J. Pépin, *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne*, p. 460 and n. 3 (n. 32).

Several elements make the Porphyrian origin plausible, at least indirectly: (1) the appearance of the original Greek, which includes the term ἀπίθανον; (2) the insistence on the unbelievable nature of the account and the highlighting of the laughter it provokes;¹²⁵ and (3) the mention of allegorical interpretation, an exegetical move for which Porphyry criticized Origen.¹²⁶ Regarding the arguments to the contrary advanced by Y.-M. Duval, one might respond by saying, first, that the argument *a silentio* does not suffice to rule out the Porphyrian origin of the question reported by Jerome, and, second, that indirect knowledge of Origen's *In Ionam* by Porphyry could explain the allusion to a possible figurative interpretation of the story of Jon.

In sum, then, Augustine accepted without reservation the Porphyrian origin of certain *quaestiones* raised by his pagan friend, especially Question 2. The importance that he grants to several of these objections in the *civ. Dei* provides us with further support. The reservations that he had are due, it seems to me, either to the absence of explicit indications regarding the origin of one or more of the questions in the inventory as it was transmitted to him, or, a desire to diminish its worth even before answering the question. The surprising indication in the *retr.*—"But I do not think that he was that Sicilian Porphyry whose reputation is very widespread"¹²⁷—seems to be the expression of an even later doubt made on the basis of the belief that these objections seemed unworthy of the great Porphyry.

The examination of the formulation and the content of the questions make their Porphyrian origin absolutely plausible, at least indirectly, via a Latin *excerptor*. All the questions have in common the intention of illustrating an inconsistency or an improbability, whether it be an internal contradiction between two scriptural statements or an objection in the name of common sense. They suppose a detailed knowledge of Scripture which, in turn, betrays evidence of an attentive, critical reading. Their formulation resembles those of other fragments seen in the *Contra Christianos*. Their content corresponds to Porphyry's primary concerns: a comparison of religions and a search for the path to salvation; a reflection on worship;

125. Noted by Harnack, Porphyrius, *Gegen die Christen*, p. 74 (n. 22). Cf. the objections of the adversary in III,4 and III,6 (= fragm. 49 and 60 Harnack) of *Macarios de Magnésie*, Le Monogénès, *Tome II*, pp. 76–81 and p. 82; see also IV,17,9, in *ibid.*, p. 296 (n. 26). And, finally, see also the new testimony on *Contra Christianos* discovered by S. Morlet in an anonymous anti-Jewish dialogue (*Dial. an.*, I, 178–202 (CCG 30)) and cited in *Semitica et Classica* 1 (2008): p. 158.

126. Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* VI,19,4–8 (SC 41, pp. 114–116 (= fragm. 39 Harnack)). On the problems posed by this passage, see esp. J. Pépin, *La tradition de l'allégorie de Philon d'Alexandrie à Dante*, *Tome II* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), pp. 55–56 and n. 57. See also the texts cited by R. Goulet in *Macarios de Magnésie*, Le Monogénès, *Tome II*, pp. 412–413 (n. 26).

127. *Retr.* II,31 (BA 12, pp. 504–505) (n. 21).

and a concern for the fate of the soul after death, for which he excludes eternal punishment as well as a resurrection of the body. Finally, most of the *quaestiones* challenge the conception of time that the Christian religion has established; that is, the idea that the eternal enters history and that historical events impact eternity. Porphyry cannot accept this conception since, in his view, it opens the door onto the possibility that God might be unjust.

Augustine's Response: The Truth of Scripture

Since the *quaestiones* seek to highlight the inconsistencies within or the general improbability of the claims of Scripture, any adequate response has to demonstrate Scripture's internal consistency and inherent truth. This, in turn, demands both argumentation from the Scriptures and an appeal to reason. The problem is introducing the "Holy Books" into a debate with a non-believer: how can their importance be shown to an interlocutor who approaches Scripture with such strong objections? What could give it credibility? How could a literal or figurative interpretation be proposed that would successfully remove the objections raised?

As he often does, Augustine seems to treat these questions in the order in which they were asked,¹²⁸ but nothing allows us to affirm that this order corresponds to the one that would have been found in the collection cited by his friend. Augustine emphasizes that there is a progression in the questions asked: if the first or even the second have their *raison d'être* in the period before one becomes a Christian, the fourth or the sixth are not really necessary to resolve, and, in fact, can hardly be resolved before one has faith!¹²⁹ One imagines that Augustine did not leave the progression of his treatise to chance. Indeed, here he once again reveals himself to be "the teacher of God."¹³⁰

If the first question furnishes an opportunity to insist on what makes Scriptural statements credible, the second leads him to explain the basis of the Christian religion's universality: the eternal Word is present throughout the history of humanity and human history is governed by divine Providence. The response of the third question emphasizes the authority and the truth of Scripture, which alone can deliver

128. In fact, this is suggested by the following sentences: "Iam uideamus eam, quae sequitur, quaestionem" (*ep.* 102,3,16 (CSEL 34/2, p. 558)); "Post hanc quaestionem, qui eas ex Porphyrio proposuit, hoc adiunxit" (*ibid.* 5,28 (CSEL 34/2, p. 569)); "Postrema quaestio proposita est de Iona . . ." (*ibid.* 6,30 (CSEL 34/2, p. 570)).

129. Cf. *ep.* 102,6,38 (CSEL 34/2, p. 578).

130. This expression is borrowed from L. Jephagnon, *Augustin. Le pédagogue de Dieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

human beings from idolatry. The response to the fourth question extensively develops a literal exegesis of Mt. 7:2. With the two last questions, Augustine demonstrates the consistency of Scripture by linking together its two testaments through a figurative exegesis of the Old Testament text.

Question 1 on the Resurrection: The Credibility of Scripture

Augustine considers with great care each part of the objection concerning the resurrection: does a different birth necessarily imply a different resurrection (§ 3–4)? Does the decomposition of the body and its return to a confused state exclude the possibility of resurrection (§ 5)? Is the state of the resurrected body incompatible with the fact of eating or showing one's wounds (§ 6–7)? The pervasive presence of Scripture in the response is combined with a significant use of reasoning by analogy. The argumentation does not seek to prove the resurrection, which is impossible, but merely to show “that it is not absurd,” or even “unbelievable,” and that there is no valid reason for “refusing to believe what Scripture says concerning the first human being.”¹³¹ The mention of creation is not fortuitous in this context since the consistency of Christian doctrine is the very thing he wants to demonstrate.

Let us first examine the scriptural references. Regarding the question of the model of our own resurrection, Augustine responds by quoting Rom. 6:9:¹³² “Christ dies no more, and death will no longer have dominion over him.” In this way, he states that the promised resurrection is not a simple return to the life of this world and that it will be like the resurrection of Christ, not that of Lazarus. The preceding verse fully justifies Augustine's response because it associates our resurrection with Christ's: “if we believe that we have died in Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (cf. Rom 6:8). In addition, he introduces a reflection about death which plays an important role in the rest of Augustine's reasoning: if a different birth does not imply a different death, why would it imply a different resurrection? The allusion to Gn. 2:7, “the first man was ‘created from the earth’ without parents,”¹³³ immediately allows Augustine to illustrate the statement since Adam is dead like us even without having been born like us. The reference to 1 Cor. 15:52 (“in the blink of an eye, . . .

131. Cf. *ep.* 102,1,4 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 547–548): “Ita non est absurdum, ut similiter resurgant corpora, quae dissimiliter orta sunt”; 1,5 (p. 549): “incredibilia sunt haec quibusdam, quia in experta . . .”; and 1,4 (p. 547): “Sed ne hoc ipsum, quod scriptum est de primo homine, similiter infideles nolint credere . . .” See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 23 (n. 20).

132. Cf. *ibid.* 1,3 (CSEL 34/2, p. 546). See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 22 (n. 20).

133. Cf. *ibid.* (CSEL 34/2, p. 547): “. . . sicut nec ipsius primi hominis aliter exorta caro quam nostra, quando quidem ille sine parentibus de terra creatus est nos uero ex parentibus . . .” See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 23 (n. 20).

the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be transformed”) is useful for overcoming the opposition between the “bodies recently buried and those which have decomposed over a long time.”¹³⁴ To overcome the objection concerning the food taken by the risen Christ, Augustine establishes an enlightening parallel with the meal taken by the angels at the oaks of Mamre at the invitation of Abraham (cf. Gn. 18:8): although a spiritual body certainly does not have the “necessity” to eat, it does not follow from this that it does not have the “capacity” to do so!¹³⁵ We have to wonder then why Christ “wanted to eat and drink” (cf. Lk. 24:42–43), just as we would very much like to know why he “wanted” to keep the scars from his wounds (Lk. 24:39–40 and Jn. 20:20 and 27). In fact, he wanted both of these things for his disciples, to show them that his body was really a body and not a spirit and to show that it was no other body but his own.¹³⁶ Finally, we notice an allusion to the parable of the mustard seed (cf. Mt. 13:31–32) linked to an explicit citation of Rom. 1:20:

For I and whoever with me tries to understand ‘the invisible things of God through those which have been made’ (cf. Rom 1:20), admire either no less or more the fact that in a single and so small grain of seed there was hidden, as already having been begun, all those things that we praise in a tree than the fact that the great bosom of this world, which received human bodies when they decompose, will restore them whole and entire at the resurrection to come.¹³⁷

The contrast between the seed sown and the body that comes from it was, of course, used by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:37–38 to explain the newness and the diversity of spiritual bodies. Augustine’s goal, however, is rather to play on the contrast between the big and the small, as was done in the parable of the mustard seed, to show that if a big

134. Cf. *ibid.* 1,5 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 548–549): “. . . ita cum ‘in ictu oculi’, sicut apostolus dicit, fit resurrectio mortuorum, omnipotentiae Dei et ineffabili nutui tam facile est quaeque recentia quam diuturno tempore dilapsa cadauera suscitare.” See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 23 (n. 20).

135. Cf. *ibid.* 1,6 (CSEL 34/2, p. 549): “Quo modo autem contrarium est et Christum post resurrectionem cibatum et in resurrectione, quae promittitur, ciborum indigentiam non futuram, cum et angelos legamus eiusdem modi escas eodemque modo sumpsisse non ficto phantasmate sed manifestissima ueritate nec tamen necessitate sed potestate?” See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 24 (n. 20). Cf. *civ. Dei* XIII,22 (BA 35, pp. 314–315), which references Gn. 18:8 and XXII,19,2 (BA 37, pp. 632–633), which contrasts the need to nourish oneself with the power to do so.

136. Cf. *ep.* 102,1,7 (CSEL 34/2, p. 550). See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 24 (n. 20).

137. *ibid.* 1,5 (CSEL 34/2, p. 549): “Nam ego et mecum quicumque ‘inuisibilia Dei per ea, quae facta sunt, intellegere’ moluntur, aut non minus aut amplius admiramur in uno seminis tam paruulo grano omnia, quae laudamus in arbore, tamquam liciata latuisse, quam mundi huius tam ingentem sinum, quae de corporibus humanis, dum dilabuntur, absumit, resurrectioni futurae tota et integra redditurum.” See Teske, *WSA II/2*, pp. 23–24 (n. 20). The expression *tamquam liciata* is a technical term from the world of weaving. Augustine associates it with the theme of causal reasons in *civ. Dei* XXII,14 (BA 37, pp. 616–617).

thing can come from something smaller, nothing excludes the opposite, namely, that from the bigger—"the immense womb of the world"—could come the individual body of anyone who has existed, however tiny it might be. In both cases, creation is used analogously to say something about the resurrection.

The quotation of Rom. 1:20 is fully justified in this context. Augustine uses it repeatedly to provide a rational foundation for the capacity of philosophers to access a real knowledge of God through creation;¹³⁸ it is a key for understanding the multitude of analogies borrowed from nature throughout his response. If the pagan refuses to believe the witness of Scripture, at least he can understand its pertinence by reflecting on creation. From this perspective, the *mirabilia* of nature confirm the credibility of Scripture. Spontaneous generation is thus cited to make plausible the formation of Adam from the earth as well as his death, which, apparently, was similar to that of other men: indeed, animals born from the earth without parents die just like those who are born through mating!¹³⁹ The phenomenon of vision accounts for the instantaneousness of the resurrection for everyone, regardless of the time of their death: if the visual ray produced by the eye can reach objects that are close and objects that are far with the same speed, could not the omnipotent God raise from the dead both those who died centuries ago and those who died today?¹⁴⁰ The parched earth and the sun's rays absorb water very differently: the first, by lack, the second, because they have the power to do so.¹⁴¹ Is this not an image of the difference between the biological body, which is nourished by necessity, and the spiritual body, which has the capacity, but lacks that necessity? In short, the innumerable "miracles"¹⁴² of

138. On this, see G. Madec, "Connaissance de Dieu et action de grâces. Essai sur les citations de l'*Ép. aux Romains* I, 18–25 dans l'œuvre de saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 2 (1962): pp. 273–309.

139. Cf. *ep.* 102,1,4 (CSEL 34/2, p. 547). Augustine completes his argument using another analogy: the comparison between olive oil and oil made from animal fat confirms that a distinctly different origin does not necessarily imply a difference in properties: both float on water (*ibid.*, p. 548)! J. Larrieu-Regnault has noted that Augustine can therefore criticize the author of the objection for lacking rigor. However, "le raisonnement par la ressemblance n'est qu'un raisonnement hypothétique"; "l'argument d'Augustin ne peut donc déboucher, et il le sait, que sur un 'pourquoi pas?'" For this, see "*Lettre* 102. Présentation et traduction," p. 34 (n. 12). On spontaneous generation, see *Gen. litt.* III,14,22–23 (BA 48, pp. 246–249).

140. Cf. *ep.* 102,1,5 (CSEL 34/2, p. 548). The development was sparked off by Paul's expression "*in ictu oculi*" from 1 Cor. 15:52; cf. *s.* 362,18,20 (PL 39, col.1625). On this theory of vision, see *trin.* IX,3 (BA 16, pp. 80–81) and *s.* 277,10 (PL 38, cols.1262–1263); cf. also G. J. P. O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (London: Duckworth, 1987), pp. 82–83.

141. Cf. *ep.* 102,1,6 (CSEL 34/2, p. 549).

142. Cf. *ibid.* 1,5 (CSEL 34/2, p. 549): "incredibilia sunt haec quibusdam, quia inexperta, cum omnis natura rerum tam sit plena miraculis, ut non quasi facili peruestigatione rationis sed uidendi consuetudine mira non sint atque ob hoc nec consideratione nec inquisitione digna uideantur."

nature, which we see every day but which we do not usually notice, should make the miracle of the resurrection credible!¹⁴³

Question 2 on the Time of the Christian Religion: The Eternal Word and Its Relation to History as the Foundation of the Christian Religion

To justify the late appearance of the Christian religion, Augustine first turns Porphyry's argument against him (§ 9–10): the criticism is valid for any instituted religion that had a beginning in time and the arguments that the pagans could use to defend their own religion are likewise valid for the Christian religion. In fact, Augustine perceptively attributes to the pagans the reasoning he develops afterwards to justify the appearance of the Christian religion at a particular moment in history. In a second part (§ 11–12), he relies on the Prologue of John to affirm the eternity of the Word, which governs all times; the Word can therefore save all those who have known it, in all times and in all places. The consideration of the divine plan operating in history (§ 13–15) finally allows Augustine to explain by divine foreknowledge the moment chosen for the coming of Christ; this coming, at a particular moment in time, is not at all exclusive of the salvation of those who lived before his coming for he has always found people to believe in him, not only in Israel, but also in other nations.

At first glance, it is surprising to see how few scriptural references are used to answer this major objection of Porphyry. In addition to the allusions to the Prologue of John, there is, however, a very significant mention of the "holy books of the Hebrews," which concludes Augustine's response to the question:

For some are already mentioned in the holy books of the Hebrews from the time of Abraham, people not his descendants according to the flesh, nor members of the people of Israel, nor those who joined the people of Israel from another society; they were, nonetheless, sharers in this mystery. Why, then, shall we not believe that there were also others now and then at other times and in other peoples, even though we do not find them mentioned in the same authorities? In that way the salvation brought by this religion, the only true religion by which true salvation is also truly promised, was never

On the Augustine's views on miracles, see *Augustinus-Lexikon*, Vol.3, ed. C. Mayer et al. (Basel: Schwabe, forthcoming), s.v. "Mirabilia, miraculum," by J.-M. Roessli.

143. Cf. *trin.* III,5,11 (BA 15, pp. 292–293), which alludes to Ez. 37:1–10: "Et quis reddidit cadaueribus animas suas, cum resurgerent mortui, nisi qui animat carnes in uteris matrum, ut orientur morituri?" Tertullian also argues for the plausibility of the resurrection from the various manifestations of the omnipotent God in creation in e.g., *De res.* 11–12 (CCSL 2, pp. 933–935).

lacking to anyone who was worthy of it, and anyone to whom it was lacking was unworthy of it.¹⁴⁴

Whom is Augustine thinking about when he speaks of these men who, without belonging to the people of Israel, “were, nevertheless, sharers in this mystery”? Spontaneously, one thinks of Job, whose example is evoked in this sense in the *civ. Dei*: “the holy and wonderful man Job, who was neither a native nor a proselyte, that is, a stranger joining the people of Israel, but, being bred of the Idumean race, arose there and died there too.”¹⁴⁵ Augustine adds: “And I do not doubt that it was divinely provided, that from this one case we might know that among other nations also there might be men pertaining to the spiritual Jerusalem who have lived according to God and have pleased Him.”¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, *ep.* 102 mentions living men “from the time of Abraham” even though Job, at least according to the *civ. Dei*, ‘belonged to the third generation after Jacob’!¹⁴⁷ Should we think, then, of someone like Melchisedek?¹⁴⁸ Perhaps. In any case, what we should notice is Scripture’s reference to these men who are aliens among the people of Israel and yet participants in the mystery of Christ. Augustine treats this as an invitation to generalize the claim beyond the examples that Scripture provides. What is affirmed by this is the possibility of having access to Christ in other places and at other times and independently of the people of Israel. Scripture itself is thus brought into perspective. The true God can be known and can offer his salvation to people well beyond the narrow limits of space and time in Christian preaching, limits denounced by Porphyry.

144. *Ep.* 102,2,15 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 557–558): “Cum enim nonnulli commemorantur in sanctis Hebraicis libris iam ex tempore Abrahae nec de stirpe carnis eius nec ex populo Israel, nec aduenticia societate in populo Israel, qui tamen huius sacramenti participes fuerunt, cur non credamus etiam in ceteris hac atque illac gentibus alias alios fuisse, quamuis eos commemoratos in eisdem auctoritatibus non legamus? ita salus religionis huius, per quam solam ueram salus uera ueraciterque promittitur, nulli umquam defuit, qui dignus fuit, et cui defuit, dignus non fuit.” See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 28 (n. 20).

145. *Civ. Dei* XVIII,47 (BA 37, pp. 654–657): “. . . de sancto et mirabili uiro Iob, qui nec indigena nec proselytus, id est aduena populi Israel fuit, sed ex gente Idumaea genus ducens, ibi ortus, ibidem mortuus est.” See Dods, *NPNF*, vol. II, p. 390 (n. 82).

146. *Ibid.* (BA 37, pp. 656–657): “Diuinitus autem prouisum fuisse non dubito, ut ex hoc uno sciremus etiam per alias gentes esse potuisse, qui secundum Deum uixerunt eique placuerunt, pertinentes ad spiritalem Hierusalem.” See Dods, *NPNF*, vol. II, p. 390 (n. 82).

147. *Ibid.* (BA 37, pp. 656–657): “. . . colligimus tamen ex libro eius . . . tertia generatione posteriores fuisse quam Israel.” See Dods, *NPNF*, vol. II, p. 390 (n. 82).

148. According to Eusebius, *Praep. euang.* VII,8,19–21 (SC 215, pp. 186–187), he cannot be called either a Jew or a Greek and, if he is called a Hebrew, it is “rather as a symbolic interpretation of his name,” i.e., as a “migrant” or “one who is passing through.”

The allusions to the Prologue of John make perfect sense in this context: on what is the universality of the Christian religion based, if not on “the Word of God through whom all things were made” (cf. Jn. 1:1–3)?¹⁴⁹ And this is true *a fortiori* when one is addressing Platonists! In *civ. Dei* Book X, while taking Porphyry and his disciples to task, Augustine cites the first three verses of the Prologue and then adds: “The old saint Simplicianus, afterwards bishop of Milan, used to tell me that a certain Platonist was in the habit of saying that this opening passage of the holy gospel, entitled, ‘According to John,’ should be written in letters of gold, and hung up in all churches in the most conspicuous place.”¹⁵⁰ The same Johanine verses are quoted in *conf.* VII¹⁵¹ where Augustine expressly admits having read the same thing, albeit in other terms, in the books of the Platonists (*non quidem his uerbis, sed hoc idem omnino*). Augustine, then, did not choose the reference to the Johanine prologue in response to Porphyry’s objection accidentally; a Platonist could accept this text, at least partially. In addition, Question 2 alludes to it, mentioning “grace and truth.” However, in his commentary, Augustine does not simply insist on the eternity of the Word, on its role as creator and on the happiness which fills each soul endowed with reason that participates in its wisdom;¹⁵² he also emphasizes that the eternal Word is present in all of human history and that it is always the same Word at each stage of this history: before the development of the Hebrew people, throughout the period of the Kingdom of Israel, in the incarnation, since then up to our time, and finally, from now until the end of the world.¹⁵³ Now it is precisely the historical character of the Christian religion that is problematic for Porphyry. Augustine’s concern, then, is to articulate the eternity of the Word and the succession of time, presenting the role of “divine providence” who knows “what is fitting and proper in each era” and who governs the course of events accordingly.¹⁵⁴ The correlative insistence on the divine foreknowledge of God allows him at the same

149. *Ep.* 102,2,11 (CSEL 34/2, p. 553): “Quam ob rem cum Christum dicamus uerbum Dei, per quod facta sunt omnia, et ideo filium, quia uerbum . . .” See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 26 (n. 20).

150. *Civ. Dei* X,29,2 (BA 35, pp. 536–537): “Quod initium sancti euangelii, cui nomen est secundum Iohannem, quidam Platonicus, sicut a sancto sene Simpliciano, qui postea Mediolanensi ecclesiae praesedit episcopus, solebamus audire, aureis litteris conscribendum et per omnes ecclesias in locis eminentissimis proponendum esse dicebat.” See Dods, *NPNF*, vol. II, p. 200 (n. 82).

151. *Conf.* VII,ix,13 (BA 13, pp. 608–609).

152. Cf. *ep.* 102,2,11 (CSEL 34/2, p. 554): “idem ipse est filius Dei patri coaeternus et incommutabilis sapientia, per quem creata est uniuersa natura et cuius participatione omnis rationalis anima fit beata.”

153. Cf. *ibid.* (CSEL 34/2, pp. 553–554).

154. Cf. *ep.* 102,2,13 (CSEL 34/2, p. 555): “Cum enim non fortuito labi sed diuina prouidentia tempora ordinari fateantur, quid cuique tempori aptum et opportunum sit, humanum consilium praetergreditur et illinc dispertitur, unde ipsa prouidentia rebus consulit.” See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p.

time to remove the accusation of injustice implicitly brought against God: Christ chose the most opportune time and place to appear, since he knew the identity of all those who were predisposed to believe.¹⁵⁵ This is why “salvation . . . was never lacking to anyone who was worthy of it, and anyone to whom it was lacking was not worthy of it.”¹⁵⁶

Question 3 on the Distinction of Sacrifices: Scripture, “A Salutory Remedy”

In his response to Question 2, Augustine establishes a parallel between the Christian religion and the pagan religion,¹⁵⁷ in order to show that Porphyry's critique applies equally to both and to show that it cannot be held solely against the Christian religion. In fact, the Apologists often used this type of parallel to demonstrate the legitimacy of Christianity. But this is simply the first step of an overall strategy: what is important is to establish that only the Christian religion is true and that the pagan religion is merely superstition.¹⁵⁸ Augustine adopts a similar progression. The response to Question 3 is, in fact, an offensive against the worship of idols. The question lends itself to such an offensive since it supposed that there was an identity between pagan worship and the worship commanded by God in Scripture. Augustine objects precisely to this identity; the important thing, in fact, is not the form of the rites but the addressee(s) of the worship: is it given to the one, true God or to idols and demons? Augustine, relying on Scripture, devotes most of his response to criticism of pagan worship (§ 18–20); he then briefly explains the relationship between the worship of the Old and New Testaments (§ 21). In doing so, he completely undermines the very thing that is insinuated in the question: pagan sacrifices are not identical to the early Jewish sacrifices and the worship of the New Testament is not in contradiction with that of the Old! In other words, while a distinction must be made between the different systems of worship, that distinction simply cannot be the one which was expressed in the objection.

27 (n. 20), modified slightly. A very clear affirmation of divine providence is found in Porphyry, *Ad Marc.* 21–22, p. 118 (n. 101).

155. Cf. *ep.* 102,2,14 (CSEL 34/2, p. 556): “. . . dicamus tunc uoluisse hominibus apparere Christum et apud eos praedicari doctrinam suam, quando sciebat et ubi sciebat esse, qui in eum fuerant credituri.”

156. *Ibid.* 2,15 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 557–558), which is cited in n. 144 *supra*. See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 28 (n. 20). On Augustine's corrections to this affirmation, see *retr.* II,31 (BA 12, pp. 506–507) and *praed. sanct.* 9,18–10,19 (BA 24, pp. 520–523).

157. Cf. *ibid.* 9–10 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 552–553) and 13–14 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 555–557).

158. E.g., Justin establishes a parallel between Christian doctrine and pagan philosophy and mythology (*I Apol.* 20–22, ed. A. Wartelle, (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987), pp. 124–129), before criticizing the pagan gods and demonstrating the truth of Christianity (*ibid.* 23–53, pp. 128–173).

In his response, Augustine describes Scripture and seeks to demonstrate its validity. He emphasizes its divine origin: it states the “words of God.”¹⁵⁹ He calls to mind its sacred and truthful character.¹⁶⁰ He notes the double nature of its teachings: it is both extremely clear and figurative.¹⁶¹ He shows in particular that it acts as a “salutary remedy,” capable of freeing pagans from idolatrous fear:

The divine scripture offers a medicine for these morbid and pestilential feelings; it teaches a point well known, but still teaches it with the salutary remedy of an admonition when it says, ‘they have eyes and do not see; they have ears and do not hear’ (cf. Ps. 113:5, LXX) and other things of this sort. For, to the extent that these words are more patent and true in the language of the people, they fill with a salutary sense of shame those who with fear offer divine worship to such images and who gaze upon them . . . They are so deeply affected that they do not dare to suppose that they lack awareness.¹⁶²

This medicinal function of Divine Scripture is an essential conviction of Augustine: the Word of God converts, frees and heals; it leads to “confession.”¹⁶³ This is undoubtedly why he never hesitated to use it, including all those times when he addressed pagans or the enemies of Christianity. After all, the considerable place given to Scripture in the *civ. Dei* would be incomprehensible if he lacked this conviction.

The quotations of Scripture are numerous here as well: Augustine uses them to criticize pagan religion and to correct the representation of God denounced by

159. Cf. *ep.* 102,3,17 (CSEL 34/2, p. 559): “Dei eloquia” and 3,21 (CSEL 34/2, p. 563): “diuinis eloquiis.”

160. Cf. *ibid.* (CSEL 34/2, p. 558): “ueraces et sacrae litterae.”

161. Cf. *ibid.* (CSEL 34/2, p. 559): “. . . cum in eisdem ipsis litteris *apertissime* scriptum sit . . .”; “. . . qui ante nos Dei eloquia tractauerunt, *de similitudinibus* sacrificiorum ueteris testamenti tamquam *umbris figurisque* futurorum copiose locuti sunt.” This brings to mind, e.g., Ambrose’s figurative interpretation of the sacrifice of Abel. See *Expl. super Ps.* 39,12 (CSEL 64, p. 219) and *De incarn. dom. sacr.* 1,4 (CSEL 79, p. 226).

162. Cf. *ep.* 102,3,19 (CSEL 34/2, p. 560): “Quibus morbidis et pestilentiosis affectibus mederetur scriptura diuina, quae rem quidem notam sed tamen salubri remedio admonitionis inculcat dicens: ‘Oculos habent et non uident, aures habent et non audiunt’ et cetera talia. Haec enim uerba quo magis aperta et populariter uera sunt, eo magis incutiunt salubrem pudorem illis, qui, cum talibus simulacris diuinum cum timore cultum exhibent . . . sic afficiuntur omnino, ut ea sensu carentia putare non audeant.” See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 30 (n. 20).

163. On the connection between Scripture and “confession,” see *conf.* XIII,xv,17 (BA 14, pp. 454–455): “Non noui, Domine, non noui alia tam casta eloquia, quae sic mihi persuaderent confessionem et lenirent ceruicem meam iugo tuo et inuitarent colere te gratis” and *doc. chr.* II,7,10 (BA 11/2, pp. 146–147). Cf. I. Bochet, “*Le Firmament de l’Écriture*,” pp. 100–106 (n. 83); and “Maladie de l’âme et thérapeutique scripturaire selon Augustin,” in *Les Pères de l’Église face à la science médicale de leur temps*, ed. V. Boudon-Millot and B. Pouderon (Paris: Éd. Beauchesne, 2005), pp. 379–400.

Question 3. In his criticism of pagan worship, Augustine not only affirms that idols are nothing, by referencing Ps. 113:5 (LXX) "They have eyes and do not see; they have ears and do not hear" and 1 Jn. 5:21 "brothers, be on guard against idols," but he also warns against the worship of demons, which is closely linked to idolatry, by citing Ps. 95:5 "all the gods of the pagans are demons" and 1 Cor. 10:19–20 "what the pagans sacrifice belongs to the demons, it is not to God that they sacrifice."¹⁶⁴ By systematically associating the verses of the Old and New Testament, he emphasizes the identity of their teaching. This scriptural teaching goes hand in hand with a real "religious phenomenology."¹⁶⁵ Augustine explains the origin of the religious emotions experienced by the pagans before their images and idols: he points out their importance by noting that they are placed in high places, by noting their resemblance with living beings and by noting the veneration of the crowds; all these things impress the imagination of weak minds¹⁶⁶ and produces in them a sense of mystification. Augustine adds to this a criticism of the allegorical interpretation of this worship,¹⁶⁷ which relies on reason to establish a hierarchy among bodily and spiritual creatures and to reject as wrong all worship given to a creature; a scriptural allusion to the angels who refused this adoration for themselves confirms the teaching of reason.¹⁶⁸

Question 3 insinuates that the God of the Christian religion "needs" worship and that he would be inconsistent if he objected to worship that he himself had asked for. The citation of Ps. 15:2, "I said to the Lord: It is you who are my God because you do not need my goods," is a direct rebuttal to this objection. Contrary to what the pagan suggests, the worship of the Christian religion is not useful to God even though it is beneficial for us,¹⁶⁹ just as it also has a figurative meaning. In fact, a brief explanation of this figurative sense permits Augustine to demonstrate

164. Cf. *ep.* 102,3,19 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 560–561). See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 30 (n. 20), modified slightly.

165. This expression belongs to A. Mandouze; cf. his "Saint Augustin et la religion romaine," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958): p. 207.

166. Cf. *ep.* 102,3,18 (CSEL 34/2, p. 560): "Et idola quidem omni sensu carere quis dubitet? Verum tamen cum his locantur honorabili sublimitate, ut a precantibus atque immolantibus adtendantur, ipsa similitudine animatorum membrorum atque sensuum quamvis insensata et exanima afficiunt infirmos animos, ut uiuere ac spirare uideantur accedente praesertim ueneratione multitudinis, qua tantus eis cultus impenditur."

167. Cf. *ibid.* 3,20 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 561–563), *en. Ps.* 113, s. 2,4 (PL 37, cols. 1483–1484) and s. *Dolbeau* 26,17–24 (ed. F. Dolbeau (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1996), pp. 379–384). On the sources of this allegorical interpretation, see J. Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie. Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes* (Paris: Aubier, 1958), pp. 351–365.

168. Cf. *vera rel.* 109–110 (BA 8, pp. 182–185) and s. *Dolbeau* 26,25 (ed. F. Dolbeau, pp. 385–386 (n. 167)).

169. Cf. *ep.* 102,3,17 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 558–559) and *ep.* 138,6 (CSEL 44, pp. 130–131).

that it is the same God and the same religion in the Old and New Testaments. Even if the forms of worship have changed, the sacrifices of the past prefigured the sacrifice of the New Covenant “inaugurated by the true sacrifice of one priest, that is, by the shedding of Christ’s blood” and this sacrifice is precisely what Christians offer today.¹⁷⁰ To justify the identity of the faith amidst this diversity of cultural forms, Augustine appeals to the concept of signs. To answer Question 2, he had already remarked that: “it makes no difference that people worship with different ceremonies in accord with the different requirements of times and places, if what is worshipped is holy, just as it makes no difference that one speaks with different sounds in accord with the different requirements of languages and hearers, if what is said is the truth.”¹⁷¹ Similarly, he now uses the analogy of the greeting, which is different according to the time of day, but which nevertheless remains a greeting. It is always a question of combining identity and difference if one is to justify a change in matters of worship—a move which is unacceptable to the pagans. Another reason legitimates this change: what is now proclaimed (*nunc praedicata*) corresponds to what was formerly predicted (*ante praedicta*).¹⁷² One cannot accuse God, therefore, of changing his will. Finally, it should be noted that Augustine establishes an explicit connection between the offering of Christ’s sacrifice, that is, the Eucharist, and the name “Christians.”¹⁷³ These analyses undoubtedly prefigure the argument of *civ. Dei* X, which demonstrates that sacrifice is due to God alone and that the only true sacrifice is that of Christ, which itself was prefigured by the sacrifices of the Old Covenant and which the Church continues to offer.¹⁷⁴

170. *Ep.* 102,3,21 (CSEL 34/2, p. 563): “Dispartita autem diuinis eloquiis sacrificia pro temporum congruentia, ut alia fierent ante manifestationem noui testamenti, quod ex ipsa uera et unius sacerdotis uictima, hoc est ex fuso Christi sanguine ministratur, et aliud nunc, quod huic manifestationi congruum, qui iam declarato nomine Christiani appellamur, offerimus, non solum euangelicis uerum etiam propheticis litteris demonstratur.” See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 31 (n. 20).

171. *Ibid.* 2,10 (CSEL 34/2, p. 553): “. . . respondeant ita nihil interesse pro diuersa temporum locorumque congruentia, quam diuersis sacramentis colatur, si, quod colitur, sanctum est, sicut nihil interest pro diuersa linguarum auditorumque congruentia, quam diuersis sonis dicatur, si, quod dicitur, uerum est” See Teske, *WSA* II/2, pp. 25–26 (n. 20). Cf. *c. Faust.* XIX,16 (CSEL 25/1, pp. 512–514) and *ibid.* XVI,32 (CSEL 25/1, p. 481).

172. Cf. *ep.* 102,3,21 (CSEL 34/2, p. 563): “Mutatio quippe non Dei non ipsius religionis sed sacrificiorum et sacramentorum impudenter nunc uideretur praedicata, nisi fuisset ante praedicta.” See also *ibid.* 2,12 (CSEL 34/2, p. 554) and cf. both to *ep.* 138,7 (CSEL 44, pp. 131–132).

173. Cf. *ep.* 102,3,21 (CSEL 34/2, p. 563), which is cited in n. 170 *supra*.

174. Cf. *civ. Dei* X,1,2, (BA 34, pp. 424–425); X,4 (BA 34, pp. 438–439), with an allusion to the sacrifices of Cain and Abel; X,5 (BA 34, pp. 438–445) which cites Ps. 15:2 and emphasizes the figurative value of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant; X,7 (BA 34, pp. 448–451); X,16 (BA 34 pp. 486–487) on the fact that sacrifice cannot be made to angels; X,6 (BA 34, pp. 446–449) and X,20 (BA 34, pp. 498–499) which discuss the sacrifice of Christ.

Question 4 on the Measure of Judgment: A Literal Exegesis of Mt. 7:2

The response to Question 4 on the measure of judgment is quite different from that given to the preceding questions in that it is presented as a very detailed and literal exegesis of Mt. 7:2. Augustine's goal is twofold: first, to remove the supposed contradiction between an eternity of punishment and its measure and, second, to respond to the accusation of injustice that might arise if God dispensed an eternal punishment for a temporal fault, in other words, a punishment that it is disproportionate to the fault which sanctioned it. To achieve this, he first applies the methods of a *grammaticus* to Mt. 7:2 and shows the objection's lack of logical rigor (§ 23–25); the comparison with the preceding verse then allows him to provide an acceptable meaning to Mt. 7:2 (§ 25–27). The scriptural references are few: Augustine cites Mt. 7:1–2 and alludes to Rom. 9:14 (“There is, of course, no injustice in God!”) and Jas. 2:13 (“judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy”).¹⁷⁵ By way of conclusion, Augustine explains that, for the sake of brevity, he could not “gather all or even most of the passages of the holy books on sins and the punishment of sins.”¹⁷⁶ This is, however, precisely what he strives to do in Book XXI of *civ. Dei*.

To remove the contradiction raised by the author of the question, Augustine begins by explaining that all measures are not measures of time and, thus, it is not contradictory to affirm simultaneously the measure of a punishment and its eternal character. He uses one of the pagan beliefs as a persuasive tool: they believe that the sun is eternal and yet they seek to measure it!¹⁷⁷ If the contradiction is so removed, it nevertheless remains necessary to convince them of divine justice: where, therefore, is the proportionality in the measure between the evil deed and the punishment? Thanks to several analogies, Augustine is able to proceed very progressively in order to demonstrate that “equality is not identity.”¹⁷⁸ He compares the expression in Mt. 7:2 (*in qua mensura mensi fueritis*) to other similar expressions that could be used by Christ, e.g., *quod mensi fueritis* or *quantum mensi fueritis*. In and of themselves, these phrases do not necessarily imply an identity, nor even a quantitative equality, between what we do and what we receive in return.¹⁷⁹ And this is all the more true for

175. Cf. *ep.* 102,4,25 (CSEL 34/2, p. 566) for the allusion to Rom. 9:14 and *ibid.* 4,27 (CSEL 34/2, p. 568) for the allusion to Jas. 2:13. Only the former is noted by Teske, cf. *WSA* II/2, pp. 33–34 (n. 20).

176. *Ibid.* 4,27 (CSEL 34/2, p. 568): “Non autem sinit proposita breuitas responsionis meae, ut colligam omnia uel certe quam plurima, quae de peccatis et de peccatorum poenis sancti libri habent” See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 34 (n. 20).

177. Cf. *ibid.* 4,23 (CSEL 34/2, p. 564).

178. Cf. J. Larrieu-Regnault, “*Lettre* 102. Présentation et traduction,” p. 72 (n. 12).

179. Cf. *ep.* 102,4,24 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 565–566).

the expression "*in qua mensura mensi fueritis*." It does not imply any kind of identity of the object measured: e.g., with the same measure we can measure both wheat and gold. Nor does it imply any kind of quantitative equality: e.g., we can use a bushel to measure one bushel of wheat or a thousand bushels.¹⁸⁰ In other words, it is useless to seek a pure and simple equivalence between the act committed and the punishment it merits: punishment is not of the same nature as a fault (one does not make an adulterer suffer adultery) and a punishment that would be a quantitative equivalent of a fault would hardly make sense (e.g., the duration of an act is certainly neither the right criterion for evaluating a fault, nor the measure to use for its punishment).¹⁸¹

What, then, should be the principle of evaluation for an act, and, once this is determined, the criteria for determining the measure of punishment to apply? Augustine discovers the best answer in the preceding verse: "Do not judge in order that you may not be judged, for with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged" (Mt. 7:1–2). Again, we should exclude as unsuitable the interpretation that says that if we have committed a rash judgment or if we have distorted the measures, God would judge with rashness or apply a distorted measure; no, for "God can neither judge with rashness nor apply a distorted measure." In fact, this is a claim that Augustine made as early as the *s. dom. mon.*¹⁸² And, as he explains in *ep.* 102, we will not be judged unjustly because we have made an unjust judgment, for "there is no injustice in God"¹⁸³ (cf. Rom. 9:14). How then shall we interpret the *in quo iudicio* which now replaces *in qua mensura*? By discovering through judgment what conditions the good or evil act: "For a person uses the judgment of his mind, whether good or evil, either for doing good or for sinning."¹⁸⁴ The notion of use allows Augustine to go from judgment to will, for it is the latter which uses (*utitur*) judgment, just as it uses the eyes or other faculties.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, it is free will which is the "measure"

180. Cf. *ibid.* 4,25 (CSEL 34/2, p. 566).

181. Cf. *ibid.* 4,24 (CSEL 34/2, p. 565): "Ita dici posset: 'Quod feceris, patieris', non ut, si stuprum fecerit, stuprum patiat, sed quod peccato isto fecit legi, hoc ei lex faciat . . ." and *ibid.* 4,26 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 567–568) where, e.g., homicide is discussed as a crime that may be committed quickly in order to illustrate the principle that the length of the punishment cannot be dictated by the time required to commit the crime.

182. *S. dom. mon.* II,18,62 (CCSL 35, p. 158): "Nullo modo Deus uel temere iudicat, uel iniqua mensura cuiquam rependit."

183. Cf. *ep.* 102,4,25 (CSEL 34/2, p. 566): "Numquid si iniquo iudicio iudicabunt, iniquo iudicabuntur? Absit. Nulla quippe iniquitas apud Deum." Cf. *civ. Dei* XXI,11 (BA 37, pp. 432–433).

184. *Ibid.* 4,25 (CSEL 34/2, p. 567): "Iudicio enim quisque animi sui seu bono seu malo utitur uel ad beneficiendum uel ad peccandum." See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 33 (n. 20).

185. Cf. *lib. arb.* II,19,51 (BA 6, pp. 372–373): "Noli ergo mirari, si ceteris per liberam uoluntatem utimur, etiam ipsa libera uoluntate per eam ipsam uti nos posse, ut quodam modo se ipsa utatur uoluntas quae utitur ceteris . . ."

that allows us to both evaluate the act and determine the reward or the punishment it deserves. Augustine thus transposes Mt. 7:2:

In his own will the good man measures out good actions, and in that same measure happiness will be measured out to him. Likewise, in his bad will a bad man measures out his bad works, and in that same measure unhappiness will be measured out to him. For it is in the will that anyone is good when he wills rightly, and it is in the will that anyone is bad when he wills wrongly.¹⁸⁶

The importance of this interpretation is easy to see: free will is the principle of the good or bad act; it is, therefore, also the only just principle of evaluation for the act performed¹⁸⁷ and, by extension, for determining what that act deserves. Augustine explains elsewhere that, "in the mind itself where the appetite of the will is the measure of all human actions, punishment immediately follows upon the sin."¹⁸⁸ In other words, the sanction for an action is not external to the action performed; it is its logical consequence; in Platonic terms, it is the imprint left on the soul by the act.¹⁸⁹ The importance attributed to the will even permits Augustine to justify "the eternal severity of the punishment," since, if the fault is temporal, it may arise from a will "to have the eternal enjoyment of his sin."¹⁹⁰ In this way, the decisions of one's free will, while limited to a particular place in time, do truly impact or impinge upon one's eternal destiny.

With this line of argument, Augustine removes the exegetical and logical contradiction denounced by the author of Question 4 as well as the suspicion of injustice. Moreover, eternal punishment turns out to be imaginable from the moment

186. *Ep.* 102,4,26 (CSEL 34/2, p. 567): "In uoluntate quippe propria metietur bonus homo bona facta et in ea metietur ei beatitudo, itemque in uoluntate propria metietur malus homo mala opera et in ea metietur ei miseria, quoniam, ubi quisque bonus est, cum bene uult, ibi etiam malus, cum male uult." See Teske, *WSA II/2*, pp. 33–34 (n. 20).

187. This amounts to saying that *dilectio*, which is the will in all its force (*ualentior uoluntas*), is the root of good actions, just as, in the opposite sense, *cupiditas*, which is an impetuous will (*uiolenta*) is the principle of the evil act (cf. *trin.* XV,21,41 (BA 16, pp. 532–533) and XI,2,5 (ibid. pp. 172–173)). See also *ep. Jo.* 7,8, (BA 76, pp. 304–305: "Videte quid commendamus, quia non discernuntur facta hominum nisi de radice caritatis. . . . Semel ergo breue praeceptum tibi praecipitur: dilige et quod uis fac"); as well as ibid., 8,9 (BA 76, pp. 336–341). On the relationship between will, love and free will in Augustinian thought, see I. Bochet, *Saint Augustin et le désir de Dieu* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1982), pp. 102–114.

188. *Ep.* 102,4,26 (CSEL 34/2, p. 567): "in ipso autem animo, ubi appetitus uoluntatis humanorum omnium est mensura factorum, continuo poena sequitur culpam . . ." See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 33 (n. 20).

189. Cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 524e–525a, ed. A. Croiset (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1923), p. 221.

190. *Ep.* 102,4,27 (CSEL 34/2, p. 568): "In eadem igitur mensura quamuis non aeternorum malefactorum aeterna supplicia remetiuntur, ut, quia aeternam uoluit habere peccati perfruitionem, aeternam inueniat uindictae seueritatem." See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 34 (n. 20).

that we identify the “measure” of an act and its punishment with free will. The weight thus given to free will is undoubtedly a characteristic of Christianity affirmed by Augustine. By contrast, the Platonic belief in reincarnation, which, by definition, is cyclical, prevents it from assigning this same degree of definitiveness to human choice.

Question 5 on the Son of God According to Solomon: The Coherence of Scripture

Augustine's response to the fifth question, i.e., to “Did Solomon really say: God does not have a Son?,” is difficult for a reader unfamiliar with Scripture. Augustine answers by citing Prv. 8:25 (“Before all the hills, he begot me”) and by identifying Christ with the Wisdom of God, following 1 Cor. 1:24. He then quotes Prv. 30:3–4, which he also exegetes through various references from the New Testament. The aim is both clear and twofold: he wants to show that Solomon “really did say that God has a Son”¹⁹¹ while also showing that there is agreement between the books of Solomon and the New Testament, a fact that was implicitly challenged by the question.

The reason for the appeal to Prv. 8:25 is obvious: the verse played an important role in the Arian controversy where it was used to respond to attacks rooted in Prv. 8:22, “The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways,”¹⁹² and to establish the divine and eternal generation of the Son.¹⁹³ Augustine rarely cites these verses, but they do prove to be very important in Book I of *trin.*,¹⁹⁴ a text written before *ep.* 102. On the one hand, Prv. 8:25, linked with Jn. 14:6b's “I am the truth,” is said to apply

191. Ibid. 5,29 (CSEL 34/2, p. 569): “Cito respondetur: Non solum hoc non dixit, uerum etiam dixit, quod Deus habeat filium.” See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 34 (n. 20), modified.

192. Hilary of Poitiers specifies that the Arians, by twisting the meaning of Prov. 8:22, concluded that “he was created God rather than begotten” (*De Trin.* I,35 (SC 443, pp. 266–269)). On the rare occasions that he references this verse, Augustine, however, never stops at the term *creauit*. In fact, as A.-M. La Bonnardière has noted, “son attention est au contraire polarisée par le mot *uia* . . .” La Bonnardière then goes on to conclude: “Nous avons là une preuve manifeste du caractère fragmentaire des informations reçues par Augustin au sujet de l'arianisme.” For this, see her *Biblia augustiniiana. A.T.—Le livre des Proverbes* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1975), pp. 171–172.

193. Cf. Hilaire de Poitiers, *De Trin.* XII,37 (SC 462, pp. 434–437) and XII,49 (SC 462, pp. 454–457).

194. I,12,24 (BA 15, pp. 152–155): “Secundum formam Dei dictum est: ‘Ante omnes colles genuit me,’ id est, ante omnes altitudines creaturarum; et: ‘Ante luciferum genui te,’ id est, ante omnia tempora et temporalia; secundum formam autem serui dictum est, ‘Dominus creauit me in principio uiarum suarum.’ Quia secundum formam Dei dixit ‘Ego sum ueritas’ et secundum formam serui, ‘Ego sum uia’.”

to the Son *in forma Dei*. And, on the other, Prv. 8:22, linked with Jn. 14:6a's "I am the way," is applied to the Son *in forma serui*. It is, therefore, not surprising that Augustine appeals to Prv. 8:25 to convince his interlocutor of the divine nature of the Son according to Solomon.

At the same time, the citation of Prv. 30:3–4 is absolutely exceptional; this is the only time this text is cited in all of Augustine. One supposes that he re-read the book of Proverbs in order to understand what might have raised the question transmitted by his pagan friend. He will have undoubtedly chosen Prv. 30:3–4 because of its ending, which takes the form of an enigma: "What is his name and what is the name of his son?" and because of the correspondence with the symbols used by Paul in his epistles. In order to better understand the commentary Augustine proposes, allow me to cite these verses: "God taught me wisdom, and I learned the knowledge of the saints. Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the winds in his bosom? Who has turned water into his garment? Who has held the bounds of the earth? What is his name and what is the name of his son?"

Going up to and coming down from heaven is easily applied to Christ using Eph. 4:10: "He who has come down is the same one who has gone up above all the heavens." The mention of "bosom" suggests for Augustine a hidden and secret place and that of the "winds" is associated with souls. Taken together, these two elements lead him to make a connection with Col. 3:3: "For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." More unexpectedly, the "turning water into his garment" becomes a symbol of conversion and of baptism, connected to Gal. 3:27: "As many of you have been baptized have put on Christ." Finally, the mention of the "bounds of the earth" evokes, not surprisingly, Christ's sending out of the disciples as recorded in Acts 1:8: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria and even to the ends of the earth." This complex interplay of correspondences assures that the son mentioned by Solomon is indeed the Son of God and that this Son is none other than Christ.

Question 6 on Jonah:

Figurative Exegesis and Fulfillment of the Scriptures in Christ

If the response to the Question 4 was a model of literal exegesis, the answer to Question 6 introduces the reader to the subtleties of figurative exegesis as well as to the profound meanings it is capable of generating. The question objects to the improbability of the story of Jonah and its laughable character while at the same time considering its possible figurative sense. Augustine first defends faith in the miracle (§ 31–32); then he explains its prophetic meaning (§ 33–35); then he concludes

by showing that the laughter of the pagans was also prophesied (§ 36–37). In what follows, we will pass over arguments Augustine used to defend the plausibility of the miracle in favor of the figurative interpretation he proposes and the importance he places upon the fulfillment of prophesies.

Augustine is careful not to disassociate meaning from fact: a fact, if it did not have meaning, would not merit being recounted in Scripture; and without factual truth, the figurative sense that would be too anemic to lead us to faith. In *The Cave of the Nymphs*, Porphyry himself seems to grant a certain importance to the literal sense: considering Homer's description of the cave of Ithaca as a "pure fiction of the poet" would be showing one's "negligence." And to this he adds: "The more one tries to show that Homer made up nothing regarding the cave and that the latter, even before the poet, had already been dedicated to the gods, the more this sanctuary will appear full of ancient wisdom"; he does not exclude, however, "the additions of the poet."¹⁹⁵ It is even more important for Augustine to defend factual truth, because facts are the language of divine power: "For, just as we humans customarily speak with words, so the divine power also speaks with actions. And just as new or less familiar words add a splendor to human discourse, when they are added to it with moderation and propriety, so the eloquence of God is somehow more resplendent in miraculous actions that have an appropriate meaning."¹⁹⁶ The miracle, then, is like a rare sign that astonishes, that grabs one's attention and makes a very strong impression; if it is without reality, it loses all its strength and cannot arouse faith; but if it is not recognized as a sign, it loses its *raison d'être*.

In his interpretation of the story of Jonah, Augustine, loosely inspired by Jerome's *In Jonam*,¹⁹⁷ does not hesitate to see in the prophet a double figure: Jonah emerging alive from the monster after three days in its belly is a figure of Christ, who died and who was raised on the third day (§ 34); Jonah, sitting in the shade of the gourd plant and saddened to see it dry up, is a figure of the people of Israel (§ 35). The first interpretation, which was "revealed by the heavenly master himself . . . in the

195. *De antro nymph.* 4, trans. Y. LeLay (Lagrasse: Éd. Verdier, 1989), p. 67. For more on this text, see J. Pépin, *La tradition de l'allégorie de Philon d'Alexandrie à Dante, Tome II*, pp. 61–62 (n. 126) and S. Toulouse, "La lecture allégorique d'Homère chez Porphyre: principes et méthode d'une pratique philosophique," *La lecture littéraire* 4 (2000): p. 45.

196. *Ep.* 102,6,33 (CSEL 34/2, p. 573): "Nam sicut humana consuetudo uerbis ita diuina potentia etiam factis loquitur et, sicut sermoni humano uerba noua uel minus usitata moderate ac decenter aspersa splendorem addunt, ita in factis mirabilibus congruenter aliquid significantibus quodam modo luculentior est diuina eloquentia." See Teske, *WSA II/2*, p. 37 (n. 20).

197. Cf. Y.-M. Duval, "Saint Augustin et le Commentaire sur Jonas de saint Jérôme," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 12 (1966): pp. 9–40.

Gospel," is indisputable; the second, on the other hand, is only one among several possible interpretations: the only norm is its conformity to the rule of faith.¹⁹⁸ At the same time, the interpretation cannot be arbitrary: Scripture is explained by Scripture; moreover, there is a symbolic coherence that must be respected in order for the interpretation to remain plausible. If Jonah, first swallowed and then vomited out by the monster, is a figure for Christ who died and rose from the dead, nothing excludes seeing the boat as a figure of the wood of the cross, the belly of the monster as a symbol of the tomb and/or of death, and the companions of Jonah caught in the storm as an image of people tossed about in this world. It is also logical to note that the preaching of Jonah only positively impacted the Ninevites once he was rejected by the monster, just as Christ's preaching did not positively impact the pagans until after his resurrection.

The interpretation of Jonah under the gourd tree is stranger for us. It can be understood from the association of Jonah's sadness before the conversion of the Ninevites and of Israel's sadness before the salvation of the pagans.¹⁹⁹ The shadow of the gourd tree (*umbraculum cucurbitae*) can then evoke "the shadow of things to come" (*umbra futurorum*) that Paul associates with Jewish worship in Col. 2:17. The drying up of the gourd tree logically represents the obsolescence of this worship and the morning worm that eats it and dries it out symbolizes Christ on the cross.

The pagans' question highlighted the laughter provoked by the story of Jonah: Augustine resolutely addresses this in his response,²⁰⁰ but he clearly intends to reverse the situation as he does so. The prophets also announced these mockeries, but, at the same time, they predicted that the mockeries would give way to a recognition of Christ's royalty. Two scriptural texts are associated with the book of Jonah in order to help make sense of the pagans' laughter: Is. 51:7–8 and Ps. 21. Is. 51:7–8 commands us to "not fear the reproaches of men," for "like a garment, they shall be worn out by time, and they will be eaten as wool by a moth." Augustine, who associates the moth that devours the wool with the worm that eats the gourd tree, concludes that the Christ-worm is imperceptibly devouring the pagans! As Augustine points out in both *s. Morin* 1 and the *divin. daem.*, citing the same verses,

198. *Ep.* 102,6,37 (CSEL 34/2, p. 577): "Liceat sane cuilibet quamlibet aliter dum tamen secundum regulam fidei cetera omnia, quae de Iona propheta mysteriis operata sunt, aperire; illud plane, quod in uentre ceti triduo fuit, fas non est aliter intellegere, quam ab ipso caelesti magistro in euangelio commemorauimus reuelatum." See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 39 (n. 20), modified slightly.

199. Cf. *ibid.*

200. Cf. *ibid.* 6,31 (CSEL 34/2, p. 570): "cachinum paganorum"; *ibid.* 102,6,32 (CSEL 34/2, p. 572): "risus; ita rideant scripturas nostras; quantum possunt, rideant . . . ; riserunt"; *ibid.* 102,6,36 (CSEL 34/2, p. 575): "adhuc cachinnent pagani . . ." and, finally, *ibid.* 102,6,37 (CSEL 34/2, p. 577): "si inrisus est uermis iste; iste uermis inrisus est."

the prophecy is being fulfilled since the pagans are fewer and fewer in number.²⁰¹ The quotations from Ps. 21 furnish the key to this situational reversal: the death of Christ has fulfilled the prophecy of the psalmist; the conversion of the nations that the Psalm announces is well on its way to being fulfilled.²⁰² For Augustine there is a close connection between the mockery suffered by Christ on the cross, the fulfillment of the Scriptures and the salvation of the pagans. "Let them laugh then at our Scriptures": the laughter of the pagans is no longer something to fear, since the Scripture which predicted it is fulfilled in Christ and since this very same Scripture announces their conversion.

Conclusion

A careful analysis of the *quaestiones*, their presentation and their content have confirmed for me their Porphyrian origin, at least indirectly, via a Latin *excerptor*. Thanks to Augustine's pagan friend, it does appear that in *ep.* 102 we possess several questions from the *Contra Christianos*—at least in residual form.

Augustine certainly considered this to be the case, at least for the first four questions, if one may judge from the place and the treatment he gives them in the *civ. Dei* where he repeatedly engages with Porphyry and his disciples. Accordingly, the *Quaestiones expositae contra paganos* sketch the major themes of the *civ. Dei*. The question of the resurrection comes back many times in the *civ. Dei*: it is alluded to in Book X, treated in Book XIII, where Augustine sought to explain the qualities of spiritual bodies, and developed at length in Book XXII in response to the pagans who considered it ridiculous and unbelievable. This shows its importance, notably in the debate with Porphyry, who, on the contrary, affirms: "One must flee every body." The question about the time when the Christian religion appeared certainly influenced Augustine's presentation of the "universal way of salvation" at the end of Book X, that is, at the transition point between the two major parts of the *civ. Dei*: this way, explains Augustine, "is granted by the divine compassion to the nations universally. And no nation to which the knowledge of it has already come, or may hereafter come, ought to demand, 'Why so soon?' or, 'Why so late?'"²⁰³ To confirm this, Augustine immediately shows that this way was announced in an oracle to

201. Cf. *ibid.* 6,36 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 575–576); s. *Morin* 1,4 (*Miscellanea Agostiniana*, vol. 1, *Sancti Augustini Sermones post Maurinos reperti*, ed. G. Morin (Roma: Tipografia poliglotta Vaticana, 1930), p. 593); and *div. daem.* 10,14 (BA 10, pp. 692–693).

202. Cf. *ep.* 102,6,37 (CSEL 34/2, pp. 576–577), which cites Ps. 21:8–9, 17–19 and 28–29.

203. *Civ. Dei* X,32,2 (BA 34, pp. 550–551): "Haec est igitur animae liberandae uniuersalis uia, id est uniuersis gentibus diuina miseratione concessa, cuius profecto notitia ad quoscumque iam uenit et ad quoscumque uentura est, nec debuit nec debet ei dici: quare modo? quare sero? . . ." See

Abraham, who was a Chaldean, that it was prophesized in the Psalms and by Isaiah, and that these prophesies are fulfilled in Christ. The question on the distinction of the sacrifices is also echoed in Book X of the *civ. Dei*, where Augustine protests against the worship given to demons—where he is explicitly relying on Porphyry—and explains that the Christian religion is “the true religion” since it offers sacrifice to the “one true God.”²⁰⁴ Also noteworthy is that *ep.* 102 sketches the theme of the two cities, contrasting the idolatry which draws people to the “society of demons” with the true religion which “urges human beings to become companions of the holy angels”: “eternal fire” is reserved for the first; “an eternal reign” is reserved for the second.²⁰⁵ Finally, the question regarding eternity and the measure of punishment is taken up at length in Book XXI, as has already been discussed above.

The interest of *Quaestiones expositae contra paganos* is to offer a reflection on Scripture to pagans who, following the example of Porphyry, radically contest its relevance and its trustworthiness. If someone should say that it is contrary to common sense and the demands of reason, Augustine responds by showing that these contradictions are pseudo-contradictions that rigorous logic and reason enables one to overcome. In particular, he shows that the biblical representation of God is in conformity to reason. The God of the Christian religion is not a God who has needs; the worship he demands is for the good of the believer. Nor is he an unjust God who would choose to reveal himself at a specific place and time, refusing to make himself known to others by other means, or who would condemn someone to a punishment disproportionate to the fault. Augustine also shows that the biblical representation of human destiny is pertinent, even if Porphyry cannot accept this. If an eternal punishment can be inflicted on a human being, it is because his free will is such that he can make choices having eternal significance. The body that is promised in the resurrection is not a biological body that has needs or that suffers from wounds; it is a transformed body that is no longer submitted to necessity and that obeys the will. Should someone claim that Scripture, with its alleged internal contradictions, is incoherent, Augustine responds by demonstrating that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments agree with and compliment each other. In particular, he responds by justifying the differences and taking history into account: divine providence governs it appropriately through all the different eras, ages and periods. What might appear to be an unacceptable change of reason is, on the contrary, the continuity of an eternal design that takes its place in history. The fulfillment

Dods, NPNF, vol. II, p. 202 (n. 82). Cf. Porphyry, *De regressu animae*, fragm. Smith 297F (= *civ. Dei* X, 29); 300aF (= *civ. Dei* XII, 27); 301aF (= *civ. Dei* XIII, 19).

204. Cf. *ibid.* X,3–4 (BA 34, pp. 432–439) and *ibid.* X,9–11 (BA 34, pp. 454–471).

205. *Ep.* 102,3,19 (CSEL 34/2, p. 561). See Teske, *WSA* II/2, p. 30 (n. 20), modified slightly.

of prophecies is the sign of this *par excellence*. However, in defending Scripture, Augustine does not forget that it is only one of the means by which the Word makes himself known to human beings: the Word also reveals himself through creation and, thus, it is possible that people could believe in him even if they were or are completely alienated from Israel.

Perhaps what we can take from this controversy between Augustine and Porphyry regarding Scripture is an invitation to dialogue with our contemporaries—whether trained in philosophy or not—who are interested in Scripture, but who may not be able to believe in it, or even with those who contest its apparent inconsistencies. Reading the *Quaestiones expositae contra paganos* encourages us to rally all the intellectual resources at our disposal to show the pertinence of Scripture and to offer a literal and figurative exegesis that is likely to convince our interlocutors.