

## 'CHRISTUS VIA' IN AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS

IN A previous article,<sup>1</sup> I argued for the symbolic significance of the wooden ruler upon which Monica finds herself standing during her prophetic dream as recounted towards the end of the third book of Augustine's *Confessions*. Considering that the account of the dream took place almost a quarter of a century after its occurrence, it is remarkable, to say the least, that Augustine recalled both that his mother had seen herself as standing upon a ruler during the dream, and furthermore, that the ruler had been made of wood. Both details in Augustine's account of the dream would suggest that he regarded them with enduring significance. As was shown in the above-mentioned article, one can amass substantial evidence, both from the context of the *Confessions*, as also from Augustine's accustomed symbolism, with a view to arguing that the wooden ruler stands for none other than Christ himself.

Since completing that article, I have encountered another interpretation of the dream which would seem to call for a questioning of my previous position about the meaning of the wooden ruler in Monica's dream. This dream is one of those considered in Gert Haendler's 'Christus im Traum nach lateinischen Texten des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts'.<sup>2</sup> Haendler sees Christ as present in Monica's dream indeed, yet not as the wooden ruler upon which she is standing. For Haendler, Christ is the "very beautiful young man with a happy face" who approaches Monica in the dream.<sup>3</sup> This is an interesting, though not immediately evident possibility. One tends to conclude, all too readily, that the beautiful young man is none other than her son Augustine, who is standing beside her on the ruler at the dream's end.

Haendler's identification of the mysterious young man with Christ is strengthened by realizing that Augustine's recount of the dream has an intended resemblance to the biblical episode of the widow of Nain,

---

<sup>1</sup> Leo C. Ferrari, 'Monica on the Wooden Ruler (*Conf.* 3.11.19)', *Augustinian Studies* 6 (1975), pp. 193-205.

<sup>2</sup> *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 95 (1970) 481-490.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 489.

as I have already observed.<sup>4</sup> That widow was weeping over the dead body of her son being carried out for burial when Christ intervened and restored her son to life and to his mother.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, later on in the *Confessions*, Augustine alludes quite explicitly to this biblical episode in connection with his own impending conversion. Thus, early in the sixth book we read of Monica:

She bewailed me as one dead, certainly, but as one who would be raised up again by you, she was in her mind laying me before you on the bier so that you might say to the widow's son: 'Young man, I say unto thee, Arise', and he should revive and begin to speak and you should give him to his mother.<sup>6</sup>

However, notwithstanding the weight of this allusion and the corroboration provided both by the context and the content of Monica's dream itself, it is argued here that the symbolism already claimed for the wooden ruler is not thereby automatically excluded. Christ may well be present in the dream as the divine physician, restoring the spiritually dead widow's son to life. He can also be symbolically present in the dream as the wooden ruler upon which both mother and son find themselves at the dream's end. This twofold presence of Christ would not be incompatible with oneiric symbolism. Neither too would it be excluded by the intentions of Augustine. Rather would it be consistent with the central importance which he imputes to Christ in the *Confessions*, a fact already underlined by Cayré.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as this last-mentioned author shows, Christ is present in the *Confessions* under several aspects, including those relevant to present considerations—namely as the divine physician and also as the "way" towards God. Under the former aspect he would be the beautiful young man of the dream who assures Monica of her son's final conversion (i.e. of his being raised from the "death" of sin to the "life" of grace). Under the latter aspect of the "way", Christ would be present as the wooden ruler upon which mother and son are both standing at the dream's end.

---

<sup>4</sup> Luke 7.12-15. Cf. 1 Kings 17.17-24 and 2 Kings 4.32-37. Cf. Leo C. Ferrari, *art. cit.* p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 7.15.

<sup>6</sup> *Conf.* 6.1.1. Citations are from the Rex Warner translation. The last digit in the reference is to the paragraph number in the Pilkington translation, which digit facilitates location of the citation for those in possession of this, or a like numbered translation.

<sup>7</sup> Fulbert Cayré, 'Le Christ dans les Confessions', *L'Année Théologique Augustinienne* 13 (1953) 232-259.

Martine Dulaey, in her *Le rêve dans la vie et la pensée de saint Augustin*,<sup>8</sup> regards the symbolism of the wooden ruler in Monica's dream as excessively evident. It is the *regula fidei* upon which Augustine also finds himself standing at the end of the eighth book, after the conversion-scene in the garden. It is also the *via recta*—the straight way followed by the righteous in the Bible.<sup>9</sup> One who is on this way, deviates neither to left nor to right. Thus does Mlle. Dulaey explain the significance of the ruler, without however attempting to account for its wooden character. Both these were explained by myself in a previous study<sup>10</sup> which must have been written while the above-mentioned book was in the press. The wooden ruler, it is claimed, ultimately symbolizes Christ.<sup>11</sup>

The present study aims to substantiate, yet again, the same conclusion, but by approaching the topic from quite another angle. Central to present considerations is what Christ said of himself: "I am the way, the truth and the life".<sup>12</sup> As will be shown, the notion of *Christus via*—or Christ as the way to God is of central importance to the spiritual quest of the *Confessions*. All through the earlier books Augustine has been seeking the "way". As becomes evident towards the end of that quest, this "way" is Christ. Only when standing on the wooden ruler of Monica's prophetic dream (described at the end of the eighth book as *regula fidei*) is Augustine finally on that long-sought "way". Accordingly, the ruler episode is the climax of the wandering theme which winds its way through the *Confessions*. This wandering ceases only when Augustine finds the right "way" which is Christ—whence *Christus via*.

The great importance of this notion of *Christus via* to Augustine is evident from the numerous occasions on which it is explained in the course of his writings. The idea seems to appear as early as 396 in the opening book of the *De doctrina christiana* where it is encountered no less than three times.<sup>13</sup> It is found again in the *De catechizandis rudibus* 399.<sup>14</sup> In addition, isolated references occur in several other works.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Published by Études Augustiniennes (1973).

<sup>9</sup> I.e. *Genesis* 24.48; *1 Esdra* 8.21; *Psalms* 26.11, 106.7; *Proverbs* 2.13; 12.15; 14.2; 16.25; 21.2; 21.8; 39.2; *Wisdom* 10.10; *Ecclesiasticus* 2.16; 49.11; 51.20; *Isaiah* 26.7; 40.3; *Hosea* 14.9; *Matt.* 3.3; *Luke* 3.4; *Mark* 1.3.

<sup>10</sup> Leo C. Ferrari, *art. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 203.

<sup>12</sup> *John* 14.6.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, 1.16 [17]; 1.38 [34]; 4.59 [27]. This fourth book however, was written in 426.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, 40.

<sup>15</sup> *De Genesi ad Litteram* (lib. XII) 4.41 [24]; *De Trinitate* 1.24; *In Joannis epistolam ad Parthos* 10.1; *De civitate Dei* 9.15.2; 10.32.2; 11.2 (*ad finem*).

The three works in which the idea receives most repeated attention are the *Tractatus in Joannis evangelium*,<sup>16</sup> the *Sermones*<sup>17</sup> and the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*.<sup>18</sup> Between them, these writings account for some two dozen uses of the theme. In all, the idea of *Christus via* receives attention in Augustine's writings on more than thirty different occasions.

While this notion of *Christus via* derives immediately from the New Testament, Augustine may well have been familiar with it long before his acceptance of the Scriptures (through Ambrose's influence) and the conversion which ensued. For at least nine years prior to his conversion, Augustine was a member of the Manichaean sect. It is instructive to notice the role of the "way" in this religion. If the contents of the Chester Beatty Collection of Manichaean hymns<sup>19</sup> are any indication, the young Augustine would have encountered numerous references to the "way" in the literature of that sect. In the above-mentioned Collection there are at least seventeen such references. In particular, allusions to Jesus as the one to be followed, or the path, number six.<sup>20</sup> A memorable metaphor on the idea, is the following:

Lo the Perfect Man is stretched out in the middle of the world that thou mayest walk in him and be taken to the Light.<sup>21</sup>

Finally on this topic of possible Manichaean influence, it is noteworthy that the above Collection contains three uses of a metaphor which puts one in mind of the ruler of the *Confessions*: "Hail, gate of Light, the straight path of life", "The commandment has drawn me to the straight way" and "The straight way that leads to life".<sup>22</sup>

Looking next over the allusions to wanderings and to pathways in the *Confessions*, several examples early in the work would seem to imply dramatic contrast of surroundings in which the wanderings occur. For Augustine, being lost in a city and being lost in a wild terrain are equally valid examples of the same condition of not knowing where one is going. Accordingly in the second book, Augustine describes how in the company of bad friends he trod the very streets of Babylon

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*, 13.4; 22.8; 34.9; 42.8; 69.2; 86.3.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, 9.21; 91.9; 92.3; 123.3; 141.4; 142.1 & 5; 170.11; 306.10.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, 60.4; 66.5; 70.19; 86.1; 103.4, 6 & 7; 118.3; 123.2; 142.1; 150.10; 346.1-2.

<sup>19</sup> *A Manichaean Psalm-Book*, part II, volume II of *Manichaean Manuscripts of the Chester Beatty Collection*, edited by C. R. C. Allberry (Stuttgart 1938).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, References (by page and line) are as follows; 2.24-5; 63.30; 134.22; 163.16-17; 177.16 and 178.25-26.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.25-26 (*Cf.* 163.16-17).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.3; 176.15; 193.18.

itself.<sup>23</sup> This is the same book which climaxes in the pear-theft,<sup>24</sup> and in the self-examination of that incident, Augustine berates himself excessively for the influence of evil friends upon his early conduct. In contrast to the above example of being lost in the streets of Babylon is the condition of being lost in some wild terrain.<sup>25</sup> This image occurs on more than one occasion in the earlier books of the *Confessions*. Thus, again in the second book, Augustine says of his relations with God: "I went on going further from you and further, making my way into more and more of these sterile plantations of sorrow (*plura sterilia semina dolorum*)".<sup>26</sup> The idea of wandering in some uncultivated and inhospitable terrain is repeated at the end of the same book: "I slipped from you and went astray, my God, in my youth, wandering too far from my upholder and my stay, and I became to myself a wasteland (*regio egestatis*)".<sup>27</sup> Wandering in an inhospitable terrain is again implied in the third book: "Unhappy sheep that I was, straying from your flock and impatient of your keeping! No wonder that I became infected with a foul disease".<sup>28</sup>

Common to the above three examples is the realization (in retrospect) that his wanderings were taking him further and further away from God. This aspect of the wanderings finds insistently repetitious emphasis in the third book: "I wandered with a stiff neck on my path further and further away from you",<sup>29</sup> "Far indeed was I straying from you",<sup>30</sup> "As I went further and further from the truth I had the impression that I was drawing nearer to it".<sup>31</sup> But Augustine did not then know that the way back to God was through humility and devoutness.<sup>32</sup>

Yet another type of wandering, found particularly in the earlier books of the *Confessions*, involves pathways indeed (in contrast to the previous examples), but paths which are spiritually deleterious. Thus, in the first book, Augustine finds rest in the condemnation of his own former evil ways (*malarum viarum*) in order that he may the better love the good ways of God.<sup>33</sup> Again, at the very beginning of the second

---

<sup>23</sup> *Conf.* 2.3.8.

<sup>24</sup> *Conf.* 2.4.9.

<sup>25</sup> *Conf.* 2.8.16.

<sup>26</sup> *Conf.* 2.2.2.

<sup>27</sup> *Conf.* 2.10.18.

<sup>28</sup> *Conf.* 3.2.4.

<sup>29</sup> *Conf.* 3.3.5.

<sup>30</sup> *Conf.* 3.6.11.

<sup>31</sup> *Conf.* 3.7.12.

<sup>32</sup> *Conf.* 3.8.16.

<sup>33</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.22. Cf. *Conf.* 3.3.5.

book, containing the famous pear-theft, Augustine says that he will go back in recollection over the most wicked ways (*vias . . . nequissimas*) of his youth <sup>34</sup> so that the bitterness of his recollections may be replaced by the sweetness of God. At the age of seventeen, Augustine was sent away to study in Carthage. Recalling his spiritual condition upon arrival in that city, he describes how he hated security and a path without snares (*viam sine muscipulis*).<sup>35</sup> Similarly, not long after settling in at Carthage, he apparently was involved in following the path of sacrilegious curiosity.<sup>36</sup>

One expression of this same kind of idea of the dangerous way, may cause the English reader some puzzlement. The example is to be found in the fourth book, when Augustine writes that God saw him from afar "stumbling in that slippery way (*lapsantem in lubrico*)".<sup>37</sup> With a view to explaining this expression, a detail from one of Augustine's other works would seem to be useful:

If you should stumble (*lapsus fueris*) you will fall. When you have fallen [the devil] will possess you. In order not to fall, do not leave the way (*via*). God has laid out for you a narrow pathway (*semitam*). Whatever is outside that, is slippery (*lubricum*). Besides, the light is Christ and the way (*via*) is Christ.<sup>38</sup>

Some other descriptions of the false pathways to be found in the earlier books of the *Confessions* are descriptions which stand more obviously in contrast to the straightness of the ruler upon which Augustine will be standing at the end of the eighth book. Thus, of his mother's fears for her son's chastity, he writes in the second book: "she was alarmed for me, fearing those crooked ways (*vias distortas*) which are trodden by those who turn their backs to you".<sup>39</sup> In opening the fourth book, Augustine prays to God: "Grant me the power to survey in my memory all those wanderings (*circuitus*) of my errors in the past".<sup>40</sup> This same expression is employed in the eighth book when Augustine consults the holy Simplicianus: "I described to him the winding paths (*circuitus*) of my error".<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, in the sixth book, when describing he exclaimed: "What tortuous ways these were! (*O tortuosas vias*!)".<sup>42</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Conf.* 2.1.1.

<sup>35</sup> *Conf.* 3.1.1.

<sup>36</sup> *Conf.* 3.3.5. Cf. *Conf.* 8.7.17.

<sup>37</sup> *Conf.* 4.2.2.

<sup>38</sup> *Enarratio in Psalmum 103*, sermo 4.6.

<sup>39</sup> *Conf.* 2.3.6.

<sup>40</sup> *Conf.* 4.1.1.

<sup>41</sup> *Conf.* 8.2.3.

<sup>42</sup> *Conf.* 6.16.26.

Earlier on too, in the same book, he describes how he was trying to reach temporal happiness "by so many painful turns (*tam aerumnosis anfractibus*) and such devious ways (*circuitibus*)".<sup>43</sup> Finally, of the will, just prior to the dramatic conversion scene in the eighth book, Augustine observes: "it was necessary for the will to be resolute and sincere, not the turning and twisting (*versare et jactare*) this way and that".<sup>44</sup>

The last two aspects of the ways found in the *Confessions*—namely the slipperiness and the twisting and turning—put one in mind of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Accordingly, the following account (from the *City of God*) acquires an interesting significance: "[Satan] chose the serpent, because, being slippery (*lubricum*), and moving in tortuous windings (*tortuosis anfractibus mobile*), it was suitable for his purpose".<sup>45</sup>

The pathways which Augustine trod in his quest for the way which leads to God were both difficult and laborious.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, even after coming under the influence of the holy Ambrose in Milan, Augustine was still in despair of ever finding the way of life.<sup>47</sup> With his companions, he continued to tread the broad and well-worn paths of the world, for they were reluctant to confine themselves to the narrow way, which alone leads to God.<sup>48</sup>

The "way" which Augustine had long been seeking is finally identified late in the seventh book after Augustine's description of his break with the Manichees and the astrologers, as well as his discovery of the all-important books of the "Platonists". These events, as it later appeared to him, were important preparations for the final discovery of the "way" which was none other than Christ himself:

And I tried to find the way (*viam*) of gaining the strength necessary for enjoying you, and I could not find it until I embraced that Mediator betwixt God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who is over all, God blessed for evermore, calling to me and saying, *I am the way (via), the truth and the life.*<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Conf. 6.6.9.

<sup>44</sup> Conf. 8.8.19.

<sup>45</sup> *De civitate Dei* 14.11.

<sup>46</sup> Conf. 4.12.18; 5.2.2. The former site also contains a reference to the paths as being rough (*aspera*)—a detail of significance later on in this article.

<sup>47</sup> Conf. 6.2.2.

<sup>48</sup> Conf. 6.14.24 (Cf. 6.5.8.). Worthy of mention is the occurrence of the same contrast in the *Manichaean Psalm-Book*: "We passed from the broad way, we found the narrow way". (*Op. cit.*, 170.28).

<sup>49</sup> Conf. 7.18.24.

In retrospect, Augustine realized that he had not sought the way to God in Christ the Saviour.<sup>50</sup> This then was the way to which all his wanderings and perilous journeys over dangerous pathways were finally to lead. However, by the end of the seventh book, though he had been liberated from the errors of the Manichees and astrologers, and taught by the books of the Platonists to seek a truth which was incorporeal, he still had not entered upon the way which leads to God. He compares his spiritual condition to the traveller who can see the goal of his journey in the far distance, but yet did not know by what way he could arrive there.<sup>51</sup> The book closes with a picturesque account of his predicament:

It is one thing to see from a mountaintop in the forests the land of peace in the distance and not to find the way to it and to struggle in vain along impassable tracks, ambushed and beset on all sides by fugitive deserters . . . and it is another thing to hold to the way that leads there, a road built and guarded by our heavenly General, where no banditry is committed.<sup>52</sup>

Dramatic developments, leading to the resolution of this predicament, take place in the next book. This is the eighth book which climaxes in Augustine's conversion and closes with his (symbolic) standing upon the rule of faith—the wooden ruler upon which Monica and he had been standing in her prophetic dream of some nine years previously. Hence, with the developments of this book, the erring son returns at long last to the religion of his childhood in which his pious mother had raised him.

Early in the developments of this book is the admission that doubts about God's existence are a thing of the past. Now he only wants to stand more firmly in God: "I no longer desired to be more certain of you, only to stand more firmly in you".<sup>53</sup> By the book's end he is to be standing on the rule of faith. Meanwhile, the significance of this final condition is anticipated in the opening section of the book: "The way—the Saviour Himself—pleased me, but I was still reluctant to enter its narrowness".<sup>54</sup> In his state of hesitancy, Augustine consulted the holy Simplicianus, a choice again based upon the realization that this holy

---

<sup>50</sup> *Conf.* 7.20.26.

<sup>51</sup> *Conf.* 7.20.26.

<sup>52</sup> *Conf.* 7.21.27. Cf. *Sermo* 9.21 (*ad finem*); *Sermo* 170.11.

<sup>53</sup> *Conf.* 8.1.1.

<sup>54</sup> *Conf.* 8.1.1. Cf. *Conf.* 3.5.9. Elsewhere, Augustine is more explicit about the difficulty of entering upon the narrow way when one is swollen with pride (*Sermo* 142.5).



man was well experienced in following the way of the lord: "It seemed to me that he must have experienced much and learned much as a result of having lived so long in so earnestly following your way (*in tam bono studio sectandae viae tuae*)".<sup>55</sup> And yet again, in what he wished to discover of Simplicianus, the "way" is the centre of his intentions: "I wanted to make use of his experience and learning in order to show me the best means by which someone feeling as I did, could set his foot on your way (*ad ambulandum in via tua*)".<sup>56</sup> Finally, just prior to the conversion scene, Augustine asks himself: "Why do you try to stand by yourself and not stand at all? Let him support you".<sup>57</sup> Such then, in brief, are the seemingly significant details of the eighth book which terminated with Augustine seeing himself standing upon the ruler of Monica's dream of some nine years previously.

This event, the climax of the autobiographical section, occurs just over half way through the *Confessions*. It is noteworthy that with one notable exception,<sup>58</sup> this detail of the ruler virtually terminates the many allusions to pathways in the work as a whole. Such references are quite rare in the concluding half of the *Confessions*. This therefore was the one true "way" which Augustine was seeking in his many wanderings in the first half of the book and it was the way upon which he was to journey for the remainder of his life. And this was the Christ who said: "I am the way, the truth and the life".<sup>59</sup>

Finally, lest it be thought that this connection between the many crooked ways and the one straight way of the symbolic wooden ruler is an arbitrary connection, it remains to point out that such a relation accords well with a certain detail in the eighth book, seen in conjunction with a point which Augustine makes elsewhere. In the struggle prior to his final conversion, the importance of the will is all too evident. Indeed, just prior to the famous garden-scene, the word "will" or its variants occurs more than fifty times in three chapters.<sup>60</sup> Too, the net effect of the conversion is also seen in terms of will at the opening of the ninth book: "I was able totally to set my face against what I willed and to will what you willed".<sup>61</sup> Moreover, as Augustine had observed in the

---

<sup>55</sup> *Conf.* 8.1.1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Conf.* 8.11.27.

<sup>58</sup> The most notable exception occupies *Conf.* 10.34.52, when Augustine examines the temptations which currently beset him as he attempts to follow the right way.

<sup>59</sup> *John* 14.6.

<sup>60</sup> *Conf.* 8.8-10.

<sup>61</sup> *Conf.* 9.1.1.

eighth book, it had been a "turning and twisting" will.<sup>62</sup> These various details acquire an interesting significance in relation to the final ruler scene when seen in the light of a text from one of Augustine's other writings:

Do not desire to twist (*torquere*) the will of God to your will, but rather conform this will to the will of God. For the will of God is in a certain way a ruler (*regula*). If, for instance, you have twisted the ruler (*torsisti regulam*), what do you have by which to be corrected? His will however, remains unchanged, for this ruler is immutable.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, Augustine's various earlier wanderings—in the spiritual wilderness,<sup>64</sup> along crooked, or rough ways,<sup>65</sup> are to be contrasted respectively with the symbol of civilization—the ruler which is both straight and smooth and upon which he sees himself standing at the end of the eighth book. By a most curious coincidence, nothing bridges the gap between the two opposed conditions of Augustine better than a certain passage from Isaiah:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness (*in eremo*):  
Prepare the way (*viam*) of the Lord.  
make his paths straight (*semitas rectas*).  
Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be brought low,  
and the crooked (*tortuosa*) shall be made straight (*directa*),  
and the rough ways (*aspera*) shall be made smooth (*vias planas*);  
And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.<sup>66</sup>

This extract connects very dramatically Augustine's earlier wanderings in search of the "way", with his final condition of standing on the rule of faith, thus making the extract the biblical basis, as it

<sup>62</sup> *Conf.* 8.8.19.

<sup>63</sup> *Enarratio in Psalmum* 93.18.

<sup>64</sup> I.e. in the sterile plantations of sorrow (*sterilia semina dolorum*) of *Conf.* 2.2.2. and the wasteland which he became unto himself (*et factus sum mihi regio egestatis*) at the end of the same book. Indeed, as I have shown elsewhere, the same second book (containing the climactic pear-theft) is remarkable for its emphasis on the wilderness: "Silvescere ausus sum variis et umbrosiis amoribus" (*Vide*: Leo C. Ferrari, 'Symbols of Sinfulness in Book II of Augustine's *Confessions*', *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971) 93-104, especially 95-7.

<sup>65</sup> Thus the crooked ways (*vias distortas*) of 2.3.6., *circuitus erroris* (*Conf.* 4.1.1), stymbling on the slippery way (*lapsantem in lubrico*, *Conf.* 4.2.2), *vias difficiles et laboriosas* (*Conf.* 4.12.18), *tam aerumnosis anfractibus et circuitibus ambiebam* (6.6.9), *O vias distortas!* (6.16.26), etc.. Finally, rough ways are referred to explicitly in 4.12.18: *Quo itis in aspera? quo itis?*

<sup>66</sup> *Isaiah* 40.3-5.

were, of both contrasted conditions of Augustine. Several considerations imply that Augustine had the text from Isaiah very much in mind, not only as the basis of the entire *Christus via* theme in the *Confessions*, but also as the scriptural warranty for climaxing his youthful wanderings with the image of himself standing upon the ruler.

In the first place, at the beginning of the garden scene, when about to enter into the intense conflict with his own will, he refers to the role of this faculty in his conversion with imagery which is very suggestive of the above lines from Isaiah:

All I had to do was to will to go there, and I would not only go but would immediately arrive; but it was necessary for the will to be resolute and sincere, not the turning and twisting (*versare et jactare*) this way and that of a will that was half maimed, struggling, with one part rising and another part falling.<sup>67</sup>

Again, while the eighth book closes with the reference to standing on the rule of faith, the earlier chapters of the succeeding book are concerned with the events subsequent to his conversion. Then, in the fourth chapter of this ninth book, when looking back at the promptings of grace which led to his conversion, Augustine quotes from the very same section of Isaiah as that cited above:

It is a pleasure to me, Lord, to confess to you by what inward goads and stings you utterly tamed me, and how you evened me down (*complanaveris*), lowering the mountains and hills of my high imagination, straightening my crookedness (*tortuosa mea direxeris*), and smoothing my rough ways (*aspera*).<sup>68</sup>

The key-text of Isaiah, to which reference has already been made, occurs also in three of the evangelists. Each time it is imputed to John the Baptist foretelling the coming of Christ who was to say: "I am the way, the truth and the life".<sup>69</sup> The previous considerations have attempted to show just how central these words are to the spiritual quest in Augustine's *Confessions*.

In conclusion, the previously demonstrated importance of the key-text from Isaiah would seem to indicate the earnestness with which Augustine later remedied an omission noted in the ninth book. As a convert preparing for baptism, he had consulted with Ambrose on the

---

<sup>67</sup> *Conf* 8.8.19.

<sup>68</sup> *Conf*. 9.4.7.

<sup>69</sup> The text from Isaiah is found in *Matthew* 3.3, *Mark* 1.3 and *Luke* 3.4. The words of Christ are from *John* 14.6.

subject of suitable spiritual reading. Of the holy bishop's advice he recounts:

He told me to read the prophet Isaiah. . . . I, however, could not understand the first part that I read and, thinking that all the rest would be like this, laid it by with the intention of taking it up again when I should be better trained in the Lord's speech.<sup>70</sup>

Leo C. Ferrari  
*St. Thomas University and  
The University of New Brunswick  
Fredericton, N.B.  
Canada*

---

<sup>70</sup> *Conf.* 9.5.13.