

THE BOYHOOD BEATINGS OF AUGUSTINE

AUGUSTINE WAS approximately forty-three years of age when his *Confessions* made its appearance about 397. As Bishop of Hippo Regius in Roman North Africa he was the subject of widespread praise, not only because of the dignity of his office, but also by reason of his personal virtues. In him lofty heights of learning were matched only by rare depths of religious faith. Professional orator, prolific writer and invincible in public debate, Augustine's fame spread everywhere before him. Yet with true humility he always insisted that it was to God and not to himself that praise was due for the virtues which so many admired in him. That he intended the *Confessions* to achieve just this, is evident from his own descriptions. Thus, in sending a copy of the work to a certain Darius, he had occasion to remark:

Accept, my son, the books containing my *Confessions* which you desired to have. In these behold me that you may not praise me more than I deserve; there believe what is said of me, not by others, but by myself; there mark me, and see what I have been in myself, by myself; and if anything in me please you, join me in praising Him to whom, and not to myself, I desired praise to be given.¹

The same intention is quite explicitly declared in another context, together with a hint of the widespread popularity which the work doubtless enjoyed, even during his own lifetime:

The thirteen books of my *Confessions*, whether they refer to my evil or good, praise the just and good God, and stimulate the heart and mind of man to approach unto Him. And as far as pertaineth unto me, they wrought this in me when they were written, and this they work when they are read. What some think of them they may have seen, but that they have given much pleasure, and do give pleasure, to many brethren I know.²

It follows that the work is patently regarded by its author as a means of diverting praise from himself as the renowned Bishop of

¹ *Letter* 231.6, written in the year 426.

² *Retractions* 2.6.1.

Hippo Regius and directing such praise to God, the true source of his virtue, and indeed of all goodness in the universe. In practice, as the reader of the *Confessions* soon discovers, the work is primarily a testimony to the workings of divine grace in the human soul, particularly as exemplified by the events of Augustine's own life. It follows that the more sinful the state from which God's grace has rescued him, so much the more brightly would this divine influence shine forth. Too, Augustine's innate inclination to sinfulness would likewise become more obvious, thus showing to all the world that he also was all too human. In spite of his exalted position, he too had been subject to temptation and sin in his earlier life, as the pages of the *Confessions* amply testify. This would tend to temper the amount of praise which greeted him on all sides as the celebrated Bishop of Hippo Regius.

Such a self-effacing strategy would seem to account for the way in which Augustine emphasizes his sinful past in the course of the work. Indeed, his sense of culpability (*Schuldbewusstsein*) is there so pronounced as to have become the topic of a book by Schäfer.³ On the other hand, this same author has pointed out at a particular place in his study⁴ that the same mood of culpability is to be found in Augustine's writings long before he achieved ecclesiastical eminence. Thus, his earlier works are sprinkled with his reproaches (*Anklagen*) and complaints of suffering (*Wehrufen*). That these instances are not confined to his earlier works has been amply demonstrated by Reuter, using an impressive collection of examples.⁵ If these findings be accepted then it follows that a certain mood of sadness and suffering permeates all of Augustine's works.

On the other hand, the *Confessions* has its own special reasons for being outstanding with its mood of culpability already emphasized by Schäfer. As Augustine reviews his sinful past in this book he is deeply stirred to self-reproach by the spectacle of his former wickedness. Too, he acknowledges with grateful humility the sufferings by which God reclaimed him and rescued him from his own iniquities. Self-reproach and suffering do therefore possess a singular importance in the case of the *Confessions*.

However, the question still remains of Augustine's basic temperament, with its proclivity for suffering and sadness. The present study aims at elucidating the genesis of that temperament, using invaluable

³ Peter Schäfer, *Das Schuldbewusstsein in den Confessiones des heiligen Augustinus* (Würzburg, 1930).

⁴ *Op. cit.* 104.

⁵ Hermann F. Reuter, *Augustinische Studien* (1887) 362 ff.

evidence gleaned from the pages of the *Confessions*. In this regard, emphasis is placed upon the important (if not exclusive) role of the traumatic beatings which the sensitive genius suffered in his early childhood. Trite as such a thesis may seem in the light of the modern psychology of child-rearing, it is maintained that these early beatings are not to be dismissed as unimportant in the moulding of Augustine's temperament. Indeed, as will be shown, there is ample evidence for the enduring influence of these early floggings, not only upon his most important formative years, but also upon his outlook as a mature man. Further, not only are these boyhood beatings to be conceded enduring significance for Augustine personally, but also (through his influence) for the genesis of a theme central to the religious thought of western Christianity.

Possessed, as he undoubtedly was, of a uniquely sensitive nature, Augustine was thereby all the more susceptible to being profoundly disturbed by his first whippings. Added to this was the possibility of unusually severe beatings which would have struck stark terror into the heart of even the most obtuse of youths. Whether the latter factor reinforced the former in the case of Augustine, is unknown. The fact remains however, that when he came to writing his *Confessions* at the mature age of about forty-three, those floggings figured prominently in the first book of his autobiography. (1.9-18 *passim*).⁶ Even at a mature age the stark terror of the ordeals was very much alive in his memory so that he was moved to attempt to translate his childhood dread into adult terms:

Is there anyone, Lord, with so high a spirit . . . who, by cleaving devoutly to Thee, is endowed with so great a courage that he can esteem lightly those racks and hooks, and varied tortures of the same sort, against which, throughout the whole world, men supplicate Thee with great fear, deriding those who most bitterly fear them, just as our parents derided the torments with which our masters punished us when we were boys.⁷

Much later in life also, at about the age of seventy-two, when coming to the end of his other well-known work, *The City of God* Augustine refers to the whipping of boys to make them learn. Even at this advanced age, with death as it were, staring him in the face,

⁶ *Confessions* 1.9-18. Henceforth such bracketed numbers in the text refer to book, chapter and paragraph in the *Confessions*. Quotations are from the Pilkington translation.

⁷ *Confessions* 1.9.15. Henceforth : *Conf*.

so great was his remembered terror of those punishments that he would rather die than go through them again:

Boys are compelled, under pain of severe punishment, to learn trades or letters; and the learning to which they are driven by punishment is itself so much of a punishment to them, that they sometimes prefer the pain that drives them to the pain to which they are driven by it. And who would not shrink from the alternative, and elect to die, if it were proposed to him either to suffer death or to be again an infant?⁸

Whether the infant Augustine was thrashed at home prior to his beginning school is open to question, since he does not imply this in the *Confessions* or elsewhere to my knowledge. Certainly his father, Patricius, was a man given to violent anger (9.9.19) and only the tact of his wife, Monica, saved her from the wife-beating which was traditional in the village (*ibid.*). This was all the more remarkable in that Patricius was renowned for his furious anger (*ibid.*). On such occasions, he may have had to vent his anger on other members of the household. Thus, even as a young married man, there is record of his having corrected with stripes (*verberibus coercuit*) some servants found to be the source of rumours injurious to his new wife (9.9.20). Whether his frustrated anger could also have been released upon his children is not known. Certainly, the infant Augustine must have been at least the transfixed spectator to his father's rages, even if not the subject of his irate thrashings. In any case he would most likely have been familiar from earliest years with the image of the tyrant-father, an image which was destined to become an important ingredient in his later conception of God, as will be seen. Further, as the pages of the *Confessions* amply testify, Augustine was not overly eloquent in praise of his father's virtues.⁹ Much stronger by far were the bonds of affection to his mother.¹⁰

From the *Confessions*, the overt source of Augustine's first beatings seem to be the school-teachers who had charge of the infant-prodigy's earliest education. Indeed, so young was the impressionable genius

⁸ City of God 21.14 ; cf. 22.22. Dods translation.

⁹ The few references to his father are disparaging in nature, thus: 1.11.17; 2.3.5.&6; 3.4.7; 9.9.19&c.

¹⁰ Thus: "our mother to whose merits I believe that I owe everything that I now am". (*On the Happy Life* 1.6). Monica's influence pervades the *Confessions*, for as Brown remarks: "The relationship between mother and son that weaves in and out of the *Confessions* forms the thread for which the book is justly famous". Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo; A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1969) p. 29.

when submitted to these first traumatic tortures that it seemed to him that he even learned to talk by begging God not allow him to be beaten at school:

For as a boy I began to pray to Thee, my help and my refuge and in invoking Thee broke the bands of my tongue, and entreated Thee though little, with no little earnestness, that I might not be beaten at school.¹¹

If God seemed to have abandoned him on these terrifying occasions, his parents seemed even crueler to his infant's mind, for they merely laughed at the stinging stripes which he bore home with him: "My elders, yea, and my very own parents too, who wished me no ill, laughed at my stripes, my then great and grievous ill."¹²

Apparently his parents were extremely ambitious for their son from his earliest years. Learning was to be the means whereby he would later make a name for himself in the world. In this respect, it would seem that at that time his mother was no less solicitous for his progress than his father.¹³ As a result, it appears that even before he attended school, he was sternly burdened with his parents' ambitions for him, a great load indeed for one so young and sensitive. But even worse was waiting for him in school:

O my God! What miseries and mockeries did I then experience, when obedience to my teachers was set before me as proper to my boyhood, that I might flourish in this world and distinguish myself in the science of speech, which should get me honour amongst men, and deceitful riches! After that I was put to school to get learning, of which I (worthless as I was) knew not what use there was; and yet, if slow to learn, I was flogged!¹⁴

Considering the traumatic circumstances under which the sensitive infant was so early in life goaded on to seek worldly fame and wealth through his oratorical talents, it is the less surprising that he later so violently rejected all these worldly ambitions. Further, it would seem credible too that here in the first floggings administered by some grim tyrant of a school-master, together with the mocking laughter of his very own parents at the painful stripes which he bore home, lay the first seeds of disenchantment with the adult world. Aided by other

¹¹ *Conf.* 1.9.14.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Conf.* 2.3.8.

¹⁴ *Conf.* 1.9.14.

factors, this could later ripen into, renunciation of the world and of worldly pursuits:

We delighted only in play; and we were punished for this by those who were doing the same thing themselves. But the idleness of elders they call business, while boys who do the like are punished by those same elders . . . For will any one of good sense approve of my being whipped because, as a boy, I played ball, and so was hindered from learning quickly those lessons by means of which, as a man, I should play more unbecomingly?¹⁵

Yet if the thrashings hurt, the scoffing laughter of his own parents would seem to have had some perceptible effects upon the older Augustine. Even at a mature age, he would appear to be very sensitive to being the object of any kind of ridicule.¹⁶ Humour there is in Augustine, but (at least to my limited knowledge) it always seems to be directed at something other than himself.¹⁷ A master of grinding irony when vanquishing some unfortunate opponent in public debate, he is nevertheless consistently serious about himself and his intentions. Perhaps too, under the circumstances, this was one of his great assets.

Again, cruel and terrifying as were the beatings which the young Augustine suffered at school, in his mature years through the light of his faith he was able to view these scourgings as the work of God Himself:

But Thou . . . didst use for my good the error of all who pressed me to learn; and my own error in willing not to learn, didst Thou make use of for my punishment.¹⁸

As he soon learned, suffering was not to come to an end with the termination of school-days. Nor was adult life lacking in its own form of punishment. Consequently, just as the faults of boyhood are sup-

¹⁵ *Conf.* 1.9.15.

¹⁶ The *Confessions* is sprinkled with allusions which seem to indicate Augustine's sensitivity in this regard. Thus, even in the first book, the following examples can be found: "It is Thy mercy I address, and not derisive man" (1.6.7); "Dost Thou laugh at me for asking such things?" (1.6.9); "If I should now so cry . . . I should be most justly laughed at and rebuked" (1.7.11); "O my God! what miseries and mockeries did I then experience" (1.9.14); "My elders, yea, and my own parents too . . . laughed at my stripes" (*ibid.*); "Let them no longer exclaim against me of whom I am no longer in fear" (1.13.22).

¹⁷ Conrado Rodriguez, 'El humorismo de San Agustín', *Ciudad de Dios* 154 (1942) 213-236. See also *Saint Augustine of Hippo &c.*, by Rev. Hugh Pope (Image Books 1961) 156-168.

¹⁸ *Conf.* 1.12.19.

planted by those of adult life, so too, the sufferings of school days gave place to those proper to adults:

For these same sins, as we grow older, are transferred from governors and masters, from nuts, and balls, and sparrows, to magistrates and kings, to gold, and lands, and slaves, just as the rod is succeeded by more severe chastisements.¹⁹

Therefore, seen in the larger perspective of eternal salvation, the scourgings of school-days are merely an apprenticeship to the sufferings of life, by which God calls wandering and wayward souls back to Himself. This, for Augustine, is the true role of all sufferings in life, from the school floggings to the agonies of the suffering martyr:

Thy laws, from the ferule of the schoolmaster to the trials of the martyr, being effective to mingle for us a salutary bitter, calling us back to Thyself from the pernicious delights which allure us from Thee.²⁰

The irate schoolmaster of Augustine's infancy therefore becomes the scourging God who purifies his soul through the many punishments of life. In this regard it is to be noted that a favoured theme of the *Confessions* is that of the scourging God. Thus he says of his youthful passions: "But I, poor fool, seethed as does the sea . . . nor did I escape Thy scourges (*flagella*)" (2.2.4). Later on he fell in love: "in order that I might be scourged (*caederer*) with the burning iron rods of jealousy, suspicion, anger, fear, anger and strife" (3.1.1). He wore himself out too on unseemly iniquities: "in all of which Thou didst scourge (*flagellabas*) me" (3.3.5). Too, he contrived a wicked affair in church for which, as he says of God: "Thou chastisedst (*verberasti*) me with grievous punishments" (*ibid.*). The sinner returns to God and "Thou purgest (*purgas*) us from our evil customs" (3.8.16). From the age of nineteen to twenty-eight he was deceived by the errors of the Manichees, of which experience he says: "Let the arrogant, such as have not been yet savingly cast down (*prostrati*) and stricken (*elisi*) by Thee, O my God, laugh at me" (4.1.1). Yet in all his flight, the God of vengeance (*ultionis*) was close behind him (4.4.7). Every soul that is tied to the love of perishable things is miserable and torn to pieces (*dilaniatur*) (4.6.11). Indeed, the sinner finds God's law in his own punishment (*poena*) (4.9.14). God dissolves the hardest of hearts in pity or vengeance (*vindicans*) (5.1.1). Again, while at Carthage, God did goad him (*sti-*

¹⁹ *Conf.* 1.19.30.

²⁰ *Conf.* 1.14.23.

mulos admovebas) into giving up his wordly vocation of public orator (5.8.14). God even let the young and rebellious Augustine elude his mother and flee to Rome in order that her love for her son might be purified with the just lash of sorrow (*dolorum flagello vapulet*) (5.8.15). But arrived in Rome, he says "I was received by the scourge of bodily sickness (*flagello aegritudinis corporalis*) (5.9.16). A year later he fled further afield to Milan: "Where also didst Thou break my bones with the rod of Thy correction (*baculo disciplinae tuae confringebas ossa mea*)" (6.6.9). Even in seeking God, he tells how He beat back the infirmity (*reperculsa infirmitate*) of his sight (7.10.16; cf. 7.17.23). In the eighth book which climaxes in his conversion, he becomes impatient with his unwillingness to commit himself completely to God and lashes his own soul with scourges of rebuke (*sententiarum verberibus . . . flagellavi*) (8.7.18). So he was in great agony with the punishment of his own mind (8.10.22). The powerful conflict within him brought him near to conversion at which point God showed His mercy by redoubling the lashes (*flagella ingeminans*) of fear and shame (8.11.25), which at last made it possible for him to break completely with his sinful past. Yet even after his conversion, he says to God: "nor will I be silent about the severity of Thy scourge (*flagelli tui asperitatem*)" (9.4.12). Finally, after the death of his own mother (who had virtually given her life for his conversion), his soul was stricken (*sauciabatur*) and that life torn apart which they had lived together (9.12.30). Verily, he could say to God: "Thou hast stricken (*percussisti*) my heart with Thy word" (10.6.8). The *Confessions* is therefore seen to contain about twenty references to the scourging God. This number amply illustrates the importance of the theme to Augustine's considerations.

Finally, the theme of the scourging God in the *Confessions* has an obvious relevance to the theme of the prodigal son in the same work. This latter topic has been dealt with by myself in another article.²¹ By scourging the wayward sinner God induces him to return unto Himself, just as the privations of the biblical prodigal son persuaded him to return to his father's house.²²

Furthermore, as the pages of the *Confessions* testify, the scourges of God are extended to all sins, including the forgotten faults of infancy. From even these must the sinner be cleansed to be acceptable to God:

Who bringeth to my remembrance the sin of my infancy? For before
Thee none is free from sin, not even the infant which has lived but a

²¹ Leo C. Ferrari, 'Symbols of Sinfulness in Book II of Augustine's *Confessions*', *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971), pp. 93-104.

²² Luke 15.11-32.

day upon the earth . . . In what then did I sin? Is it that I cried for the breast?²³

In opposition to Rousseau then, Augustine does not see an innate goodness in infants, which is later undermined by the corruptions of society. Rather "in the weakness of the infant's limbs, and not in its will, lies its innocence"²⁴ The reason for the inherent sinfulness of infants is the corruption deriving from Adam and transmitted through the concupiscence of sexual intercourse:

But if 'I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me', (Psalm 51.5) where, I pray Thee, O my God, where, Lord, or when was I, Thy servant innocent?²⁵

Regarding works of Augustine other than the *Confessions*, the earliest date for the appearance of the scourging God theme would seem to be 388. The idea is introduced as a quote of *Hebrews* 12.6: "Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth. He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth". It occurs twice in the *Book of 83 Diverse Questions*²⁶ which was begun in 388 and completed in 395/6. The same quotation is found in the book, *On Genesis, against the Manichees* of 389. It is noteworthy that for all the scourging which occurs in the *Confessions*, Augustine does not even once make use of *Hebrews* 12.6 in that work. On the other hand, it is found in relative abundance in his *Commentaries on the Psalms*, where it occurs no less than twenty times.²⁷ Its use in his sermons is however relatively scarce,²⁸ while he seems to have used it only once in the course of his correspondence.²⁹ Regarding the

²³ *Conf.* 1.7.11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Conf.* 1.7.12. According to Augustine, concupiscence entered the act of reproduction as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve (*City of God* 14.16-26). This section of the *City of God* was written about 420. In his *On the Good of Marriage* (written 401) Augustine maintains that while the married state is a good one, it is less perfect than the state of pure continence: "Freedom from all sexual intercourse is both angelic exercise here, and continueth for ever" (*op. cit.* 8).

²⁶ *Loc. cit.* Q. 82.

²⁷ The following numbers indicate the number of the psalm, then the paragraph number in Augustine's commentary, as found in the Gaume edition of the *Opera Omnia* (1835): 9.10; 36.9 of 3 (i.e. the ninth paragraph of the third sermon on psalm 36); 31.26; 37.23; 40.9; 58.6 of 2; 71.10 of 2; 72.13; 78.8; 79.5; 87.2 of 2; 88.2 of 2; 89.10; 93.17; 93.28; 110.2; 114.5; 118.3 of 13; 118.2 of 17; 118.3 of 31; 122.10.

²⁸ 46.11; 97.3; 236.5; 296.10.

²⁹ *Letter* 111.5.

relative abundance of *Hebrews* 12.6 in the *Commentaries on the Psalms*, it is noteworthy that the Psalms were especially dear to Augustine during his conversion,³⁰ when the scourges of God were finally bearing their fruits.

The first time that Augustine mentions being personally scourged by God would seem to be in the *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, which was begun in 388 and completed in 390. After accusing the Manichees of barking like dogs at the truth, he then goes on to say:

Do not be angry. I too barked and was a dog; and then, as was right, instead of the food of teaching, I got the rod of correction.³¹

These words were recorded between 388 and 390. There are two known events of this time in Augustine's life which could well have wrung those anguished words from his lips. In 387 his mother, Monica, had died just outside Rome, when returning home with the newly converted Augustine to North Africa. She had virtually given her life for his conversion. There remained a large debt to be settled. Again, in 389, just after their return to North Africa, his son Adeodatus died at the age of seventeen. These two tragedies could help explain why the repentant Augustine took up the theme of the scourging God at this stage of his reformed life: "Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth. He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth".

The circumstances of Monica's death contained a malevolent twist, as I have attempted to explain elsewhere.³² She sickened and died after merely passing in the vicinity of Rome. But this was the pagan Rome which Augustine had betrayed while at Milan, in turning to the Christian cause. Monica's death occurred in the year 387. Ten years later, in 397, Augustine began writing the *Confessions* which is unique among his works up till that time, in being replete with references to the scourging God, as has been seen. This too is the book which culminates in that same death of his mother, which terminates the biographical section.

However, in the fullness of time that same Rome was itself to be humbled. In 410 the city fell to the invading Goths under Alaric and was plundered. Augustine's sermon on the occasion of this tragedy contains references to the scourging God:

And men wonder . . . when God corrects the human race and rouses it by scourges (*flagellis*) . . . and often does not choose whom He will

³⁰ *Conf.* 9.4.

³¹ *Op. cit.* 18.33.

³² Leo C. Ferrari, 'The Background to Augustine's *City of God*', *The Classical Journal* 67, no. 3 (Feb.-March 1972) 198-208.

scourge (*flagellet*) . . . for He scourges (*flagellat*) the just and the unjust together.³³

Again, *Hebrews* 12.6 is cited³⁴ and towards the end of the sermon, Augustine points out how the city has been scourged by God, rather than being destroyed:

And so, by the hand of a correcting God, that city was amended rather than destroyed, just as the servant, knowing the will of his lord and yet doing things worthy of blows (*plagis*) will be beaten (*vapulabit*) with many stripes.³⁵

Among the works of Augustine subsequent to the *Confessions* it is instructive to observe the venerable Bishop returning again and again to the theme of the scourging God, whose punishments extend to all flesh.³⁶ Even the seemingly innocent are scourged, because in the sight of God, no one is without sin.³⁷ If, by chance, some are spared, this is not because God is not cognizant of them, but rather because their excessive sinfulness has precluded them from any hope of being saved.³⁸ Just as the father loves a child when punishing it, so too God's scourges are a sign of His love.³⁹ From them the just benefit in manifold ways.⁴⁰ Indeed, those who are well disposed praise God's punishments which are for their good.⁴¹ Too often men bemoan their misfortunes, but not the reason why God allows them to occur.⁴² But the thoughtful and pious Christian will realize that the privations of this life are as nothing when compared with the punishments to come in the next, for the benefit of the unrepentant.⁴³ Too, the God-fearing

³³ *De excidio urbis Romae sermo* (A critical Text and Transaction with Introduction and Commentary &c.) by Sister Marie Vianney O'Reilly (Washington, D. C., 1955) 1.35.

³⁴ *Op. cit.* 3.45.

³⁵ *Op. cit.* 8.15.

³⁶ Commentary on Psalm 134, par. 14 (Henceforth: *In Ps.* 134.14).

³⁷ Letter 111.2-4. (Letter numbers are as listed in the Gaume edition (1836) of the *Opera Omnia*); *In Ps.* 31.26 of 2; Sermon 72.7; *Sermo de tempore barbarico* 1.1; *Sermo de excidio urbis* 1; *ibid.* 4-5; *In Ps.* 88.3 of 2; *cf.* 1 John 1.8.

³⁸ *Sermon* 46.11; *Sermon* 363.2. *Cf.* *In Ps.* 88.3 of 2; *In Ps.* 91.14; *In Ps.* 148.11; *Sermon* 55.5.

³⁹ *Sermon* 13.9 (8); *In Ps.* 30.20 in 1 (20 paragraph in first 'enarratio'); *In Ps.* 138.16; *Sermon* 5.2.

⁴⁰ *In Ps.* 31.26 in 2; *In Ps.* 37.23-24; *In Ps.* 38.17; *In Ps.* 49.6; *Sermon* 22.3; *Sermon* 55.5; *Sermon* 157.3; *Sermon* 171.4-5.

⁴¹ *In Ps.* 63.18; *In Ps.* 118.3 of 31; *In Ps.* 144.4; *Sermon* 19.4; *Sermon* 21.8 *Sermon* 46.12.

⁴² *In Ps.* 37.23.

⁴³ *Sermon* 22.3; *Sermo de urbis excidio* 3.

Christian is sustained in his sufferings by the thought of how much the sinless Christ suffered in this life.⁴⁴

Thus, on more than forty occasions, the subject of the scourging God receives elaboration along lines such as those indicated in the previous paragraph. What is noteworthy is the fact that these occasions are confined almost exclusively to Augustine's public preachings, whether in his regular sermons, or in the series of discourses which he conducted upon the psalms. Thus, the venerable Bishop never tired of preaching to his congregation the hard lesson that the tragedies of his own life had taught him, for by them he had been saved and brought back to the God whom he was trying to evade.

As would be expected, Augustine's repeated emphasis upon the idea of the scourging God derives not only from his own personal sufferings, but also from his favoured source of inspiration, namely the Bible:

Happy the man, whom God chastens for his faults! The correction He sends thee, never on thy life, refuse. Wounds He, it is but to heal; the same hand, which smote, shall medicine thee.⁴⁵

The classical case is of course that of Job, from which the previous citation is taken. Sometimes too, God scourged without sparing the object of divine ire, as with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha.⁴⁶ Likewise, twenty-three thousand Israelites fell in one day for the worshipping of the golden calf.⁴⁷ Again, further back in biblical history, the whole human race, with the exception of Noah and his family, was obliterated by God for their wickedness.⁴⁸ Such final punishments were not unusual for the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Sometimes however his scourges did not completely obliterate a whole nation, or race, as happened with the various plagues sent to the Egyptians to persuade them to release their Israelite slaves.⁴⁹

What is of interest however, is the fact that the God who is characterized by anger, scourging and vengeance, is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, as the above examples illustrate. Admittedly, there are intimations of divine retribution in the New Testament, as is implied with such parables as the tares sown among the wheat,⁵⁰ and

⁴⁴ *In Ps.* 88.2 of 2; *Sermo de urbis excidio* 9.

⁴⁵ *Job* 5.17-19.

⁴⁶ *Genesis* 18-19.

⁴⁷ *Exodus* 32.

⁴⁸ *Genesis* 6.

⁴⁹ *Exodus* 7-12.

⁵⁰ *Matt.* 13.24-30.

the story of Dives and Lazarus.⁵¹ However, with the coming of Christ and the New Testament, the emphasis was not on fear, but on *love*, and the latter excludes the former, as the words of John explain: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love".⁵² As a result, the new commandment is not to fear, but to love, for in the words of Christ: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another".⁵³

The Jehovah of the Old Testament scourged and destroyed as He saw fit. His complete antithesis is the God of the New Testament—the God, not of anger and destruction, but of love and salvation. Indeed, rather than condemning the world, the Bible records that this God loved it so much that He sacrificed His only Son for its salvation:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.⁵⁴

One would expect the writings of the great Bishop of Hippo to substantiate the primacy of this loving God. Whether this avails throughout the entire gamut of his voluminous writings is too weighty a question to entertain here. By way of substitute, Augustine's well-known *City of God* would seem to offer a representative sampling of his attitude, since it was written over a prolonged period of thirteen years, from 413 to 426. In this work however, the predominant emphasis would seem to be on the scourging God in a manner remarkably reminiscent of the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Christ is not seen as an important ambassador of God's bounteous love on earth, but rather as a long-awaited mediator between God and man, as I have explained elsewhere.⁵⁵ The whole terrestrial import of the Incarnation is eerily absent from the work. It presents a scourging God intent upon strict justice and the final judgement which will see most of the human race condemned to hell.⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Luke* 16.19-31.

⁵² 1 *John* 4.18.

⁵³ *John* 13.34.

⁵⁴ *John* 3.16-17.

⁵⁵ Leo C. Ferrari, 'Some Surprising Omissions from Augustine's *City of God*', *Augustiniana* 20 (1970) 336-346.

⁵⁶ In the *City of God* Augustine's favourite scriptural citation is Matt. 25.41: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels", which occurs no less than seven times in the work: 20.12; 21.10; 21.23 (twice); 21.24 (twice) and 21.26. Again, the great majority of humanity will be

Perhaps the venerable Bishop was unconsciously applying here what he had already learned from his public preachings, which, as was observed, contained so many references to the scourging God. Preaching a loving and merciful God would not have proven very effective in eradicating sin. No doubt in dealing with the many vices of his unlettered, recalcitrant congregation he had found that fear was a much more effective goad to virtue than love. As he would have realized, both from the Bible and from his own personal experience: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom".⁵⁷ This too may well be the moral of the *Confessions* with its numerous references to the scourging God.

In the previous pages I have attempted to give some idea of the importance of the theme of the scourging God in Augustine's writings. It has been traced back to his earliest whippings in school which he manifestly saw (in retrospect) as preparing him for the later scourges of life by which God was to purify his soul. Again, there are grounds for arguing that the traumatic terror of his first floggings as a very young schoolboy contributed to an enduring sense of culpability and the formation of a temperament disposed to self-reproach and suffering. It would seem that these characteristics can be found in his writings, as well as in his frequent use of the image of the scourging God. At the same time, the practical value of this image in his preachings must be also recognized.

In conclusion, the God of Augustine, as gleaned from certain of his sermons and from his better-known works, would seem to resemble more the stern Jehovah of the Old Testament than the merciful and loving God of the New Testament. Finally, one is tempted to draw the parallel that just as the floggings of his first school teachers drove him to the study of literature in which he was to excel as a professional orator, so too in the school of life, the later scourges of God impelled him to a profound study of the Bible upon which he became a peerless authority and the principal interpreter for the western christian tradition. Without the boyhood beatings which affected him so profoundly, there may well have been no saint Augustine.

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punished in eternal death ("ex illis enim multo plures secunda in aeternum morte plectentur") 13.23.

⁵⁷ Psalm 111.10, Proverbs 1.7 & 9.10.