

The One (*unum*) - A Guiding Concept in *De uera religione**

An Outline of the Text and the History of Its Interpretation

Vera rel. is one of the most important of Augustine's works. The brilliant little essay (Van der Meer) emerged in several stages between 388 and 391. Augustine completed it in Thagaste¹, where he lived as *seruus Dei*² before being appointed *presbyter* by the community of Hippo. The book contains many ideas elaborated later in major works like *ciu.* and *trin.*³ and belongs to the best of Latin classical writing on worship (*religio*) along with Cicero's *De natura deorum* and Lactantius' *Diuinae institutiones*.

Like *Acad.*, Augustine's first extant written work, it is dedicated to Romanianus, who had helped the young student to study in Carthage and travel to Italy. There, in Milan, Augustine read the «substantial books, which caused a little spark of philosophy to light the incredible blaze»⁴ of his conversion.

Much scholarship has been wasted on the question of what this conversion was all about. Part of the discussion consisted in suggesting a number of ways

* Cf. *uera rel.* XXXV.65.182 : *unum certe quaerimus quo simplicius nihil est. ergo in simplicitate cordi quaeramus illum.* CCSL 32, 229f.

1. Cf. O. DU ROY, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon Saint Augustin. Genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391*, Paris 1966, 312, note 2. J.J. O'MEARA, «Against the Academics», *ACW* 12, 1950, 182, note 32.

2. Cf. P. BROWN, *Augustine of Hippo*, London 1967, 92.

3. On the former cf. G. MADEC, «Le *De ciuitate Dei* comme *De uera religione*», *Interiorità e intenzionalità nel *De ciuitate Dei* di San Agostino*. Atti delle III. Seminario Internazionale del centro di Studi Agostiniani di Perugia, a cura di Remo Piccolomini, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum*, 35, Roma, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1991, 7-33. On the latter cf. DU ROY (1966) 309-367.

4. *Acad.* II.2.5 : *Cum ecce tibi libri quidam pleni...ubi illi flammulae instillarunt pretiosissimi unguenti guttas paucissimas, incredibile, Romaniane, incredibile...incredibile incendium concitarunt.* CCSL 29, 20.

how to understand and structure *uera rel.*, especially with regard to the interesting way in which it relates Platonic⁵ and Christian thought.

In the following, we shall briefly outline the history of this discussion (I) and look at some of these suggestions, especially with regard to their methods of interpretation (II). Then we shall present a new approach (III) based on the understanding of the text as a whole and a particular Augustinian concept of the One (*unum*) as its guiding motif.

I

As suggested *Acad.* II.2.5 and *beata u.* I.4⁶ Augustine's conversion in Milan was initiated by «books of Platonists». At the end of last century the question was raised if this means that in 386 Augustine converted to Platonism and not to Christianity⁷.

1. Platonism, Christianity and Augustine's Conversion

The first two essays on the topic were presented by A. Harnack and G. Boissier in 1888⁸. Both observed that Augustine's account of the events of 386 in *Conf.* disagreed with what he had written in his early writings. Those had been much more Platonic than Augustine himself would later admit. But if in 386 Augustine had converted to Platonism, when had he converted to Christianity?

5. In the following, the term «Platonic» is used as a collective term for the «pagan philosophical» influence on Augustine, «Christian» for the «biblical ecclesial» influence. Both, of course, coincided in the Milan group: «For the leading members of the church of Milan Neoplatonism and Christianity were closely connected and did not contradict each other, as many believe today» (P. COURCELLE, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin*, Paris 1968, 11f).

6. *Lectis autem Platonis [Plotinis] paucissimis libris... collataque cum eis, quantum potui, etiam illorum auctoritate, qui diuina mysteria tradiderunt, sic exarsi, ut omnes illas uellem ancoras rumpere, nisi me nonnullorum hominum existimatio commoueret.* CCSL 29, 67. Cf. P.F. BEATRICE, «Quosdam platoniorum libros. The Platonic reading of Augustine in Milan», *VigChr* 43(1989) 248-281.

7. For the following cf. G. MADEC, «Le Néoplatonisme dans la conversion d'Augustin. L'état du question centenaire», C. MAYER-K. H. CHELIUS, *Internationales Symposium über den Stand der Augustinus-Forschung 12.-16. April 1987* (= *Cassiciacum* 39/1), Würzburg 1989, 9-25.

8. A. HARNACK, *Augustins Confessionen*, Gießen 1888 (= *Reden und Aufsätze* 1, Gießen 1904, 51-79). G. BOISSIER, «La conversion de saint Augustin», *RDM* 85(1888) 43-69 (= *La fin du paganisme* 1, Paris 1891, 339-379).

In 1897, F. Loofs tried to answer this question⁹. He observed that by 391 Augustine had begun to blend more and more Christian elements into his writings. However, in 1908 W. Thimme relativized this impression. «In 391», he wrote, «Augustine's conversion to Christianity was still far from being completed», and in an almost desperate mood he added the question: «Was it ever completed¹⁰?»

Now suddenly more and more Platonic elements were discovered in ever later writings. At the same time a kind of «revisionist» group of scholars began to discover Christian elements even in the most philosophical ones of the early dialogues. The discussion turned ideological. Courcelle spoke of a «traditionalist» and a «criticist» camp¹¹.

To overcome such difficulties, some tried to show the development of Augustine's thought from Manicheism to Platonism, from Platonism to Catholicism, from Catholicism to Augustinism¹². Others tried to distinguish between an intellectual (Platonic) and a spiritual (Christian) dimension of Augustine's thought¹³.

Still, most scholars agree that the *libri Platoniorum* made Augustine discover the significance of transcendence, which enabled him to develop his thoughts on eternity, time and creation¹⁴ - themes Augustine continued to address for the rest of his life, though in ever changing ways.

2. Platonism and Christianity - The Role of Vera rel.

Augustine knew Christianity from his childhood and discovered the teaching of the Church after having experienced the limits of rational inquiry. He reflected on the relationship of *auctoritas* and *ratio*, for example in *uera rel.*¹⁵

9. F. LOOFS, art. *Augustinus*, *Realenzyklopaedie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche II*, Leipzig 1897, 257ff. (= *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte*, Halle 1906, 348ff).

10. W. THIMME, *Augustins geistige Entwicklung in den ersten Jahren nach seiner Bekehrung 386-391*, Berlin 1908, 254.

11. P. COURCELLE (1968) 11f.

12. Cf. P. ALFARIC, *L'Évolution intellectuelle de S. Augustin*, Paris 1918.

13. Cf. F. MASAI, «Les conversions de Saint Augustin et les débuts du spiritualisme en Occident», *Le Moyen Age* 67(1961) 1-40.

14. On the originality of his thought on these themes cf. R. SORABJI, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, London 1983, 233f.

15. Cf. XXIII.44.122.-XXV.47.129. Esp. XXIII.45.122 : *Tribuitur enim in auctoritatem atque rationem: auctoritas fidem flagitat et rationi praeparat hominem, ratio ad intellectum cognitionemque perducit*. CCSL 32, 215.

At that stage he did not see a contradiction between philosophy and religion. In a way, it was all the same to him¹⁶.

Nevertheless, he thought the Platonists would have to change their doctrine if they wanted to become Christian¹⁷. Their way was not quite «true religion». *Vera rel.* I.1.1.-X.20.57 tells what they needed in order to complete their conversion to Christianity: An historical theological concept of God being present in the world (*in una regione terrarum*) and a guide (*uir diuinus*) for the people (*catholica*) on the way (*via, iter*). With such motives gaining strength Augustine's thought became progressively alienated from mainstream Platonism. As O. Du Roy wrote¹⁸, «not even the most Christian of Plotinus' writings [...] would come near to a doctrine» like the Incarnation.

II

In 1922 part of the discussion about Augustine's conversion began to focus on *uera rel.*¹⁹ According to M. Wundt, Augustine had converted a fourth time around 391. As a result, says Wundt, he no longer seemed to have thought of rationality as a religious force²⁰. Wundt's contribution has to be seen in context. There was a growing need for getting the discussion out of the narrow scope of the period between 386 and 391, especially with regard to the tremendous change Augustine's thought underwent between those years and the year 396, when he wrote *Ad Simplicianum*. But Wundt's attempt was not seen as particularly helpful. Two years later H. Dörries published an elaborate response to Wundt's challenge, which triggered off a completely new discussion focussing on *uera rel.*²¹

16. *uera rel.* V.8.26 : ...*non aliam esse philosophiam, id est sapientiae studium, et aliam religionem.* CCSL 32, 193.

17. *uera rel.* IV.7.23 : *Paucis mutatis uerbis atque sententiis Christiani fierent.* Cf. W. THIMME (1908) 14.

18. O. DU ROY (1966) 158.

19. Cf. M. WUNDT, «Ein Wendepunkt in Augustins Entwicklung», *ZNW* 21(1922) 53-64.

20. Wundt imagines a «sharp break» instead of a continuous development, «an event of tremendous force». Pp. 55, 57, 60 and 63. According to him, the other three conversions were 1) after reading the *Hortensius*, 2) after reading the Platonists, 3) after reading in the letters of St. Paul. *Conf.* I.4.7 ; VII.9.13 ; VII.21.27/VIII.12.29.

21. H. DÖRRIES, «Das Verhältnis des Neuplatonischen und Christlichen in Augustinus De vera religione», *ZNW* 33(1924) 64-102.

1. Christian and Platonic «Elements» in *Vera rel.* ?

In his article of 1924 Dörries tries to critically distinguish Christian and Platonic elements in *uera rel.* As he does not know the sources he has to analyse the text with a preconceived notion of what Christianity and Platonism respectively are. He is not interested in the text as a structured whole, but in its single elements, which he identifies as Christian or Platonic. The result is an excellent analysis of the different types of argument in the text and a good basis for «real» source-critical research. But the disadvantage of such an approach, too, is obvious.

Dörries has difficulties with the text as a whole : Why are there so many Christian elements in the «Platonic» introduction ? Why are the most Plotinic expressions missing ? Why is authority given such a prominent role in the text²² ? Dörries cannot answer these questions.

Also the way in which he structures the text raises questions. He subdivides it into three main parts, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion:

Introduction (I.1.1-VII.12.38/VII.13.39-X.20.57) :

Exclusion of other religions and definition of the religion of the Catholic church as the true religion;

First part (XI.21.58-XXIII.44.121) :

Nature of evil and goodness of the divine world order ;

Second part (XXIV.45.122-XXXVI.67.189) :

Authority and rationality as remedies for the soul ;

Third part (XXXVII.68.190-LIV.106.292) :

Consequences of the perversion of the soul ;

Conclusion (LV.107.293-LV.113.313).

The introduction is divided in two parts. The address to Romanianus (VI.11.35-VII.12.38) concludes the first²³. Dörries does not raise the question why there are two introductions. It does not occur to him that there might have been several editions of the text²⁴. He lets the first part end at XXIII.44.121 when the argument turns from a praise of the beauty of the universe to a reflection on the relationship between *auctoritas* and *ratio*. But at XI.21.58 the first part begins with the theme of God as life and of Christ as the answer to death - the latter being characterised as *inclinare ad nihilum* (XI.22.62). Would it not be more plausible to begin the second part at XVIII.35.94 with a discussion of the *creatio ex nihilo* and end it at XXXIV.63.178 with an address of the

22. Cf. H. DÖRRIES (1924) 78f, 99f.

23. Later interpreters agree that the second (part of the) introduction begins VII.12.36.

24. This was first suggested by O. Du Roy (1966) 310ff.

One who is responsible for that ? Thus the triad XXIII.44.121²⁵ would still be a conclusion, though that of a minor part of part two (XVIII.35.94-XXXIV.63.178). Instead of structuring the text this way Dörries lets his second part reach from XXIV.45.122 (*auctoritas* and *ratio* as a medicine) to XXXVI.67.189 (on the origin of error) not considering at XXXIV.64.179 the change of style from dialectic to protreptic (*o animae pervicaces...*).

Before XXXIV.64.179 a number of arguments had been developed: On being and God (XVIII.35.94-XVIII.36.98), on the origins and limits of evil (XIX.37.99-XXIII.44.121²⁶), on authority and reason (XXIV.45.122-XXIX.-53.146), and on the meaning and end of being (XXX.54.147-XXXIV.63.178). By expanding the second part up to XXXVI.67.189, Dörries can hardly explain what the unifying theme of all this together should be. The title he gives it, «consequences of the perversity of the soul», is hardly satisfactory; for its function is not to analyse the futility of a sinful life but rather to encourage people to seek the One inspite of error and fall²⁷, identity through the unity of self-possession²⁸, knowledge of the nature of being, universe²⁹, and human self as the image of the One³⁰.

Dörries' way of structuring the text has some disadvantages indeed. This may at least in part be due to his method of trying to distinguish Christian and Platonic elements 1) without knowing the specific differences between Christianity and Platonism from sources and 2) by not taking into account the text as a whole.

2. *Vera rel. a collection of Porphyrian sources ?*

In 1933 W. Theiler tried to ascribe all the material in *uera rel.* identified (by Dörries) as Platonic to Porphyry³¹. His paper shares the strengths of Dörries' but also its weaknesses. Theiler saw *uera rel.* structured in much the same way as Dörries saw it, though he applied different labels :

25. *Et est pulchritudo uniuersae creaturae per haec tria inculpabilis: damnatione peccatorum, exercitatione iustorum, perfectione beatorum.* CCSL 32, 215.

26. The end of Dörries' first major part.

27. XXXIV.64.179-XXXVIII.71.200.

28. XXXIX.72.201-XXXIX.73.207. One can hardly believe that Augustine should have put his most brilliant account of the *si fallor sum* argument into a chapter about the perversity of the soul

29. XL.74.208-XLII.79.227.

30. XLIII.80.228-L.99.278. As for the conclusion LI.100.279-LV.113.313 there is no disagreement.

31. W. THEILER, «Porphyrius und Augustin» (Halle an der Saale 1933), *Forschungen zum Neuplatonismus*, Berlin 1966, 160-251.

A. I.1.1-X.20.57	Introduction : The Catholic Church representing true religion.
B. XI.21.58-XXXIII.44.121	Full and minor being.
C. XXIV.45.122-XXXVI.67.189	Ascent of the soul to the supreme being.
D. XXXVI.68.190-LIV.106.292	Descent of the soul.
E. LV.107.293-LV.113.313	Final protreptikos.

Theiler's understanding of the text is predominantly ontological. Part A is thought to be a reflection on the nature of being, parts B and C conclusions from this with regard to anthropology. Theiler wants to underline the Porphyrian character of most of the texts. He thinks the best of them are based on Porphyrian sources and not originally Augustinian. For him, *uera rel.* is a compilation of Porphyrian material rather than a textual unit. Some of it, he thinks, is doubly used, in particular XI.21.58-XVII.34.93 and XVIII.35.94-XXIII.44.121³². What are we to think about his outline?

First of all let us concede that a new argument begins after XVII.34.93. Then, however, XVI.30.81-XVII.34.93 must be considered an essential element of part B, in particular if part B does not end XXXVI.67.189. but XXXIV.64.179, as we suggest. It would conclude XI.21.58ff. (a characterisation of God as life), as XXXI.57.158ff. concludes XVIII.35.94ff. (a characterisation of God as the supreme being and creator) - both times with a praise of Christ, Lord of the universe.

Theiler has problems precisely with these Christological parts. In his view they «interrupt» the argument of the Porphyrian texts. Were he to see the text as a whole, he would find that the latter are used for a different end. In each case the point of the argument is Christ, first in the part leading up to XVII.34.93, when Christ is introduced as victor over sin and death, God's mediator, life, and second in the part leading up to XXXIV.64.179, where he is characterised as truth and the revelation of the One.

Therefore, despite its tremendous amount of scholarship, Theiler's article suffers from a vital weakness. Even if Theiler had established Porphyrian sources in *uera rel.*, he would have done this at the cost of misunderstanding the text and its structure as a whole.

3. Different Editorial Intentions in *Vera rel.* ?

In 1966 O. Du Roy published his monumental volume on Augustine's early trinitarian thought³³. He took the works of Dörries and Theiler as a starting point and suggested a new approach. In his view Augustine wrote *uera rel.* in

32. «These two pieces cannot have emerged in the brain of Augustine». W. THEILER (1933, 10) 1966, 111.

33. Full title cf. note 1.

several stages and with ultimately one aim, «to make the trinitarian anagogy and dialectic coincide³⁴». A central expression in this context is VII.13.40 *trinitas creatrix*, which occurs for the first time in Augustine's writings. With Du Roy's approach an important step was made toward understanding *uera rel.* as a textual unit.

Du Roy rejects source criticism. Dörries and Theiler, he thinks, had both based their theses on too much speculation about Platonic sources (328). One could only distinguish several, as he calls them, editorial intentions («intentions redactionnelles» 366) of the author according to the periods of his thought. He distinguishes an early anti-Manichean intention beginning IX.16.46 and ending LV.107.294 with some later additions in between, and a later anti-Porphyrrian intention comprising the whole of the text. The central idea of the anti-Manichean layer is expressed in the verse Rm 1:25³⁵, which polemizes against people who «serve the creatures more than the creator». The anti-Porphyrrian layer turns the argument positive and introduces Christological and salvation historical motives to demonstrate the way of the true religion.

The parts called by Du Roy the anti-Manichean and the anti-Porphyrrian intention are, of course, also thematically related to each other. They would fit together even if they did not belong to different editorial layers: The first anti-Manichean part (XI.21.58-XVII.34.93) tells about fall and restoration of the soul rejecting a dualistic solution. The second anti-Manichean part (XVIII.-35.94-XXVIII.51.142) repeats the theme in ontological terms³⁶. The anti-Porphyrrian layer tries to offer positive solutions to problems the anti-Manichean layer stated criticising the dualistic solution. XIII.26.70-XIV.28.77 (a model of the fall of the angels) is an attempt to explain why evil exists despite the supreme being, God, being the origin of all being and yet not of evil. XXV.46.126-XXV.47.129 (unity as the true sign of *auctoritas*) is a response to the challenge of dualism. The overcoming of evil and the achievement of unity (I.1.1-VIII.15.45 and LV.108.295-LV.113.313) is reached through salvation history, part of which is the history of Platonism, and the ascent of the soul, i. e. its becoming one in the One. The outline, thus conceived, would be as follows :

Introduction: I.1.1-X.20.57 ;

Anti-Porphyrrian : I.1.1-VIII.15.45 ;

Anti-Manichean : IX.16.46-X.20.57 ;

Anti-Manichean parts : XI.21.58-LV.107.294 ;

1. XI.21.58-XVII.34.93 (decline and ascent) ;

34. O. Du Roy (1966) 309.

35. Cf. X.19.53, XX.39.106 and XXXVII.68.190.

36. XXIX.52.143-XXXVIII.69.195 is seen as an addition to the second anti-Manichean part. It suggests how the theories just developed may be put into spiritual practice. XXIV.45.122ff. *auctoritas* is introduced as a means to this end. Du Roy notes that trinitarian formulas are missing in this context. It is *auctoritas* and *ordo* which take the role of the Holy Spirit.

- . Anti-Porphyrian remark : XIII.26.70-XIV.28.77 ;
- 2. XVIII.35.94-XXVIII.51.142 (decline and ascent) ;
 - . Anti-Porphyrian remark : XXV.46.125-XXV.47.129 ;
 - Anagogic Addition : XXIX.52.143-XXXVIII.69.195 ;
- 3. XXXVIII.69.196-LV.107.294 (3 vices and remedy) ;
 - Anti-Porphyrian conclusion : LV.108.295-LV.113.313.

Du Roy remarks that one of the dominating motives of *uera rel.* is the idea that pain and punishment are essential elements of sin³⁷. This became apparent already in the works of Dörries and Theiler. The three major vices are lust (*uoluptas*), pride (*superbia*), and curiosity (*curiositas*). Salvation will be achieved when these three are overcome. The Christological dimension to this is shown XXXVIII.71.198f. (Mt 4:1-10//Lk 4: 3-12). Christ himself had to overcome these three temptations. The third anti-Manichean part is therefore subdivided as follows:

- Introduction : XXXVIII.69.196-XXXVIII.71.200 ;
- Overcoming *uoluptas* : XXXIX.72.201-XLV.83.238 ;
- Overcoming *superbia* : XLV.84.239-XLVIII.93.263 ;
- Overcoming *curiositas* : XLIX.94.264-LI.100.279 ;
- Conclusion : LII.101.280-LV.107.294.

At the end the term «true religion» is understood more and more in its practical sense as «the right attitude to devotion and worship». True religion is the worship of the One, God the Father, through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Against Theiler Du Roy holds Augustine to be a highly original thinker. Far from being a compilation of Porphyrian material *uera rel.* is the result of several years' creative writing and editing.

4. *Vera rel.* - The Text as a Unit

In recent years the tendency apparent in Du Roy's approach has become more dominant: *Vera rel.* is seen as a textual unit. «Criticism» is no longer considered that important. Two examples, one concentrating on content, the other on structure, may illustrate this trend.

37. Thus XII.23.64, XX.39.106ff.

a) *Unity of Content : The Theme of Ascent*: In 1976 F. Van Fleteren published an article in which he suggests «a new approach» to *uera rel*³⁸. He takes the theme of «ascent» as the focus of the whole text and structures it accordingly:

- I. Introduction : I.1.1-X.20.57 :
 - A. True Religion, the fulfilment of what the philosophers sought, leads to salvation : I.1.1-VI.11.36 ;
 - B. Address to Romanianus: VII.12.36-X.20.57 ;
- II. The Problem of Evil : XI.21.58-XXIII.44.121 :
 - A. Movement toward being and not-Being : XI.21.58-XII.25.69 ;
 - B. The voluntary nature of evil : XIII.26.70-XVII.34.93 ;
 - C. Metaphysics of created being... : XVIII.35.94-XXIII.44.121 ;
- III. Ascent of the Soul to God : XXIV.45.122-LIV.106.292 :
 - A. Authority : XXIV.45.122-XXVIII.51.142 ;
 - B. Reason : XXIX.52.143-LIV.106.292 ;
 - 1. Ascent to the soul itself : XXIX.52.143-XXXII.60.170 ;
 - 2. Obstacle Falsity : XXXIII.61.171-XXXVI.67.189 ;
 - 3. Obstacle Vice : XXXVIII.68.190-LIV.106.292 ;
 - a) Introduction : XXXVII.68.190-XXXVIII.71.200 ;
 - b) Three-fold Vice :
 - Pleasure : XXXIX.72.201-XLV.83.238 ;
 - Pride : XLV.84.202-XLVIII.93.263 ;
 - Curiosity : XLIX.94.264-LI.100.279 ;
 - c) Conclusion : LII.101.280-LIV.106.292 ;
- IV. Conclusion : Ascent to the Trinity : LV.107.293-LV.113.313 ;

Van Fleteren subdivides the introduction correctly before the address to Romanianus VII.12.36. He pulls the two first parts together to one large part II (XI.21.58-XVII.34.93 and XVIII.35-XXIII.44.121) and subdivides it into three parts. He assumes a second major part III reaching from XXIV.45.122 to LIV.106.292, its theme being the ascent of the soul. For Van Fleteren this is the focus of the whole text. He subdivides it into a smaller part A (Authority) and a larger part B (Reason), which is subdivided again by a complex of triadic structures.

From XXIX.52.143 to XXXI.60.170 the ascent of the soul is outlined in its ideal form. XXXIII.61.171 to XXXVI.67.189 falsity or error is introduced as the «reason» for not accomplishing it. As the obstacle at the heart of the matter, however, vice is outlined (XXXVIII.68.190-LIV.106.292) as consisting of three irreducible forms, pleasure, pride and curiosity. They are

38. F.E. VAN FLETEREN, «Augustinus De vera religione. A new Approach», *Augustinianum* 16(1976) 475-497.

the major obstacle to the ascent of the soul, since they are also the cause of error. But they also contain the clue to its accomplishment in themselves. It is outlined part IV as «true religion».

With his way of outlining *uera rel.* Van Fleteren has overcome many weaknesses of earlier attempts, even the one of Du Roy's; for Du Roy, whose guiding idea had been that of a *trinitas creatrix*, had had problems integrating parts in which trinitarian thought was not elaborate. The cost of Van Fleteren's striving to show the unity of the text is, of course, that he cannot consider the possibility of different sources or editorial layers in the text. Moreover, in part II.B he does not further subdivide the text: The fall of the angels (XIII.26.70-72), the fall of man (XIV.27f.73-77), and sin as punishment (XV.29.78-80) are themes that do not fit his way of looking at the text as a description of the ascent of the soul.

Finally one has to ask, how parts II and III are connected; for the theme of ascent only starts part III.B. It is not easy to understand what the historical introduction and the metaphysical ups and downs, the back and forth of parts I, II and III.A have to do with the theme of ascent. It certainly is the theme of III.B. But it must be doubted, if it is the theme of the whole of *uera rel.* There must be something more general.

b) Unity of Structure : Cyclic Structures: Before presenting our own proposal, let us look at that of Waldtraut Desch. Desch tried to carry out a predominantly structural analysis of *uera rel.*³⁹ Although she does not explicitly mention it, her approach in many ways parallels that of Van Fleteren. Let us first look at her outline :

Prooemium 1 : I.1.1-VI.11.35 - Platonic-Christian teaching

Prooemium 2 : VII.12.36-X.20.57 - Manichean teaching

First part :

A1 : XI.21.58-XV.29.80 - God and creation...

B1 : XVI.30.81-XVII.34.93 - Return...: Christ, OT, NT

A2 : XVIII.34.94-XXIII.44.121 - God and creation...

Second part (focus XXXIX.72f.201-207) :

B2 : XXIV.45.122-XXVIII.51.142 - Return... : Exterior and interior...

A3 : XXIX.52.143-XXXVI.67.189 - God and creation...

B3 : XXXVIII.68.190-LIV.106.292 - Return... : Exterior and interior...

Final protreptikos : LV.107-113.293-313

39. W. DESCH, «Aufbau und Gliederung der Schrift *De vera religione*», *VigChr* 34(1980) 263-277.

In the same way as Van Fleteren Desch subdivides the introduction and calls the first one «Platonic-Christian», and the second one «Manichean teaching». She subsumes the first two parts (XI.21.58-XVII.34.93 and XVIII.34.94-XXIII.44.121) under one. But she is doing this under conditions very different from those of earlier interpreters; for she is looking mainly for cyclic structures in the text - which she finds as a matter of course.

Desch assumes two major parts, the one just mentioned, and a second one reaching from XXIV.45.122 to LIV.106.292 with its focus on XXXIX.72f.201-207, the famous chapter with the argument of self-knowledge (*si enim fallor...*). She subdivides these two parts along two rows of sections in interchange with each other. The first, row A, with numbers 1, 2 and 3, has the theme of «God and creation between being and nothing», the second, row B, also with numbers 1, 2 and 3, has the theme «return to God». In the first part row B is sandwiched between A1 and A2 and realises its theme in terms of «Christ - Old and New Testament»; in the second part it sandwiches A3 with its theme (return to God) focussing on the ways of the interior and exterior human being. Desch is interested only in the relationship between the two times three cyclically structured parts. Prooemium 1 refers to the second part anticipating the role of reason in the ascent of the mind⁴⁰. Prooemium 2 refers to some questions raised by the problem of Manicheism. They are solved in the first part where God is shown as the source of life, evil as limited etc.

Inside the two main parts the cyclic constructions work as follows. A1 and A2 both think of God as *summa essentia*.⁴¹ We have seen that these two pieces are parallels to such a degree that Theiler thought they were doublets⁴². Desch rejects this view and sees a development from the first to the second argument (272). B1 and B2 are salvation-historical and Christological-spiritual additions to A1 and A2. B2 and B3, Desch maintains, are connected through the relationship between exterior and interior human history. The seven stages of life refer to the whole of human history as well as to its salvation history and the salvation history of every single human being (273f). The unity of the second part is maintained through the theme of the One, origin of beauty and being. A1 and A3 are connected with each other through the themes of right judgement - its origin is the judgement of God - and its counterpart, the disappearance of all bodily deception. In addition to this A3 leads up to the insight that salvation/creation from nothing (A1) and the goodness of God (A2) coincide in the soul's being one with the One in God through Christ.

40. W. DESCH (1980) 267f.

41. W. DESCH (1980) 271.

42. W. THEILER (1933, 10) 1966, 171.

5. Summary

Starting from the discussion about Augustine's conversion we turned to the history of the interpretation of *uera rel.* It was a history of «criticisms», beginning in 1924 with Dörries' attempt at applying a critical method without having enough textual basis or methodology for creating it. Theiler (1933) tried to overcome this need by hypothetically assuming certain pieces of the text to be sources of Porphyrian origin, a view that was rejected by Du Roy (1966) who offered the model of editorial intentions. But the tendency was to return to the text as a unit, be it for reasons of structure (Desch, 1980) or of content (Van Fleteren, 1976).

III

Van Fleteren called *uera rel.* a summary of Augustine's early thought⁴³. Platonism is still present and historical-biblical thought not yet fully developed. Elements of Augustine's later anthropology can already be recognised. But what is the focus of the text? Du Roy had stressed the theme of unity⁴⁴. Van Fleteren and Desch followed Du Roy in many ways, however, they did not pick up on this point. An analysis of *uera rel.* as focussing on the concept of the One (*unum*) is still missing. In the following we shall present a possible outline of such a project.

1. Thinking the One. Porphyry, Victorinus and Augustine

Augustine uses the term *unum* about 400 times in *uera rel.*, mainly in connection with Biblical monotheism⁴⁵ and Platonism⁴⁶. The peculiar way in which Augustine combines these two traditions in *uera rel.* results in the particular meaning and function of the concept of the One in its text as a whole, which (in some way fatally) attracted already Wundt, Dörries and

43. VAN FLETEREN (1976) 497.

44. He calls his chapter on *uera rel.* «ressemblance de l'un», «image of the One». (1966) 309.

45. To look at this aspect would require a detailed analysis of Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics in *uera rel.* I shall try to present such an analysis in my forthcoming article *Augustinus - Exeget oder Philosoph ? Schriftgebrauch und biblische Hermeneutik in De uera religione.*

46. On «thinking the One» in Neo-Platonism cf. W. BEIERWALTES, *Denken des Einen*, Frankfurt 1985. Part of it deals with the Platonism Augustine met and transformed thus handing it down on Western tradition, cf. 9-113. For *uera rel.* Cf. already I.1.1 : ...*qua unus deus colitur...principium naturarum omnium...*, then XXXV.65.182 : *unum certe quaerimus...*, CCSL 32, 187.229. E. a.

Theiler. In *uera rel.* the concept of the One has not the strictly metaphysical or even mystical function it had in Plato's «Parmenides» or in Plotinus' «Enneads». On the other hand it is used in any case much more metaphysically than in many other Christian writings or even in the Bible. Besides the possible influence of biblical hermeneutics (cf. note 45) it was the influence of Porphyry, which enabled Augustine to use the concept of the One in this way. In the following some few notes may suffice to show the effects of Porphyrian concepts on the thought of *uera rel.* as already Theiler had assumed them, but then identified them with methods very different from the one presented here⁴⁷.

Augustine came in touch with philosophy at the age of twenty when he read Aristotle's «Categories»⁴⁸. Like Plotinus 150 years earlier, he was not particularly impressed by them⁴⁹, which means he didn't understand their purpose; for already Porphyry had said that the «Categories» were not for the understanding of «things» (*res*) but the function of language⁵⁰. It took Augustine almost ten years and the help of the Milan circle to find his way out of the Manichean «system» of thought, which had been, as he said, the result of his materialistic understanding of the substance of God⁵¹. An influential figure behind that circle with men like Ambrose and Simplicianus was Marius Victorinus⁵².

Victorinus had translated works of Porphyry into Latin and shown that Porphyry was in fact not a trivial commentator of Aristotle overshadowed by his master Plotinus but the one who had made the latter's mystic approach to philosophy a workable doctrine, mainly by introducing the ontological distinction between *esse* and *ens*⁵³. According to Plotinus the One was beyond being and nothing. Porphyry said that we cannot think anything «beyond». Therefore it is reasonable to think the One as the supreme being (cf. Greek *ousía*).

47. Secondary literature on this field is legion. Besides the titles mentioned under I, note 52 and Beierwaltes (1985) cf. among others : E. BENZ, *Marius Victorinus und die Entwicklung der abendländischen Willensmetaphysik*, Stuttgart 1932. H. DÖRRIE, «Porphyrius als Mittler zwischen Plotin und Augustin», *MM*, vol. 1, Berlin 1962, 26-47. P. HADOT, «The harmony of Plotinus and Aristotle according to Porphyry», R. SORABJI, ed., *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle*, London 1990, 125-140.

48. *Conf.* IV.16.28 : *annos ferme uiginti, cum in manus meas uenissent Aristotelica quaedam, quas appellant Decem Categorias...legi eas solus et intellexi... CCSL 27, 54.*

49. Cf. *Enneads* VI.1-3.

50. *In Categorias* LVI.31.

51. *Conf.* IV.16.29 : *quasi et tu subiectus esses magnitudini tuae aut pulchritudini, ut illa essent in te quasi in subiecto sicut in corpore... CCSL 27, 54.*

52. On the following P. HADOT, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, 2 vols., Paris 1968. R.A. MARKUS, «Marius Victorinus and Augustine», ed. H.A., ARMSTRONG, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, London 1967.

53. P. HADOT (1968) 488f.

From this Victorinus was able to develop a doctrine of the Trinity. The One beyond everything reveals itself to our thought as being. The father is revealed by the son through the spirit⁵⁴. God, the One who is beyond everything, wants to be something. It is much harder to grasp *why* than *that* God acts like this. His will is as obscure as his being. One cannot understand the one without the other⁵⁵.

Now Augustine develops exactly the same argument in *uera rel.* «Why do beings defect ? Because they are mutable. Why are they mutable ? Because they are not supreme. Why are they not supreme ? Because they are inferior to the one who made them. Who made them ? The supreme one. Who is this ? God, the immutable trinity ; for he made them through supreme wisdom [son] and keeps them in supreme goodness [spirit]. Why did he make them ? That they be (= exist) ; for he himself is good, insofar he exists ; for supreme goodness is supreme being. From what (*unde*) did he make them ? From nothing; for whatever exists, necessarily exists in a certain way (*specie*). Thus even something which is good to the least degree is still good and has its being from God⁵⁶».

Although we cannot follow Theiler's way of precisely establishing the Porphyrian sources from which Augustine drew, we can at least say that in this and in a great number of other texts in *uera rel.* Augustine uses the Porphyrian idea of identifying the concept of being (*ousía, esse, ens*) with that of the One (*hén, unum*) and combines it with the biblical concepts of creation and salvation through the personal God revealing himself in Christ and the Church. In other words, we may possibly dare outline *uera rel.* along the idea of *unum* (different from but related to the Neoplatonic «One») as its unifying concept.

2. The One - A Guiding Concept in Vera rel. Outline

When we were presenting the various attempts at structuring *uera rel.* we already mentioned some of the criteria, based on which we have worked out our own suggestion. First of all we are going to divide the text into three main parts :

54. P. HADOT (1968) 326-329.

55. VICTORINUS, *De generatione XVI* (1026B) : *Deo enim plenis omnibus nefas est impossibile quae uere non sunt dici et esse.*

56. *uera rel.* XVIII.35.94 : *quare deficiunt ? quia mutabilia sunt. quare mutabilia sunt ? quia non summe sunt. quare non summe sunt ? quia inferiora sunt eo a quo facta sunt. quis ea fecit ? qui summe est. quis hic est ? deus incommutabilis trinitas, quoniam et per summam sapientiam ea fecit et summa benignitate conseruat. cur ea fecit ? ut essent; ipsum enim quantumcumque esse bonum est, quia summum bonum est summe esse. unde fecit ? ex nihilo, quoniam quidquid est, quantumcumque specie sit necesse est ; ita etsi minimum bonum, tamen bonum erit et ex deo erit. CCSL 32, 203f.*

- I. The One as Origin and Principle (I.1.1-X.20.57) ;
- II. The One as Life, Being and Truth : (XI.21.58-XXXIV.64.178) :
 - A. The One as Life (XI.21.58-XVII.34.93) ;
 - B. The One as Being and Truth : (XVIII.35.94-XXXIV.64.178) :
 - 1. The One as Being (XVIII.35.94-XXIII.44.121) ;
 - 2. The One as Truth (XXIII.44.122-XXXIV.64.178) ;
- III. The One as Goal (XXXIV.64.179-LV.113.313).

The external structuring of the introductory part I is fairly clear. Its end is marked by the exhortatory final sentence: «Turn ye therefore, as far as you can, to the following in a pious and diligent manner; for God supports such kind of people⁵⁷». Part II.A begins with a double negation introducing God as the supreme source of life: «There is no life that would not be from God...⁵⁸» It leads up from the depths of sin and death, equals to nothing (*inclinatio ad nihilum*, cf. XI.22.62), from the Old to the New Testament of Christ and the Church as the answer. II.B repeats this structural motif and widens it at the same time. XVIII.35.94 God is introduced as the supreme being and at the end (XXXIV.64.178) hailed as the One that created everything from nothing, as even the least kind of being is still «somehow» an image of the «supreme One⁵⁹». The complication of this part is reached by a repetition of the ontological motif through an epistemological one : XXIII.44.121 the introduction of God as the supreme being that creates everything *ex nihilo* culminates in something that sounds like a cry about the «inculpable» (and, as we may add, incomprehensible) «beauty of creation⁶⁰». The text then continues to outline methods how to perceive this beauty in its truth and avoid mistakes⁶¹. The beginning of the final protreptic part at XXXIV.64.179 is justified by a change of style. From now on *uera rel.* is no longer an essay or treatise, but an exhortation at an high level that tries to take into consideration

57. X.20.57 : *Intende igitur in haec quae sequuntur diligenter et pie quantum possibile ; tales enim adiuvat deus.* CCSL 32, 200.

58. XI.21.58 : *Nulla uita est quae non sit ex deo...* CCSL 32, 200.

59. XXXIV.63.178 : *Omne quippe corpus uerum corpus est, sed falsa unitas. Non enim summe unum est aut in tantum id imitatur ut impleat; et tamen nec corpus ipsum esset nisi utcumque unum esset. Porro utcumque unum esse non posset, nisi ab eo quod summe unum est id haberet.* CCSL 32, 229.

60. XXIII.44.121 : *Et est pulchritudo uniuersae creaturae per haec tria inculpabilis...* CCSL 32, 215.

61. This part (II.B.2) is conceived as philosophical-theological aesthetics developed by keeping the right balance between authority and reason in the process of the *fides quaerens intellectum*: XXIV.45.122 : *Quam ob rem ipsa quoque animae medicina, quae diuina prouidentia et ineffabili beneficentia geritur, gradatim distincteque pulcherrima est. Tribuitur enim in auctoritatem atque rationem: auctoritas fidem flagitat et rationi praeparat hominem, ratio ad intellectum cognitionem perducit.* CCSL 32, 215. Cf. XXXIV.63.178. Cf. also my article «Religio, philosophia und pulchritudo. Ihr Zusammenhang nach Augustinus, De uera religione», *VigChr* 47 (1993) 363-373.

the existential situation of the addressee⁶². All further subdivisions fall under these three main parts. Let us outline them a little bit more in detail:

I. The One - Origin and Principle (*unum principium*)⁶³ :

A. The One, division and plurality (I.1.1-3) :

1 . *Plurality of cults and schools caused by*

2 . *The division of cult and teaching*⁶⁴.

B. The One - a natural desire (II.2.4-VI.11.35)⁶⁵ :

1 . *Platonism as an hypothesis*⁶⁶,

2 . *Christ and the church as a reality*.⁶⁷

C. The One - its reality (VII.12.36-X.20.57) :

1 . *History*⁶⁸,

2 . *Beauty and order in plurality*,

3 . *Knowledge and salvation*.⁶⁹

62. XXXIV.64.179 : *O animae pernicaces, date mihi qui uideat sine ulla imaginatione uisorum carnalium. Date mihi qui uideat omnis unius principium non esse... CCSL 32, 229.* The allusion to *unum principium* calls back into mind the beginning of the whole, I.1.1 : *...deus...principium... CCSL 32, 187.*

63. On *unum principium* cf. among others I.1.1 and XXXIV.64.179.

64. Although Socrates is praised for his courage (II.2.4), he and Plato are blamed for not having succeeded in popularizing their philosophy. Cf. I. OPELT, «Das Bild des Sokrates in der christlichen Literatur», *JAC. EB* 10, 1983, 192-207.

65. Cf. II.2.6: *unum deum quaerent, quem solum supra mentes nostras esse et a quo omnem animam et totum istum mundum fabricatum... CCSL 32, 188.*

66. According to Augustine, Platonism remains an hypothetical world view, especially in comparison with the historically verifiable success of Christianity : III.5.17 : *si tot iuuenum et uirginum milia contemnentium nuptias casteque uiuentium iam nemo miratur - quod cum fecisset Plato usque adeo peruersam temporum suorum timuit opinionem ut perhibeatur sacrificasse naturam... CCSL 32, 191.*

67. In this context Augustine calls the presence of the One in history in the Old as well as in the New Covenant *sacramentum*. V.8.26ff. Cf. also the following. In *uera rel.* in general, *sacramentum* is used analogically for signifying 1) the catholic rites (V.8.26 heretics are not admitted *ad communicanda sacramenta*), 2) the variety of rites (9.27 heretics are said to have *paria sacramenta*), 3) the unity of Christian doctrine over against the *uetus testamentum* (XVII.33.89 the *uetus testamentum* is said to be burdened with *multa sacramenta*, while the New Covenant is freed to have only *pauca sacramenta*), 4) L.99.276 *allegoria sacramenti*.

68. God the One can be recognised by reading the signs of the times (VII.13.39ff.) : One has to decide about one's faith (*sectanda*), to clean one's mind (*purganda*), to perceive God's acting in history (*percipienda*), to draw conclusions (*cognita*) from what one has realised and to proceed toward insight (*intellectus*).

69. X.19.54 Augustine stresses that only God's grace can initiate the process of salvation which is identical with intellectual perfection : *nullo in rebus humanis ad diuina capessanda interposito gradu per quem ad dei similitudinem a terrena uita homo niteretur... CCSL 32, 199.* On the link between knowledge and salvation cf. R. LORENZ, «Gnade und Erkenntnis bei

II. The One - Life, Being and Truth: (XI.21.58-XXXIV.64.178) :

A. The One as life (*summa uita*) (XI.21.58-XVII.34.93) :

1. *Life in comparison to death* (XI.21.58-XII.25.69) :

- a) Death and the uselessness of nothing⁷⁰,
- b) Life, being and order⁷¹.

2. *Grace in comparison to sin* (XIII.26.70-XIV.28.77) :

- a) Sin and punishment⁷²,
- b) Grace and the gift of perseverance⁷³.

3. *The One as salvific force* (XV.29.78-XVII.34.93) :

- a) Prehistory of the fall⁷⁴,
- b) Effects of the fall in history⁷⁵,
- c) History as salvation history⁷⁶.

Augustinus», ZKG 75 (1964) 21-78.

70. Uselessness, *nequitia*, and nothing, *nihilum* are equalled to death. Death is defined as *uergere ad nihilum*. XI.21.58 : *nec aliqua uita in quantum uita est malum est, sed in quantum uergit ad mortem ... mors autem ... nequitia*. CCSL 32, 200.

71. XI.21.60 : *ille...est omnium speciosissimum...unus deus, una ueritas, una salus omnium et prima atque summa essentia...ex qua est omne quicquid est, in quantum est...in quantum est, bonum est*. CCSL 32, 201.

72. XII.23.64 : *Et hoc est totum quod dicitur malum, id est, peccatum et poena peccati*. CCSL 32, 202.

73. Probation is successful through grace mediated through Christ. This part is underlined by a number of quotations from Scripture encouraging to enter a spiritual life : Joh 1:3 ; Rom 8:11 ; 1 Cor 15:54f.

74. XIII.26.70 the fall of the *malus angelus* is explained by the mutability of his will. Though his being is perfect, his will turns bad. «Der Fall des Teufels, der sich nicht in die Ordnung Gottes einordnen, sondern eine eigne Herrschaft gründen will, ist gleichsam das historische Vorbild des steten Versuches des Menschen, sich um Gottes Gesetz nicht zu kümmern, selbstherrlich, nicht seinsbezogen zu handeln, so wie für den Neuplatoniker der Fall des Menschen in die Leiblichkeit das Paradeigma seiner ethischen Verirrung, aber auch die Heimkehr ins Vaterland, zum Vater [...] das des Strebens des guten Menschen nach dem Geistigen ist». W. THEILER (1933, 28) 1966, 193.

75. XV.29.79f. Augustine calls this effect *damnatio* and ascribes to it a certain beauty (on the «aesthetics of the Fall» cf. C. HARRISON, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, Oxford 1992, esp. 122-125). Because of sin humanity is condemned to live in this world, to fight - with God's grace - a spiritual fight for the good and succeed - or perish. Apparently, at this stage, Augustine does not yet distinguish between *damnatio* and *condemnatio* or reflect on eternal damnation in the strict sense like in *ciu. dei* XXI.17 and 23. Cf. *uera rel.* XIV.27.73, XX.38.103, XX.43.117, XXIII.44.121, XXXVII.68.190 e. a. (On the other hand cf. in this article note 100). The problem of predestination, too, has not yet turned up.

76. XVII.34.93 divine providence is called a medical art which restores the sickness of world history. Its elements are prophecy (the announcement of salvation), perseverance (grace as *donum perseuerantiae*) and fulfilment. On the idea of «divine providence» cf. Chr. PARMA, *Pronoia und Providentia. Der Vorsehungsbegriff Plotins und Augustins* (= *Studien zur Pro-*

B. The One as being and truth (XVIII.35.94-XXXIV.64.178) :

1. *The One as being (summe esse) (XVIII.35.94-XXIII.44.121) :⁷⁷*

a) A definition of creation (XVIII.35.94-XIX.37.100) :

aa) Being and good,

bb) Creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*),

cc) Creation from God (*ex deo*).

b) Good by definition (XX.38.101-XXIII.44.121)⁷⁸ :

aa) The absurdity and function of sin⁷⁹,

bb) The necessity of salvation⁸⁰.

2. *The One as truth (ueritas ipsa) (XXIII.44.122-XXXIV.64.178) :*

a) Knowledge through learning (XXIII.44.122-XXIX.53.146) :

aa) Authority and reason⁸¹,

bb) Inner dynamics - the seven stages of life⁸²,

cc) Outward structure: world and salvation history.

b) Elements of knowledge (XXX.54.147-XXXI.58.164) :

aa) Reason and judgement⁸³,

blemgeschichte der antiken und mittelalterlichen Philosophie 6, Leiden 1971.

77. On the following cf. above III.1. On the One, being and creation in this context cf. R. SORABJI, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, London 1983, esp. 233f.

78. It is the nature of created being to be defined (limited). It is good insofar it is limited. If it were not limited, it would not exist (*ex nihilo*). Sin is to interpret this kind of limitation as something negative or bad, instead of coming from God (*ex deo*). The text tells this in a metaphor. Not creation as such (being) is responsible for the fall but creation insofar it wills (not to be creation from God). Not the tree in paradise is responsible for the fall, but the transgressor : XX.38.102 : *Non ergo arbor illa malum est, quae in medio paradiso plantata scribitur, sed divini praecepti transgressio*. CCSL 32, 210.

79. Sin is absurd. If a creature wills not to be a creature, it contradicts itself. Its will eliminates itself by willing. Nevertheless, insofar a creature continues to exist as a creature, even though it wills not to do so, its sin too functions accordingly - as crime and punishment. XX.38.103 : *hoc modo malum, quod cauendo non didicit, discit seniendo; et bonum quod obtemperando minus diligebat, ardentius diligit comparando*. CCSL 32, 210.

80. In this part Augustine anticipates the iron logic of his teaching on grace. XXIII.44.121: *Et est pulchritudo universae creaturae per haec tria inculpabilis : damnatione peccatorum, exercitatione iustorum, perfectione beatorum*. CCSL 32, 215.

81. Authority is necessary because human beings in space and time are torn apart and distracted. They have to learn in order to acquire knowledge and insight (*intellectus*). Only authority is able to initiate this process. Cf. K.-H. LÜTCKE, *Auctoritas bei Augustin*, Stuttgart 1968.

82. The seven stages of life are unconscious early childhood, conscious childhood, youth, young adult, adult life, ageing, senility. For Augustine, they do not only apply to individuals but also to cultures and societies in history. Cf. XXVI.48.130ff.

83. Within history right judgement is the result of experience acquired through the use of authority and reason. XXX.54.147 : *tanto autem melius iudicat quanto est peritior*. CCSL 32, 222.

- bb) An absolute criterion⁸⁴,
- cc) Identity⁸⁵.
- c) Stages of knowledge (XXXII.59.165-XXXIV.64.178) :
 - aa) Material knowledge⁸⁶,
 - bb) The problem of illusions⁸⁷.

III. The One as Goal (*ad unum religari*) (XXXIV.64.179-LV.113.313)⁸⁸ :

A. The dialectic of sin (XXXIV.64.179-XXXVIII.71.200)⁸⁹ :

1. *Error, fall and the chance of recovery*⁹⁰,
2. *Error and idolatry*,
3. *Christological dimension (Mt 4, 1-12 par.)*⁹¹,

B. The logic of conversion (XXXIX.72.201-XLII.227) :

1. *Unity of truth and self in consciousness*⁹²,

84. In principle, however, an absolute criterion is needed, something beyond our minds, truth. XXX.56.153 : *supra mentem nostram esse legem quae veritas dicitur*. CCSL 32, 223.

85. This law (*lex*) is personified as Christ, the Son, who is One with the Father as judge. Cf. Eph 3:15 ; Joh 5:22 ; 1 Cor 2:15 ; 2 Cor 5:10. The spiritual being (*homo spiritalis*) is identical with the One in the One and therefore able to judge properly.

86. In this section Augustine argues that there is nothing like pure empirical knowledge ; for every knowledge has a moral and an aesthetic dimension. XXXII.60.168 : *neque ullum omnino esse corpus quod non habet unitatis qualecumque uestigium...mente igitur...uidemus*. CCSL 32, 226f.

87. Illusion is caused by a wrong understanding of spiritual knowledge as blown up material knowledge. XX.40.109 : *immensa spatia cogitatione format inaniter*. CCSL 32, 212. It is overcome by the insight that true knowledge is simple knowledge of the one (*quo simplicius nihil est*).

88. On *ad unum religari* cf. LV.113.310 : *Religet ergo nos religio uni omnipotenti deo...* CCSL 32, 258.

89. This chapter starts by analysing the absurd condition of humanity. What is the reason why human beings live in pain and sin ? *Peruicacitas* ? This is not an explanation. The whole situation is absurd, confused. Confusion leads people to vice and vice makes people confused. We call this aspect of self-contradiction dialectics in contrast to the logic of conversion in the following section.

90. Recovery comes from the One and I myself am one. XXXIV.64.179 : *si una Roma...falsa est ista quam cogitans fingo...si unus est sol, falsus est iste qui cogitans fingo...ego ipse certe unus sum...* CCSL 32, 229.

91. The pericope mentioned tells how Christ himself was led into temptation but resisted. Since he was able to resist, all human beings through his grace are able to resist. On this topic cf. also W. GEERLINGS, *Christus exemplum. Studien zur Christologie und Christusverkündigung Augustins*, Stuttgart 1978.

92. Identity, the unity of One and self in consciousness, is called *conuenientia*. There is no doubt about it (*si fallor...*). XXXIX.73.205 : *omnis qui se dubitantem intellegit, uerum intellegit*. It is an objective reality, found, not produced. 207 : *non...ratiocinatio talia facit, sed*

- 2. Capacity of the interior life to grow⁹³,
- 3. Universal dimension of creation⁹⁴,
- C. Conversion and the One (XLIII.80.228-LIV.106.292) :
 - 1. The human being - image of the One (Gen 1:27).
 - 2. Perversion and conversion of the image of the One⁹⁵ :
 - a) Pride and the humility of the One⁹⁶,
 - b) Lust and the love of the One⁹⁷,
 - c) Curiosity and the knowledge of the One⁹⁸.
 - 3. Becoming one in the One:
 - a) In time through biblical revelation⁹⁹,
 - b) In eternal life beyond the limits of time¹⁰⁰.
- D. Conclusion (LV.107-113.294-313) :
 - 1. What true religion is not: «religions»¹⁰¹,

inuenit. CCSL 32, 234f. Augustine used this famous argument several times in his works starting from *Acad*. It occurs in *beata u. 7, sol. II.1, lib arb. II.7, 16 and 25, ciu. dei XI.26*. A contemporary philosophical evaluation of it is presented by Ch. KIRWAN, *Augustine*, London 1989, 15-34.

93. Because the One found in the self is something a priori different from the self, there is real innovation (*innouatio*) and rebirth (*renascitur*), conversion.

94. Because the One found in the self is something different, it permits judgements about the outward world, the material universe. In the following, Augustine elaborates mathematical and scientific theories.

95. For a detailed outline cf. DU ROY (1966) 310ff. (in this article at the end of II.3).

96. The proud one denies being humble in the image of the One.

97. Love is being loved by God, the One, and to love God, oneself and one's neighbour. XLVI.86.243. Cf. Mt 22:37 ; Dt 6:5 ; Lev 19:18 ; Rom 13:10.

98. The curious one wants to know «more» than the One. What he wants is plurality, not the one and all, which is the One alone. On curiosity cf. H. BLUMENBERG, «Augustins Anteil an der Geschichte des Begriffs der theoretischen Neugierde», *REAug 7* (1961) 35-70.

99. L.99.275 Augustine outlines a Biblical hermeneutics, the end of which is to «grasp and keep fast the spiritual and eternal». On this cf. G. STRAUSS, *Schriftgebrauch, Schriftauslegung und Schriftbeweis bei Augustin (= Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Hermeneutik I)* Stuttgart 1959.

100. LIII.103.284 Augustine points beyond the limits of time. Insight into the interior dimension of life *cognitio quae intus est* for him has a higher value than the most sophisticated theory even of Biblical exegesis. Whoever lives in faith, hope and love, does not need the Bible to lead him from piecemeal to perfection. However, if history has this in store for those who «think» and act accordingly then it must also have something in store for those who would not think but fail: the contrary of eternal life, eternal damnation. LIV.104.288. *sit ploratus et stridor dentium* (Mt 22:13). CCSL 32, 253f. Cf. Joh 1:9 ; Ps 34:9 ; 1 Cor 13:9 ; Rom 7:23-25 e.a.

101. The concept of true religion relying on the transcendent One is seen in contrast to the plurality of religions, *omnia quae in mundo sunt, concupiscentia carnis et concupiscentia oculorum et ambitio saeculi* (1 Joh 2:15). LV.107.294. CCSL 32, 256. LV.108-109.295-301

2. *True religion in relation to God, the One*¹⁰²,
3. *God and creation, being and becoming One*¹⁰³.

Although not all textual references of the term *unum* could be quoted in this outline, the guiding influence of a particular «concept of the One», as Augustine developed it, should have become visible - in part I as origin and principle, in part II as the unity of life, being and truth, and in part III as goal, as the unity of «knowing» (*cognitio, mens, intellectus*) and being saved (*gratia*) in God, the One¹⁰⁴.

We have partly been following earlier attempts at structuring the text as quoted above, partly we have made our own suggestions : Thus we have taken over the view of the text as a whole from Van Fleteren and Desch while admitting the possibility of Porphyrian sources (Theiler) and the probability of editorial layers (Du Roy). Like Van Fleteren and Desch (and against Du Roy, Dörries and Theiler) we have decided to subdivide the introductory part at VI.11.35/VII.12.36 (before the address to Romanianus). With Desch and Du Roy we have pointed out that the repetition of the theme *summa uita* (XI.21.58ff) as *summe esse* and *ueritas ipsa* (XVIII.35.94ff. and XXIII.-44.122ff) is not just a repetition, as especially Theiler had said, but contains new elements with a vital function for the progress of the argumentation of the text as a whole. Finally, we have taken over the beginning of the final conclusion from most of our predecessors (LV.107.294), but suggested a new beginning of the third, protreptic part (*ad unum religari*), namely from XXXIV.64.179 onwards. An external argument for this decision was style (change from treatise to protreptic), the internal argument was the change from epistemological reflections on the possibility of knowing the truth to an existential exhortation on the search of the human being for identity (*ego ipse certe unus sum...in teipsum redi...homo interior*)¹⁰⁵.

ten different types of worship are outlined, worship of phantasies, human works, animals, death, demons, earth and water, air, trees, and reason.

102. LV.110.302ff : Together with the angels we worship God (*unum cum ipsis colamus deum*), our joy is in him (*in uno deo habentes omnia gaudia*), we are attracted by him (*ad unum deum tendentes et ei uni religantes animas nostras*), religion binds us together with him (*religet ergo nos religio uni omnipotenti deo*). CCSL 32, 258f.

103. LV.113.313 God and creation are seen as one in the One : *unum deum ex quo omnia, per quem omnia, in quo omnia; ipsi gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen*. CCSL 32, 260.

104. LIII.103.285 : *Post hanc autem uitam et cognitio perficietur...et pax omnis aderit, nunc enim alia lex in membris meis repugnat legi mentis meae, sed liberabit nos de corpore mortis huius gratia dei per Iesum Christum dominum nostrum* (1 Cor 13:9-10 and Rom 7:23-25). This passage alludes to 1 Tim 2:3-5 (which Augustine does not explicitly make use of here, but which coincides with his argumentation) : *hoc bonum est et acceptum coram saluatore nostro, qui omnes homines uult saluos fieri et ad agnitionem ueritatis uenire. Unus enim deus, unus et mediator dei et hominum, homo Christus Iesus...* The idea of universal salvation expressed in this verse, is, however, relativized by Augustine's strong notion of the possibility of eternal damnation. Cf. LIV.104.287ff.

105. XXXIV.64.179, XXXIX.72.202, XL.74.208.

The whole of our structure of argumentation was, of course, directed by the assumed underlying concept of *unum*: In part I we stressed that Augustine tried to show how philosophy and religion have a common source (*unus deus*) but are going different ways. Only in Christianity, where history is supposed to be taken seriously as *sacramentum* (and sacraments as historical events), philosophy and religion work together towards salvation (*beatitudo*, I.1.1). Part II shows how the One works in history and leads history back to its origin: As life he overcomes death, as grace sin. He works in history. He is part of history in Christ and the church, creator and saviour of the universe. The extreme argument XVIII.35.94ff. opposing *esse* and *omnino nihilum*, complete intelligibility of creation and absurdity of sin, prepares for the epistemological reflections XXIII.44.122ff. The argument of self-consciousness XXXIX.72.201ff. is therefore not so much an epistemological or an ontological argument but lies in the centre of the spiritual theological part III which tries to guide the searching soul back from the absurdity of sin towards its origins in the One through a logic of conversion.

Conversion itself, says Augustine's conclusion of *uera rel.*, is not so much conversion from one of the «religions» to another, but from «mere religions» to the «true religion» (*uera religio*), which is at the same time philosophy and religion¹⁰⁶, which is true wisdom (*sapientia*), wisdom incarnate. The ambiguity of all these expressions (philosophy, religion, wisdom etc.) culminates in the ambiguity of the meaning of *unum*, which signifies a philosophical principle as well as the personal God. This is, in its ultimate meaning, expressed in one short passage at the beginning of part III: *Unum certe quaerimus quo simplicius nihil est. Ergo in simplicitate cordis quaeramus illum* (XXXV.65.183), «It is the One whom we are searching for. Nothing is simpler than Him. Let us therefore search him in the simplicity of our hearts».

3. Summary and Conclusion

To sum up the results of this inquiry: After more than a century of discussion our way of looking at Augustine's conversion has changed a great deal. We are no longer trying to find out the precise moment when Augustine «switched» from Manicheism or Platonism to Christianity. His conversion is seen as a process of which *uera rel.* is a witness. Acquaintance with Platonic writings in Milan (386), baptism (387), return to Africa (388) and service in the church, the call to become a presbyter in Hippo (391), and the continuous search for a better understanding of the whole of his life and being in general in the context of philosophical learning and Christian tradition make up the context in which *uera rel.* emerged. After *uera rel.* the process continued. Augustine analysed Genesis, Romans, and his way of interpreting the Bible. By 396/7 he had completed several commentaries, *Simpl.*, *doctr.* I and II and *Conf.*

106. V.8.26: *non aliam esse philosophiam...aliam religionem.*

All this was not quite clear when by the end of last century the question was raised when precisely Augustine converted to Christianity and how Platonic he remained for how long. We have seen that the concept of the One is very much influenced by Porphyrian and Victorinian Platonism. But it also comes from Biblical monotheism and is used to formulate Christian doctrine. Though we know that there are Platonic motives in *uera rel.* we cannot simply take them as a proof that Augustine was not yet a Christian. We also cannot try to tell exactly which texts are Porphyrian. We cannot even properly distinguish anti-Manichean and anti-Porphyrian sections; for both have similar functions¹⁰⁷. What we can do is to look at the text of *uera rel.* as a whole. Van Fleteren's interpretation was a great progress in this regard. But the term «ascent», he suggested as a guiding concept, is not very prominent in the text and expresses mainly its anagogic dimension leaving the ontological and epistemological parts of its first half uninterpreted. Structural similarities as shown by Desch, on the other hand, offer little insight into doctrinal questions.

Vnum, however, is a term that occurs several hundred times in the text. Its function is not merely structural, but, on the background of Christian and Neoplatonic thought, highly doctrinal. It plays, as even our few notes on the outline of *uera rel.* may have shown, an important role in the process of the argument in that text, be it historical, metaphysical, anthropological, epistemological, exegetical or spiritual.

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107. This view is also held by W. GEERLINGS, «Zur Frage des Nachwirkens des Manichäismus in der Theologie Augustins», *ZkTh* 93 (1971) 45-60, esp. 46. When Manichaeism entered the Hellenistic world, says Geerlings, it took over Neoplatonic motives. Thus, he thinks, it is (for later texts such as Augustine's) hardly possible to distinguish properly (e. g. by reconstructing possible sources) between the two traditions.

SUMMARY : Research on the structure and content of *De uera religione* has been focussing mainly on the relationship between Platonism and Christianity and a number of seminal ideas elaborated later in works like *trin.* and *ciu.* Because of the diversity of themes it contains the text has been found difficult to outline. This article presents a survey on the history of the research along with a new suggestion, which is to outline and interpret the text along a particular Augustinian notion of the Neoplatonic and Biblical monotheistic concept of the One.