

*Secundum Carnem: History and Israel
in the Theology of St. Augustine*

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In his classic study of history and society in the theology of Augustine, Robert Markus brilliantly laid out the threefold secularization of history, empire, and church that came to define Augustine's mature theology of the *saeculum*.¹ The Christian, argued Augustine, now lived in a world of ambiguity. The True Church was not the church of the perfect: rather, in the age before the End, it must abide as a *corpus permixtum*, containing both sinner and saint.² The empire, neither demonic before 312 nor holy thereafter, lacked any absolute religious significance.³ And events in the present—be they positive (such as the free and universal proclamation of the Gospel) or negative (famine, earthquake, or the fall of Rome)—were eschatologically opaque: they could not be matched with scriptural prophecy to indicate anything of the divine plan.⁴ However certain in their faith, Christians could never be certain of their circumstances. Their circumstances, therefore, could never be constitutive of their identities.

Augustine's theology of the *saeculum*, in brief, challenged traditional constructions of Christian identity. But prior to and coherent with this theology, sharing many of the same stimuli and sources, lay another of Augustine's daring revisions: that of his views on Israel *secundum carnem*, on the Law and its observances, on Jews and Judaism, that emerged in the late 390s in the course of his refutation of Manichaeism. Augustine, interestingly, could not go so far in "secularizing" the idea of

1. R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970). He summarizes these themes in chap. 6.

2. On the eschatological ambiguity of the church in the world, Markus, *Saeculum*, 105–32.

3. *Ibid.*, 45–104.

4. *Ibid.*, 1–44.

Israel and the image of the Jew as he could the concepts of church, empire, and history. But his new perspective on historical Israel as God's Chosen, and current Israel as Christ's witness, complicated and thus enriched the church's identity as Israel *secundum spiritum*. In a world where ambiguity obscured the Ultimate, Israel remained history's polestar.

Dualist and Catholic Anti-Judaism

Neither his own former Manichaeism nor the perspectives of Catholic tradition would have prepared the way for Augustine's theology of Israel. Their highly developed negative critique of the Old Testament and, correspondingly, their polarized reading of Paul, were two major weapons in the Manichees' anti-Catholic arsenal. It had accounted for some of their appeal for the young Augustine, who, repulsed by the low literary quality of Scripture, passed directly over to their camp.⁵ "[They] deceived me with such questions as: Whence comes evil? And is God bounded by a bodily shape and has he hair and nails? And are those [patriarchs] to be esteemed righteous who had many wives at the same time and slew men and offered sacrifices of living animals?"⁶ This destructive criticism was an effective missionary technique exercised in public debate.⁷ Unversed in the techniques of interpretation, the unlearned remained susceptible to Manichaean criticisms of the Old Testament as absurd, arbitrary, repulsive.⁸

5. *Confessiones (Conf.)* 3.5–6, ed. J. J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1992); cf. 5.10–11, where Augustine, though now dissatisfied with the Manichees, is still held by the force of their critique of Scripture.

6. *Conf.* 3.7.12, trans. F. J. Sheed, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York, 1943).

7. "Nam bene nosti quod reprehendentes Manichaei catholicam fidem, et maxime Vetus Testamentum discerpentes et dilaniantes, commovent imperitos," *De utilitate crededendi (De util. cred.)* 2.4 (PL 42, 67). The opportunity the Manichees offered the young Augustine to best unlearned Catholics in public debate was also no small part of their appeal, *De duabus animabus* 9.11 (PL 42, 102); see now R. Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995), esp. 70–108.

8. On the fourfold sense of Scripture, known only to the erudite few, as an effective defense against this critique, *De util. cred.* 3.5 (PL 42, 68–69); absurdity of man in God's image (hence the jibe about God's beard and nails), e.g., *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.17.27 (PL 34, 186); *Conf.* 3.7; cf. *Contra Faustum Manichaeum (C. Faust.)* 22.4 (CSEL 25.1, 593–94); arbitrariness (Why, all of a sudden, did God choose to create? what had he been doing beforehand?), *De Genesi contra*

Many of these objections to the Jewish Scriptures were ancient, found initially in the pagan critique of the Hellenistic synagogue.⁹ But Manichees could appeal to an impeccable Christian authority for their renunciation of Judaism and its Scriptures: the letters of Paul. The Apostle held a central place in Manichaean teaching, having expounded with unerring clarity the absolute distinction between good and evil, spirit and flesh, the Law and the Gospel, the inner and outer man.¹⁰ Seemingly positive remarks about the Law and the prophets found in the Epistles, they maintained, could only be the result of later interpolations:¹¹ Paul's condemnation of circumcision, food laws, and other aspects of Jewish observance was unambiguous and uncompromising. Indeed, the Catholic insistence on retaining both testaments was not only perverse; it was inconsistent and hypocritical. What point holding on to the books of the Law while disregarding its precepts?¹²

Orthodox tradition had had centuries, by Augustine's time, to rehearse its response to this dualist reading of Paul with its concomitant rejection of the Old Testament: these arguments had been mounted systematically already in the mid-second century both by Marcion and by Valentinus and other gnostics. Interestingly, the responses of Orthodox

Manichaeos 1.2.3 (PL 34, 174–75); *Conf.* 11.10.12. For an overview of the Manichaean critique of Judaism, see P. Alfaric, *L'Évolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1918), 174–92; of their critique of the OT in particular, F. Decret, *Aspects du manichéisme dans l'Afrique romaine: Les controverses de Fortunatus, Faustus et Felix avec saint Augustin* (Paris, 1970), 123–49.

9. This polemic remains embedded in, e.g., Origen, *Contra Celsum* (C. *Celsum*), trans. H. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1953).

10. On the authority of Paul for Mani, H. D. Betz, "Paul in the Mani Biography (Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis)," in *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis: Atti del Simposio Internazionale . . . 1984*, ed. L. Cirillo and A. Roselli (Cosenza, 1986), 215–34; J. Ries, "Saint Paul dans la formation de Mani," in *Le epistole paoline nei Manichei, i Donatisti e il primo Agostino*, ed. J. Ries et al. (Rome, 1989), 7–27; in western Manichaeism generally, F. Decret, "L'utilisation des épîtres de Paul chez les Manichéens d'Afrique," in *Le epistole paoline*, 29–83; Alfaric, *L'Évolution intellectuelle*, 207–8. On interpolations, Decret, *Aspects*, 174–76. On the view of Paul that Augustine would have held as a Manichee, C. P. Bammel, "Pauline Exegesis, Manichaeism, and Philosophy in the Early Augustine," in *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity: Essays in Tribute to George Christopher Stead*, ed. L. R. Wickham and C. P. Bammel (Leiden, 1993), 1–25.

11. Cf. Faustus's qualified acknowledgment of Rom 1:3, on Christ's descent from David *secundum carnem*: "Verumtamen si eius est prior illa sententia [Rom 1:3], nunc emendata est [i.e., by 2 Cor 5:16]: sin fas non est Paulum inemendatum dixisse aliquid umquam, ipsius non est," C. *Faust.* 11.1 (CSEL 25.1, 314).

12. E.g., C. *Faust.* 32.

antidualists—Justin, Tertullian, Origen—though in defense of the church's appropriation of Jewish Scriptures, themselves comprise arguments *adversus Iudaeos*.¹³ Defending the Christian validity of the Old Testament, these authors deflected much of the dualist-Paulinist critique of the Creator God and his Law onto the Jewish people themselves.¹⁴ What was "bad" in the Law—most often, specific observances: sabbath, food laws, sacrifices, circumcision—was there because of what was "bad" in the Jews: a carnal mentality (which prevented them from understanding their own Scriptures correctly, i.e., allegorically, and thus as revealing Christ) and hardness of heart.

Catholic tradition had resolved the tensions it brought on itself in retaining Jewish Scriptures while renouncing Judaism by reading the Jewish past as a history, largely, of failure—failure to understand, failure to perform. With a view toward Augustine's ultimate revision, I would like to attend here to five particular themes in this patristic reading: (1) God's intention in giving the Law, and (2) its status, especially (3) the commandment to circumcise; (4) the murder of Christ as the culminating act sealing the Jews' rejection; and (5) Jewish political desuetude as proof of this rejection.

The respective Jewish and Christian revelations, insisted Catholics against dualists, were not mutually exclusive but sequential. The Good God had given the (Jewish) Law, but he had always intended that Law to be temporary. "We do not think that there is one God for us, another for

13. See esp. J. G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford, 1983), 160–73.

14. See esp. D. Efroymson, "The Patristic Connection," in *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. A. Davies (New York, 1979), 98–117; Efroymson notes that the largest block of Tertullian's anti-Jewish material is found not in his treatise *Adversus Iudaeos*, but in his masterwork *Adversus Marcionem*, 100. On Christian anti-Judaism as Orthodoxy's response to Christian dualists, Gager, *Origins*, 160–73.

The *adversus Iudaeos* tradition itself, while obviously relevant to the line I am pursuing, cannot concern us directly here. The classic studies are A. L. Williams, *Adversus Iudaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1935); B. Blumenkranz, *Die Judenpredigt Augustins* (Paris, 1973; orig. pub. 1946); M. Simon, *Verus Israel* (Paris, 1948). In this continuing context of charged debate, with different groups of Christians contesting for the construction of Christianity, and Jews and Christians debating which community held true title to the Scriptures, and thus to the designation "Israel," we also find pagans (e.g., Celsus, Porphyry) engaged in active criticism of all groups: see Bammel's insightful discussion of the ways that African Manichaeism would have satisfied particular pagan theological objections to Christianity and to Judaism, "Pauline exegesis," 8–10.

you,” Justin—with Marcion and Valentinus doubtless in mind—
informed his Jewish interlocutor Trypho; but “the Law promulgated on
Horeb is now old, and belongs to you alone,” and he cited Jeremiah
31:31 in support of his scheme.¹⁵ The Law’s observance, thus, is obvi-
ously not incumbent upon Christians: “There is now another covenant,
and another law has come forth from Zion” (*Dial.* 24). Temporary,
onerous, the old Law had been given to—inflicted, rather, on—the Jews
alone. Why? “On account of your transgressions and the hardness of
your hearts” (18).¹⁶

The perverse literal-mindedness with which the Jews insisted on
observing these (punitive) mandates was nowhere more blatantly mani-
fest than in their fixation on fleshly circumcision. Given to Abraham as a
sign, it was intended by God to mark off the Jewish nation, to isolate it
for its singular punishments as murderers of Christ.¹⁷ Even after the com-
ing of Christ, then, Jews failed to see this fundamental mistake: literal—
which is to say, carnal—observance of the Law had never been God’s
goal. *True* circumcision was always of the foreskin of the heart (18, and
frequently); *true* Sabbath, the Sabbath in Christ (12); *true* baptism, not
the interminable Jewish immersions, but the baptism of Life (19). Inter-
pretatively, spiritually, religiously—in every imaginable way—the Jews
had missed the point. In their obdurate perverseness they declined to

15. *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* 11, ed. G. Archambault, *Dialogue avec Tryphon*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1909); trans. based on M. Dods, *The Writings of Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, vol. 2 of the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1867), repr. in *ANF*, vol. 1.

16. Similarly, says Justin, God proscribed certain meats (20) and imposed the Sabbath “as a sign, on account of your unrighteousness and that of your fathers” (21); he mandated sacrifices “for the sins of your own nation and their idolatries” and permitted the building of the Temple “that you . . . might not worship idols” (22); the commands to observe the Sabbath, and other things were “on account of your hardness of heart” (27).

17. “For the circumcision according to the flesh, which is from Abraham, was given for a sign; that you may be separated from other nations, and from us; and that you alone may suffer what you now justly suffer [Justin evidently intends the measures taken after the Bar Kochba revolt of 132–135 (1)]; and that your land may be desolate and your cities burned with fire; and that strangers may eat your fruit in your presence, and not one of you may go up to Jerusalem. For you are not recognized among the rest of men by any other mark than your fleshly circumcision. . . . Accordingly, these things have happened to you in fairness and justice, for you have slain the Just One and his prophets before him; and now you reject those who hope in him, and in him who sent him” (16). Justin further argues the wrong-headedness of fleshly circumcision in 19 (Adam and other men before Abraham were not circumcised) and in 23 (women cannot be circumcised, yet they can be made righteous: thus, circumcision is not necessary for righteousness).

understand even the most public proclamation of divine censure for their error: the destruction of the Temple, and their banishment from Jerusalem (16). If they do not understand, the world does: Israel is not the Jews, but the Church (123).¹⁸

Augustine, Allegory, and the Bible

In his *Confessions*, Augustine reports that his allegiance to Manichaeism had been troubled almost from the beginning. Even in Carthage, in the first flush of enthusiasm, he had recoiled from its elaborate mythology (“manducabam, non avide quidem”);¹⁹ in Italy, its theory of Judaizing interpolations of New Testament texts struck him increasingly as unper-
suasive and desperate.²⁰ But the force of their critique of the Old Testa-
ment and their powerful reading of Paul continued to hold him.²¹ When
his shift of allegiance came, it came through a new philosophical under-
standing of the nature of evil, and a new intellectual understanding of the
necessity of spiritual hermeneutics. The one he owed to the *libri platonico-*
rum; the other, to Ambrose of Milan.

And it was a joy to hear Ambrose, who often repeated to his congrega-
tion as if it were a rule he was most strongly urging upon them, the

18. My description synthesizes Justin’s argument, much of which reappears in book 3 of Tertullian’s *Adversus Marcionem*. Origen, in his concluding essay on biblical exegesis in the fourth book of the *Peri Archon*, likewise diagnosed the root reason for Jewish obduracy as the failure to understand the spiritual—which is to say, allegorical—sense of Scripture. Justin directed his dialogue against the Jews (represented by Trypho), but he aimed as well at Marcion and Valentinus (chap. 11, 35). Tertullian’s anti-Marcionite text incorporated much of what had appeared earlier in his *Adversus Iudaeos*. In the background of Origen’s *Peri Archon* stand Marcionites and Valentinian gnostics; of the *C. Celsum*, the pagan critique of Christianity: but specifically anti-Jewish arguments lay scattered throughout. Finally, many of the themes we can designate as ostensibly antidualist reappear in the first book of Cyprian’s *Ad Quirinum* (*Testimoniorum libri*) against the Jews. Anti-heretical and anti-Jewish polemic—despite the strong anti-Judaism of these same heretics themselves—were strongly and closely linked.

19. *Conf.* 3.6.10.

20. *Conf.* 5.11; cf. *De util. cred.* 3.7 (*PL* 42, 69–70).

21. The intellectual struggle recorded throughout books 5 through 7 owes much to the forcefulness with which the Manichees had put the question of the issue of God’s body as presented in the OT, e.g., 5.10.19: “They [the Manichees] had turned me against [your church]: and it seemed to me degrading to believe that you had the shape of our human flesh”; 6.4 5: “Thus I was ignorant how this image of yours could be”; 7 passim, on God’s implication in the problem of evil if he is indeed the Creator.

text: "the letter kills, but the spirit gives Life" (2 Cor 3:6). And he would go on to draw aside the veil of mystery and lay open the spiritual meaning of things which, taken literally, would have seemed to teach falsehood.²²

In the writing campaign that followed this period in Milan and Cassiacum, Augustine returned frequently to the benefits of allegory in combating Manichaean readings of Scripture. His "first ecclesiastical pamphlet," the *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*,²³ is a sustained application of those techniques of interpretation learned, at a distance, from Ambrose. In *De utilitate credendi*, written shortly thereafter, he lamented that such techniques were not more broadly known to the faithful: were they, much of the force of the Manichaean critique would be lost.²⁴ Yet, for all his self-conscious appreciation of allegory, Augustine evidently was not content to rest with it. Not long after the composition of the *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, he abandoned that mode of exegesis and embarked on the first of his commentaries on Genesis *ad litteram* (393), in an effort to investigate "the great secrets of natural things . . . according to their historical character."²⁵ As with so many of his writings from this period, this project too remained unfinished. A great intellectual uncertainty settled upon Augustine in the 390s. What was the problem?

At the risk of simplifying a notoriously complex man, I would characterize the fundamental intellectual issue confounding Augustine as his uncertainty about how to read the Bible.²⁶ The highly philosophical vision of Christianity won in Milan had not sustained him back in Africa,

22. *Conf.* 6.4.6. P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), 79–114, for a vivid review of Augustine's life in this period; P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1950), 98–132, for a reconstruction of the chronology of those sermons of Ambrose that can be dated to Augustine's stay in Milan.

23. Brown's characterization, *Augustine of Hippo*, 134. Augustine began the commentary in Italy in 389, but completed it once back in Africa.

24. *De util. cred.* 2.4–4.10 (PL 42, 67–73).

25. "secundum historicam proprietatem," *Retractationes* 1.18 (CCSL 57, 54).

26. There were other issues as well, of course, not least of them his being worn out. This period was prefaced by wrenching personal losses and drastic changes of circumstance: by 391, Augustine had lost his mother, his son, and his best friend Nebridius to death. Augustine himself had terminated his fifteen-year common-law marriage, abandoned his career, committed himself to celibacy and to Catholic Christianity, left Italy and its cosmopolitan Catholicism for a life of retirement in North Africa as a *servus dei*, and been suddenly inducted into the clergy at Hippo. (The *Confessions* [397] is, among many other things, his successful attempt to locate himself in his own life.)

where he was confronted, intimately and publicly, with the biblical culture of both his own church and its opponents.²⁷ Augustine's early priesthood marked out a six-year-long Jabbok, a time when he wrestled with the text of the Bible; with his post-Manichee, post-Milanese convictions about physical creation, divine justice, and human freedom; with his view of his own past. But if he limped through this period, he did not limp thereafter. The 390s end in a great burst of self-confident creativity with the staccato composition of his theological *novum*, the *Ad Simplicianum* (396), its autobiographical companion-piece, the *Confessions* (397), and the massive refutation of Latin Manichaeism, the *Contra Faustum* (398).

Of all the various factors facilitating this spectacular conclusion to Augustine's intellectual paralysis, I would like to consider, briefly, one: his encounter with Tyconius.²⁸ In his *Liber regularum*, Tyconius had laid out principles of exegesis that were strikingly indifferent to and independent of the Alexandrian allegory represented by Ambrose. Tyconius sought, rather, to walk through "the immense forest of prophecy" by understanding Scripture not philosophically, hence allegorically, but typologically—hence historically.²⁹ In pursuit of his goal, he construed

His writing subsequently foundered: the early and mid-390s are littered with the fitful productions of a man with writer's block (J. J. O'Donnell's apt diagnosis: see his *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 1, xlii–xliii). Besides abandoning the style of exegesis attempted in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (388/9) and his subsequent effort *ad litteram* (393/4), he left his commentary on Romans after completing only the first book (395). *De doctrina christiana*, begun in 396, was left until 428; the *De diversis quaestionibus* and the *Propositiones* on Romans were transcripts of small lectures given on various occasions.

27. His plunge into the study of Paul in particular was precipitated in no small part by his public debate with Fortunatus, who, defeat notwithstanding, certainly outquoted Augustine vis-à-vis the NT and esp. the epistles, e.g., *Contra Fortunatum Manichaeum* 3, 7, 17, 19, 20, 21 (PL 42, 114, 115, 120, 121, 122, 124). See P. Fredriksen, "Excaecati Occulta Justitia Dei: Augustine on Jews and Judaism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 299–324, at 302–4, for an analysis of this debate.

28. We can securely date Augustine's reading of Tyconius's *Liber regularum* to 397, when he enthusiastically endorsed the work in correspondence with Aurelius of Carthage (*Ep.* 41.2 [CSEL 34.2, 83]). I have argued, on the basis of similarities in Tyconius's and Augustine's reading of Paul, that Augustine had already read the *Liber* during his earlier cycle of work on Romans in 394. See P. Fredriksen, "Beyond the Body/Soul Dichotomy: Augustine on Paul against the Manichees and the Pelagians," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 23 (1988): 87–114, at 99–101.

29. The text of Burkitt's scientific edition (Cambridge, 1894) is now reprinted with facing English translation by W. S. Babcock, *Tyconius: The Book of Rules*, Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations (Atlanta, 1989). For the "prophetiae immensam silvam," *Rules*, prol. (ed. Babcock, 2).

all of Scripture, New Testament and Old, as “the Law”: *lex fidei demonstratrix*.³⁰ Disowning any sharp rupture between the two dispensations, insisting that the dynamics of law and faith, will and grace are constant across nations, times, and individuals, Tyconius disclosed in the Bible a continuous and consistent record of God’s saving acts in history.

Augustine owed much to Tyconius: his strategies against millenarian interpretations of traditionally millenarian scriptures;³¹ his view of the church as a *corpus permixtum*; his understanding of salvation as a process at once linear and interior that came of their mutual meditation on Romans.³² The kernel of his threefold secularization was nourished by Tyconius’s work.³³ More immediately, Tyconius’s insistence on the redemptive value of the Law, and his persistently historical typologizing of Scripture, inspired Augustine to a renewed, exhaustive attack on the “Manichaean blasphemy”: the thirty-three books of the *Contra Faustum*.³⁴

Israel, the Law, and the Jews

As we saw above, earlier Catholic writers had strongly linked their anti-heretical and anti-Jewish polemic, despite—or, paradoxically, because of—the anti-Judaism of their dualist opponents. Augustine himself can certainly echo, on occasion, much of their sentiment. His *arguments*, however, are quite strikingly different, not least of all because of his interpretation *ad litteram* and the historicizing hermeneutics acquired, in part, through Tyconius. To compare these two different Catholic responses to the theological challenge of Judaism, let us review Augustine on the five themes that we isolated above in earlier patristic polemic.

30. Rule 3, “de promissis et lege” (ed. Babcock, 32); see also the editor’s observation, 33 n. 6: The goal of the Law is the salvation of Israel, it is the means by which Israel is driven to faith.

31. See P. Fredriksen, “Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity: From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991): 151–83, and nn. 40–54 reviewing earlier literature on this topic.

32. Fredriksen, “Body/Soul,” 99–101.

33. Recognized—exceptionally—by Markus, *Saeculum*, 56; also 115. On the otherwise all-but-universal misreading of Tyconius as an apocalyptic thinker despite his being a source for Augustine’s own antiapocalyptic thought, see P. Fredriksen, “Tyconius and the End of the World,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 28 (1982): 59–75.

34. Ed. PL 42, 207–518, and CSEL 25.1, 249–797; trans. based on R. Stothert, *Writings in Connection with the Manichaean Heresy*, vol. 5 of *The Works of Aurelius Augustinus*, ed. M. Dods (Edinburgh, 1872).

Why had God given the Law? To lead to faith: the two stand on a single continuum of God’s saving acts within both public and private history.³⁵ Providential, not punitive, the Law was indeed, as Paul himself had proclaimed in Romans 9:1–5, a benefit and a privilege (*C. Faust.* 12.3). While many of its precepts, “appropriate rather than good in themselves,” were due to the proverbially stony Jewish heart (18.4), the status of the Law was perpetual and enduring, since it referred in its entirety, whether directly or indirectly, to Christ (12.7). This Christ—“not the Christ of their [the Manichees’] own making, but the Christ of the Hebrew prophets” (12.4)—had removed the veil obscuring the Law, but the Law itself remained. “The same Law that was given by Moses became grace and truth in Jesus Christ” (22.6). Thus “the Apostle himself, . . . speaking of the advantages of the Jews, mentions this as one, that they had the giving of the Law. If the Law had been bad, the Apostle would not have referred to it in praise of the Jews” (12.3).

But surely the Jews’ literal-mindedness in observing the Law had never been as God intended: were they not condemned by the overwhelming evidence of their own carnal interpretations? Not at all, countered Augustine; on the contrary. “The Jews were right in practicing these things”—the sacrifices, the immersions, the times and seasons; the fault lay with their failure “to distinguish the time of the New Testament, when Christ came, from the time of the Old” (12.9). *God had not said one thing and meant another* (the first definition of *allos-agoreuein!*): literal observance was exactly what he had had in mind. By keeping to these observances, the entire people of Israel “was like a great prophet,” foretelling Christ not only in word (that is, the Scriptures) but also in deed (“in his quae faciebat,” 22.24). Their actions, apt and pious, conformed to their times.³⁶

True of the Sabbath, true of immersions and sacrifices, and true most compellingly of *fleshy circumcision* itself. That very fact which the

35. Augustine articulated this conviction through his schematization of history and individual development into four stages: *ante legem*, *sub lege*, *sub gratia*, and *in pace*—the characteristic teaching of his notes on Romans, the *Propositiones*.

36. See Gerald Bonner’s brief but excellent discussion of the consequences of Augustine’s new sense of history and historical process for his anti-Manichaean critique, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*, rev. ed. (Norwich, 1986), 218–24: “this conception . . . is Augustine’s great argument against Manichaean attacks on Old Testament morality and must be accounted one of his major discoveries,” 222. Cf. *Conf.* 3.7.12–13, on understanding the observance of the Law historically, “though the Law itself is the same always and everywhere.”

Manichees ridiculed and abhorred, the Apostle himself named the seal of the righteousness of faith (6.3). Augustine explodes with impatience at Manichaean squeamishness over God's sovereign decision to seal in the flesh of the circumcised penis his covenant of redemption with the children of Abraham:

It is mere prurient absurdity to find fault with the sign of human regeneration appointed by that God, to whom all things are pure, to be put on the organ of human generation. . . . If you ask, as you often do, whether God could not find some other way of sealing the righteousness of the faith, the answer is, Why not this way, since all things are pure to the pure, much more to God? . . . As for you, you must try not to blush when you are asked whether your God had nothing better to do than to entangle part of his nature with these members that you revile so much. These are delicate subjects to speak of, on account of the penal corruption attending the propagation of man. They are things which call into exercise the modesty of the chaste, the passions of the impure, and the justice of God. (6.3).

The Manichaean aversion to fleshly circumcision had blinded them to the promise of redemption embodied and prefigured in and by that circumcision: the fleshly resurrection of Christ (6.3, 19.9). Had Jews understood the commandment to circumcise *secundum spiritum* and not *secundum carnem* (as Justin and others had criticized them for not doing), neither they nor the Law they were privileged to carry would have prefigured the fundamental mystery of Christianity itself: the revelation of God in the flesh, through Christ's Incarnation, and the redemption of humanity through his Resurrection. The fullness of the myriad Jewish observances—sabbath, circumcision, sacrifices—were thus *sacramenta*: “[signa] cum ad res divinas pertinent.”³⁷ Their being enacted in the flesh was precisely the point.

Thus in keeping the Law *secundum carnem*, the Jews had witnessed to divine truth. But with the coming of Christ, the mystery prefigured in the

37. *Ep.* 138. 7 (CSEL 44, 131); of the Law and its ordinances, e.g., *C. Faust.* 19.13, 16; *Adnotationes in Iob* 30 (CSEL 28.2, 572–76); *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 73.2 (CCSL 39, 1005–7); 74.12 (CCSL 39, 1033–34); *Ep.* 102.2, 12 (CSEL 34.2, 545–46, 554–55); *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* 1.124 (CSEL 85.1, 137–38).

Law had been revealed: no one, Jews included, should any longer preserve the letter of the Law.³⁸ That the Jews should have continued to do so was, Augustine concluded, a great mystery. God had blinded them; and only God knew why. The sins on account of which they had merited this blindness were “hidden, . . . known only to God.”³⁹ It could not, therefore, be the penalty for their most manifest role in killing Christ. But here, again, God brought it about that the Jewish insistence on the letter of the Law worked to providential ends. The Law sealed them with the mark of Cain: like Cain, they lived as fugitive fratricides, driven out from their native land but under the protection of God (12.12–13). And as long as they wrongly construe their heavenly mandate to keep the Law, they serve in perpetuity, till the end of the age, as witness to the Church:

Those who do not receive these truths in their heart for their own good nonetheless carry in their hands, for our benefit, the writings in which these truths are contained. And the unbelief of the Jews increases rather than lessens the authority of these books, for this blindness is itself foretold. They testify to the truth by their not understanding it. (16.21)⁴⁰

Judaism and Christian Identity

These grand theological themes, sounded with great authority in the *Contra Faustum*, will swell to a crescendo in books 15 to 18 in Augustine's mature masterwork, the *City of God*. In keeping with my opening remarks on secularization and identity, however, I would like to turn away from Augustine's Big Ideas to consider, briefly, one small application of them: his argument with Jerome over Galatians 2.

Augustine and Jerome had fallen out over the nature of the argument

38. A frequently sounded theme, e.g., *C. Faust.* 6. 2, where Augustine comments that literal observance (in this instance, circumcision) was nonetheless “certainly suited to past time.” On those who currently Judaize, be they Jew or Gentile, *Ep.* 82.18 (CSEL 34.2, 369–70).

39. “ex aliis occultis peccatis Deo cognitis, venire iustam poenam huius caecitatis . . . et [Jeremias] ostendit occulti eorum meriti fuisse ut non cognoscerent,” *C. Faust.* 13.11.

40. On the origins of Augustine's idea of Jews as a witness people, Fredriksen, “*Excaecati*.”

between Peter and Paul in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14). Jerome, in his commentary, had suggested that the apostles' quarrel had been a pretense enacted for the edification of the community; Augustine protested that this imputation of polite deceit to Scripture undermined its authority.⁴¹ In 397, continuing in this line, Augustine added another challenge: What had been wrong, *in any case*, with these apostles, though Christian, keeping these commandments as Jews? Paul, he insisted, had kept the Law, though he did not hope in it for salvation. (Though once the Law had indeed been necessary for salvation, Augustine observed: the example of the Maccabean martyrs teaches this.)⁴² Further, Paul had permitted other Jewish Christians to keep the Law, preserving their "ancestral traditions": why, then, would he have reprimanded Peter for so doing? The issue was, purely and simply, whether Gentiles should have to keep the Law. They did not. Thus Peter was truly corrected, and Paul truly reported the incident, which was to be understood as a straightforward account of an actual dispute.⁴³

Responding several years later, Jerome does the rhetorical equivalent of hitting Augustine with everything but the kitchen sink:⁴⁴ Origen and other authorities supported Jerome (75.4); Augustine's interpretation virtually advocated Judaizing (75.5); Acts gives evidence that Peter already knew full well that the Law was overthrown (75.7–11); Augustine was claiming that fear of the Jews made Peter and Paul hypocrites vis-à-vis the Gospel, and that Paul was a Judaizer—on and on. And as for those Jews who challenged the aptness of Jerome's new translation of Jonah—"your Jews," as he calls them—clearly they either did not know Hebrew, or else they lied: no surprise, huffed Jerome, since it was well known that

41. *Ep.* 28.3–5 (CSEL 34.1, 107–12), ca. 394/95.

42. *Ep.* 40. 6 (CSEL 34.2, 75–77).

43. "Otherwise, the Holy Scripture, which has been given to preserve the faith of generations to come, would be wholly undermined and thrown into doubt, if the validity of lying were once admitted," *Ep.* 40.5 (CSEL 34.2, 75), trans. based on W. Parsons, *Saint Augustine: Letters*, vol. 1 (New York, 1951). The Jewish *malum* that Paul renounced was not the Law, but the belief that the Law was necessary for Gentiles (40.6). For a recently edited sermon preached at this time on this same theme, see F. Dolbeau, *Revue Bénédictine* 102 (1992): 52–63; for a review of the entire correspondence on Galatians, with interesting observations on its relevance to the Donatist controversy, R. S. Cole-Turner, "Anti-heretical Issues and the Debate over Galatians 2:11–14 in the Letters of St. Augustine to St. Jerome," *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980): 155–65.

44. Aug., *Ep.* 75 (CSEL 34.2, 280–324) = Jerome, *Ep.* 112 (CSEL 55, 367–93).

Jews willingly corrupted even the Hebrew text of Scripture just to spite Christians (75.19–22).⁴⁵

Augustine responded to Jerome's bullying in *Ep.* 82 (ca. 405).⁴⁶ The calm confidence with which he restates his position gives the measure of the extent to which he viewed in historical perspective the Jewish attachment to Jewish law—not just Peter's and Paul's, but even that of Jesus himself. Paul had always and everywhere vigorously denied that Gentiles should observe the Law like the Jews: but Scripture abounds with examples where Paul himself, as a Christian and a Jew, kept the Law.⁴⁷ The first apostolic generation had been right to keep the Law, lest any Gentile Christian, not seeing its essential connection to Christ, think that the Law, like idols, was to be despised.⁴⁸ Jesus himself had received circumcision—not *fallaciter* by his parents, nor because, as an eight-day-old infant, he could not defend himself. He sent the cured leper to a priest "as Moses commanded" (cf. Mk 1:40–44); he himself worshiped at the Temple on the great Jewish feast days. Jesus, in brief, had lived full-heartedly as a Law-observant Jew.⁴⁹ As for the international Jewish conspiracy covertly altering Hebrew biblical texts in order to spite Jerome, Augustine politely concludes, "Would you be so kind as to point out what Jews ever did this?" (82.34).⁵⁰

Augustine was neither a philo-Semite nor a civil libertarian. Current Jewish religious practice repulsed him, and he condemned in strongest terms

45. Cf. *Ep.* 71.3.5 (CSEL 34.2, 253), on the near riot that broke out at service when the bishop of Oea introduced Jerome's new translation of Jonah.

46. CSEL 34.2, 351–87.

47. He adduces Acts 16:3, circumcising Timothy (who was half-Jewish); Acts 18:18, Paul's Nazirite vow at Cenchrae; Acts 21:18–26, Paul's offering of blood sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. I note here that Augustine is a much more tough-minded student of the historical Paul than the vast majority of his modern counterparts in New Testament studies, who continue to insist that, in becoming a follower of Jesus, Paul had renounced the works of the Law. Two recent wrong readings, to quote Gal 2:7: τῆς περιτομῆς, D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993), and τῆς ἀκροβυστίας, N. T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, 1992).

48. A powerful passage, *Ep.* 82.9–15.

49. Another powerful passage, *Ep.* 82.19. Augustine was unaware that the Jesus Seminar would later settle by vote that such passages are Judaizing interpolations; but he was familiar with the argument.

50. He had persistently dismissed Manichaean fantasy on this score; cf. his later remarks, *De civitate Dei* 15.11 (CCSL 48, 467–68).

any Christian flirtation with the observances of the Law.⁵¹ The privileged place in defining Christian community that he granted Israel *secundum carnem*—in interesting contrast to what he was prepared to grant to Manichees, Donatists, or Pelagians—arose out of the dynamics of his theology of history, and his specific battles in defense of the Old Testament against the Manichees. Real Jews had little to do with it.⁵²

We cannot, as a consequence, know very much about contemporary Jewish communities or fourth-fifth century Jewish/Christian relations in North Africa on the basis of Augustine's writings about them. His references to "real" Jews are random and superficial; his interactions, where he mentions them, for the most part strikingly neutral.⁵³ Again, compared with the legal pressure he was prepared to bring to bear on Christian opponents, his principled exemption of Jews from religious coercion might seem striking. It is and it is not. The Jews' protected status was deeply traditional, written for centuries into that extremely conservative social force, Roman law.⁵⁴ What was new was the theological spin he put on it.⁵⁵

Augustine's theology of Judaism countered, in powerful and imaginative ways, the Manichaean arguments against Catholicism. It incidentally affirmed a new kind of Christian identity. By so embedding Jewish legal observance in history, Augustine in effect demythologized, and so secularized, its implications: carnal praxis was not a huge and enduringly indictable moral failing, but divinely mandated action appropriate to those earlier times. Further, by understanding this practice as incarnate prophetic enactment, Augustine domesticated it for Catholic doctrine, relating ancient Jewish observances to current Christian beliefs by way of conformation rather than contrast. His construction of Christian identity consequently neither generated nor required an image of the Jew as a religious antitype.

A certain mildness, accordingly, characterizes much of his discussion of Jews and Judaism. Some Jews may be moved by God to convert to

51. In this letter in particular, *Ep.* 82.18.

52. For the full argument, Fredriksen, "*Excaecati*," esp. 320–24.

53. E.g., inquiring after the meaning of a Hebrew word in the Gospels, *De sermone domini in monte* 1.9.23 (PL 34, 1240–41); settling a legal dispute between a Jew and an episcopal colleague, *Ep.* 8* (CSEL 88, 41–42). See Blumenkranz, *Judenpredigt*, 59–68.

54. See esp. A. Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit, 1987); more discursively, J. Juster, *Les Juifs dans l'Empire Romain*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1914).

55. *C. Faust.* 12–13.

Christ, but that is of no eschatological significance: the community as such will remain Jews till the close of the age (*C. Faust.* 12.12). The Church is the True Israel? Sure, says Augustine: but when people hear "Israel" they think, for good reason, "Jews." Leave the name, then, to them, and avoid confusing matters.⁵⁶

The one place where the Jews retained their old pariah status, and where Augustine stands close to the older anti-Jewish tradition, is on the issue of Jewish political powerlessness. In his view, the consequences of the years 70 and 135 were absolute and eternal: the Jews, like Cain, can never go home again.⁵⁷ Perpetual political desuetude, a people forever without their land, is for Augustine both a quotidian reality and, uncharacteristically, an eschatological fact. This is the one glaring exception to his otherwise stalwart historical agnosticism: empires might come and go, ecclesiastical power wax and wane, but broken Jewish temporal power, tied as it was in the evangelical passion narratives and in christological readings of the classical prophets to the Jewish rejection of Christ, was, by theological necessity, set forever. His general secularization of these other political and social communities notwithstanding, then, Israel *secundum carnem* stood apart. The Jews as a people continued uniquely, even in postbiblical times, to express unambiguously the oracles of God.

56. *Ep.* 196.8–11 (CSEL 57, 221–25).

57. *C. Faust.* 12.12; more dramatic, and with specific reference to the Jewish War in 70, *De civitate Dei* 18.46 (CCSL 48, 644).

On 1 May 1897, responding to the impending meeting of the First Zionist Congress, the Jesuit paper *Civiltà Cattolica* observed that, "according to the Sacred Scriptures, the Jewish people must always live dispersed and wandering among the other nations, so that they may render witness to Christ not only by the Scriptures . . . but by their very existence. As for a rebuilt Jerusalem, which could become the center of a reconstituted state of Israel, we must add that this is contrary to the prediction of Christ Himself"—the argument is pure Augustine. Quotation from S. I. Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism: Conflict in the Holy Land, 1895–1925*, trans. A. Schwarz (Oxford, 1990), 96.