‘Misisti manum tuam ex alto’:
Manichaean Imagery of Christ as God’s Hand in Augustine’s Confessions?*

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Abstract

The article first explores Augustine’s conspicuous references to ‘God’s Hand’ in his Confessions by presenting a fresh translation and brief commentary of the relevant texts. In the commentary special attention is given to the possible significance of these texts to (former) Manichaean readers. It is concluded that Augustine’s eye-catching imagery is not only inspired by biblical language and—in all likelihood—by predecessors in the Christian tradition such as Irenaeus and especially Ambrose, but also strikingly coincides with an essential metaphor of the Manichaeans. This feature once again underlines the importance of the Manichaean element in Augustine’s Confessions.

Keywords

Augustine – Confessions – Manichaeism – Imagery – Metaphorical Language – Christ – Hand of God – Ambrose

1. Introduction

The past years have seen a remarkable focus on the Manichaean element in Augustine’s Confessions. Although this feature did not escape the attention of leading scholars such as Erich Feldmann and James O’Donnell,¹ it has become the

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subject of special investigation in a number of recent studies. The present article may be considered as a contribution to this new trend. Its aim is to examine Augustine’s conspicuous reference to ‘God’s Hand’ in his Confessions by analysing the relevant passages. It will be concluded that Augustine’s eye-catching imagery is not only inspired by biblical language and—in all likelihood—by predecessors in the Christian tradition such as Irenaeus and Ambrose, but also strikingly coincides with an essential concept present in the texts of the Manichaeans and (perhaps) their art.

2. An Overview of Texts from Augustine’s Confessions, with brief Interpretation

The Confessions contain a considerable number of passages in which Augustine makes mention of God’s Hand. I provide here a survey (with translation and brief


3 Or, as we will see in three cases, of ‘Hands’. It may be remarked from the outset that A., although aware of the fact that several biblical texts speak of God’s Hands, in his interpretation reduces the metaphor to relate in essence to one Hand, i.e. Christ as God’s (Right) Hand. Apart from the references given below in the main text and in n. 30, special mention may be made of his remarks on manus [pl.] Dei in en. in Ps. 118, s. 18,1 (CCL 40,1723): ‘Manus ergo Dei sunt potestas Dei. Aut si pluralis numerus eos mouet, quia non dictum est, manus tua, sed, manus tuae, accipiant manus Dei, virtutem et sapientiam Dei, quod utrumque unus dictus est Christus [cf. 1 Cor. 1:24]; qui etiam
commentary) of those texts in which Augustine either explicitly speaks of ‘Your Hand’, or more specifically mentions ‘Your Right Hand’. My overview follows the sequence of the *Confessions*, while in the translation and brief commentary the focus falls on those passages which may be considered as typical of Augustine’s wording.

Texts which explicitly make mention of God’s (Right) Hand comprise the following ones:

i.  *Conf*. 1,24 (CCL 27,13): *Exaudi, domine, deprecationem meam, ne deficiat anima mea sub disciplina tua neque deficiam in confitendo tibi miserationes tuas, quibuscum eruisti me ab omnibus uuis meis pessimis, ut dulescias mibi super omnes seductiones, quas sequebar, et amem te valuedissime et amplexer manum tuam totis praecordiis meis et eruas me ab omni temptatione usque in finem.*

*Transl.*: Hear, Lord, my entreaty (Ps. 60:2), that my soul may not faint under Your discipline (Ps. 83:3; 118:81), nor let me faint in confessing to You all Your mercies (Ps. 106:8.14.21.31) by which You rescued me from all my evil ways (e.g. 4 Reg. 17:13), that You may become more sweet to me than all the seductions I was pursuing, and that I may most strongly love You, and grasp *Your Hand* with all my heart, and You may rescue me from every temptation (Ps. 17:30) until the end (e.g. Ps. 15:11; 37:7).

*Comm.*: As a matter of fact, commentators have detected in this passage several reminiscences and even literal quotes of biblical texts. In this context, it may be specified that Augustine not only uses the (at first hearing: only biblical) metaphor for God’s Hand, but also stresses that God rescues (‘eruisti me ab omnibus uuis meis pessimis’; ‘eruas me ab omni temptatione usque in finem’). He also speaks

intellegitur brachium Domini, ubi legitur: Et brachium Domini cui reuelatum est? [Isa. 53:1]. *Aut accipient manus Dei, Filiium et Spiritum sanctum ... Libetam est igitur quomodo intellegantur manus Dei: dum tamen nec ea quae facit manibus, Verbo facere negetur.* From the passage and its context, it is not clear whose opinion A. had in view. The accepted metaphor of Christ and the Spirit as the two hands of God had been well known since Irenaeus (*haer.* 5,28,4). Important as well for the view of the later A. is his discussion in *en. in Ps.* 118, s. 32,5 on Ps. 118:173 [CCL 40,1774-1775]: *Potest sic accipi, Fiat manus tua, ut manus Dei Christus intelligatur; iuxta illud Isaiae: Et brachium Domini cui reuelatum est? [Isa. 53:1]. Non enim erat factus Vnigenitus, cum per eum facta sint omnia [cf. Ioh. 1:3]; sed factus est ex semine Dauid [cf. Rom. 1:3] ut esset Iesus, id est Salvator, qui iam erat Creator. Sed eum familiare sit scripturae: Fiat manus tua et: Facta est manus Domini [e.g. Ez. 1:3], nescio utrum possit hic sensus in eis locis omnibus obtineri. Sane ubi audimus quod sequitur: Concupiui salutare tuum, Domine [Ps. 118:74]; etiam nolentibus omnibus inimicis, salutare Dei nobis Christus occurrat ...’.—It may also be noted here that in the *conf.*, apart from *dextera*, ‘brachium’, ‘palma’, or other synonyms for ‘manus’ do not occur.

4 As indicated in the translation. It should be noticed that A. often associatively alludes to biblical texts without quoting them literally, and also that he rather freely combines such texts. With regard to the Psalms, these and other features have been thoroughly studied by G.N. Knauer, *Psalmenzitate in Augustins Konfessionen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1955. It is on his analyses that many of my references in this and the following translations are based.
of his own activity: in order to be rescued, he may grasp (amplexor: ‘to grasp’, ‘clasp’, ‘embrace’) God’s Hand. As we will see later more clearly from his conf., in this work God’s Hand often turns out to be a metaphor for Christ.

ii. Conf. 2,3 (CCL 27,18-19): ... domine, qui formas etiam propaginem mortis nostrae, potens imponere lenem manum ad temperamentum spinarum a paradiso tuo seclusarum?

Transl.: ... o Lord, You who shape the propagation of our mortal race, imposing Your gentle Hand to soften the thorns which have no place in Your paradise?

Comm.: God’s gentle Hand later returns as God’s manus mitissima et misericordiae (conf. 6,7), which also has a close parallel in 6,13: ‘manu ualidissima et misericordissima eristi eum tu’. As in these later texts, we may be entitled to understand God’s gentle Hand to be (a symbol of) Christ.

iii. Conf. 3,19 (CCL 27,37): Et misisti manum tuam ex alto et de hac profunda caligine erasti animam meam, cum pro me fieret ad te mea mater, fidelis tua, amplius quam flent matres corporea funera.

Transl.: And You put forth Your Hand from above (Ps. 143:7), and You rescued my soul (Ps. 85:13) out of this deep fog, because my mother, Your faithful one, wept for me before You, more than mothers weep for the bodily death of their children.

Comm.: The two evidently biblical quotes come from the Psalms and, once again, the verb eruo (‘rescue’) is being used. For instance, it is clear from en. in Ps. 143,14 that, for Augustine, ‘Your Hand’ is a metaphor for Christ. The noun caligo (‘fog’, ‘mist’, ‘smog’, ‘darkness’) here and in the following paragraph (3,20: adhuc volui et inuolui illa caligine) in a subtle way seems to refer to Manichaeism, being indicative of the race of darkness in the Latin version of Mani’s Epistula fundamenti (as quoted by Augustine, c. ep. fund. 19: gens caliginis ac fumi plena). Furthermore, to identify the weeping of Augustine’s mother as bringing salvation may recall the Manichaean’s opinion on salvational ‘weeping’, which went far beyond mourning the dead; the introducing cum is a ‘cum causale’, not a ‘cum historicum’.

iv. Conf. 5,1 (CCL 27,57): Accipe sacrificium confessionum mearum de manu linguae meae, quam formasti et excitasti, ut confiteatur nomini tuo, et sana omnia ossa mea, et dicant: domine, quis similis tibi? Neque enim docet te, quid in se agatur, qui tibi confiteatur, quia oculum tuum

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6 A number of Manichaean texts (and rites) imply salvational weeping; see further my ‘Filius istarum lacrimarum’ (forthcoming).
non exclusit cor clausum nec manum tuam repellit duritia hominum, sed soluis eam, cum uoles, aut miserans aut uindicans, et non est qui se abscondat a calore tuo.

Transl.: Accept the sacrifice (Ps. 50:21) of my confessions from the hand of my tongue, which You have formed and stirred up to confess Your name (Ps. 53:8), and heal all my bones and let them say: Lord, who is like You (Ps. 6:3; 34:10)? And yet he who makes confession to You is not instructing You of what is happening within him, for a closed heart does not exclude Your eye nor does man’s hardness of heart repel Your Hand, but You melt it when You will, either in mercy or in punishment, and there is none who can hide himself from Your heat (Ps. 18:7).

Comm.: This ‘most formal preface since Bk. I’ is full of quotations from the Psalms, while the wording ‘hand of my tongue’ is perhaps reminiscent of Prov. 18:21 (‘mors et vita in manibus linguae’). However, one may wonder why Augustine uses the word ‘hand’ here, as he does in the curious expressions ‘hand of my heart’ (manus cordis) in 10,12 and ‘hand of my mouth’ (manus oris mei) in 11,13. As we will see in the course of our analysis, it might be that he is also using the metaphor of the hand in reminiscence of its special significance in Manichaean belief and practice. Although the wording ‘Your Hand’ may firstly be interpreted as being a biblical reminiscence, its association with Augustine’s offering of his ‘sacrifice’ may reveal the explicit Manichaean link between a person’s offering and God’s Hand.

A similar Manichaean context seems to be evoked by the enigmatic (and, up to the present, passed over in commentaries and thus unexplained) statement: ‘And yet he who makes confession to You is not instructing You of what is happening within him’. Manichaean confession (be it by the Auditors or the Elect) directly effects both men’s and God’s existence, because God and the human soul as pars Dei are of the same light substance. The statement that immediately follows (‘for a closed heart does not exclude Your eye nor does man’s hardness of heart repel Your Hand’) may function as an explicit warning against this Manichaean view.

v. Conf. 5,13 (CCL 27,64): Manus enim tuae, deus meus, in abdito prouidentiae tuae, non deserebant animam meam, et de sanguine cordis matris meae per lacrimas eius diebus et noctibus pro me sacrificatur tibi, et egisti mecum miris modis. Tu illud egisti, deus meus. Nam a domino gressus hominis diriguntur, et uiam eius uolet. Aut quae procuratio salutis praeter manum tuam reficientem quae fecisti?

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7 O’Donnell, Confessions, II, 281.
8 Cf. Knauer, Psalmenzitate, 72 and esp. 150-151. Cf. e.g. en. in Ps. 72,30: ‘Why, then, does Scripture speak of “the hands of the tongue”? It means, in the power of the tongue, for ‘out of your mouth you will be justified, and out of your mouth you will be condemned (Mt. 12:37)’.’
Transl.: For Your Hands, my God, in Your hidden providence, did not desert my soul, and out of the blood of my mother’s heart, through her tears that she poured out by day and by night, was a sacrifice offered for me to You, and You dealt with me in wondrous manners. You, my God, did it. For by the Lord the steps of man are directed, and He chooses his way. Or what other provision is there for our salvation except through Your Hand remaking what You have made?

Comm.: These sentences conclude the story of Augustine’s meeting with Faustus and his ensuing estrangement from the Manichaeans. The role of God’s Hand(s) in this whole event is stressed. Remarkable as well is the sacrificial role which (once again, cf. 3,19) is assigned to his mother’s tears.

vi. Conf. 6,6 (CCL 27,77): ... resistens manibus tuis, qui medicamenta fidei confecesti et sparsiisti super morbos orbis terrarum et tantam illis auctoritatem tribuisti.

Transl.: ... resisting the Hands of You, who has prepared the medicines of faith, and has spread them over the diseases of the whole world, and has given them such great authority.

Comm.: With reference to Ps. 16:8 (‘resistentibus dexterae tuae custodi me’), Knauer considers the manus tuae to be a metaphor for Christ. This seems to be confirmed by Augustine’s speaking of the ‘medicines of faith’: Christ as medicus with his medicina is a well-known figure of speech in his writings, for instance in conf. 9,35 (see below). Similarly, it was a well-known metaphor among the Manichaeans, for instance in their Psalms.

vii. Conf. 6,7 (CCL 27,78): Deinde paulatim tu, domine, manu mitissima et misericordissima pertractans et componens cor meum ...

Transl.: Then, little by little, You Lord, with Your most gentle and most merciful Hand, touched and calmed my heart ...

Comm.: Here the Hands of the previous lines of conf. 6,6 may—again, cf. 5,13—be considered to be one Hand, i.e., Christ.

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10 Cf. the plural ‘Your Hands’ in 13,1 and 20. Although A. accepts the possibility to see the plural as referring to Christ and the Spirit, in essence he considers it to be a metaphor for Christ. Cf. n. 3 above and the commentary on 13,1 and 13,20. The same context of creation (and recreation) through Christ is evoked by the concluding sentence of our passage: ‘Aut quae procuratio salutis praeter manum tuam reficientem quae fecisti?’

11 Knauer, Psalmenzitate, 121-122 n. 4.


13 See the quotes from the Coptic Manichaean Psalter in ‘Manichaean Imagery of Christ as God’s Hand’, section A 2, iii.
viii. Conf. 6,13 (CCL 27,83): *Et inde tamen manu ualidissima et misericordissima eruisti eum tu ...*

*Transl.:* Nevertheless, from this You rescued him by *Your most mighty and most merciful Hand* ...

*Comm.*: The most merciful Hand of conf. 6,7 here returns in the case of Alypius’ salvation, now also characterized as being ‘most mighty’.

ix. Conf. 6,21 (CCL 27,88): *... et deligatus morbo carnis mortifera suauitate trabebam catenam meam solui timens et quasi concusso ulnere repellens verba bene suadentis tamquam manum soluentis.*

*Transl.:* ... and fettered by the disease of the flesh and its deadly sweetness, I dragged my chain, fearing to be loosed; and, as if it struck my wound, I pushed aside the words of good advice, as it were the Hand that would set me free.

*Comm.*: The passage refers to Alypius’ advice on abstinence from marrying a wife, which advice Augustine was unable to follow due to his being fettered by the bonds of carnal lust. The good advice is compared with God’s Hand which would set Augustine free; cf. e.g. the beginning of 9,1: ‘*Dirupisti vincula mea*’ (= Ps. 115:16).

x. Conf. 6,24 (CCL 27,90): *Ex quo consilio deridebas nostra et tua praeparabas nobis daturus escam in oportunitate et aperturus manum atque impleturus animas nostras benedictione.*

*Transl.:* Out of that council (Prov. 19:21; Ps. 32:11) You laughed at our plans and prepared Your own, to give us food in due time and to open *Your Hand* and fill our souls with blessing (Ps. 144:15-16).

*Comm.*: The plan of Augustine and his friends for an ideal community fell through. As in 6,17 where Alypius, Nebridius and Augustine were looking to God ‘to give them their food (*escam*) in due time’ (Ps. 114:15; 103:27), so here the same metaphor appears, now with the mentioning of God’s Hand. In wondering why, in his conf., Augustine so often uses alimentary metaphors, one may find a likely explanation in his anti-Manichaean stance. The real food he (and others) will discover is Christ (cf. e.g. 7,24; 13,23; 13,32); accordingly, there seems to be good reason to interpret God’s Hand here also as referring to Christ.

xi. Conf. 6,26 (CCL 27,90): *Tibi laus, tibi gloria, fons misericordiarum! Ego fiebam miserior et tu propinquior. Aderat iam iamque dextera tua raptura me de caeno et ablatura,*

*Comm.*: The real food he (and others) will discover is Christ (cf. e.g. 7,24; 13,23; 13,32); accordingly, there seems to be good reason to interpret God’s Hand here also as referring to Christ.

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15 A considerable number of MSS read *ablatura*: ‘to wash me clean’, i.e., by baptism.
Transl.: Praise to You, glory to You, fountain of all mercies! I was more miserable and You nearer. Already Your Right Hand drew nearer to seize me and pull me out of the dirt, and I did not know it.

Comm.: Manichaean texts frequently speak of the Right Hand which saves from the misery of this worldly existence. Already Mani used the metaphor: ‘Sed et dextera luminis tueatur et eripiat vos ab omni incursione maligna et a laqueis mundi? ‘And may indeed the Right Hand of the Light protect and rescue you from every evil incursion and from the snares of the world’ (c. ep. fund. 11, CSEL 25,207; cf. c. Fel. 1,16, CSEL 25,819). Moreover, it may seem to be depicted in Manichaean art. Moreover, it may seem to be depicted in Manichaean art. After Augustine, like Mani and his followers, often explicitly considered the Right Hand to be Christ. With Knauer, we may see ‘iam iamque’ as an expression of ‘steigend[er] Erwartung’; this rising expectation will be fulfilled in Augustine’s conversion as described in conf. 8.

xii. Conf. 7,12 (CCL 27,101): Et residebat tumor meus ex occulta manu medicinae tuae, aciesque conturbata et contenebrata mentis meae acri collyrio salubrium dolorum de die in diem sanabatur.

Transl.: And my swollen pride subsided through the secret Hand of Your medicine, and the troubled and darkened eye of my mind was healed by the sharp eye-salve of salutary sorrows from day to day.

Comm.: For Augustine, both the Hand of Your medicine (cf. conf. 9,35 and 10,69 below) and the eye-salve (collyrium; cf. Apoc. 3:18 and e.g. Io. eu. tr. 2,16) refer to Christ. Manichaean texts abundantly testify to the Manichaeans’ speaking of Christ as being both men’s physician and medicine. The curious expression ‘salutary sorrows’ might be understood in line with the typical Manichaean thinking of ‘salutary tears’ in conf. 3,19 and 5,13. The whole paragraph 7,12 functions as a pivot at which juncture Augustine summarizes the preceding (i.e., mainly Manichaean) phase of his life before he starts his description of a new development, i.e., his becoming acquainted with ‘some books of the Platonists’.

16 Cf. ‘Manichaean Imagery of Christ as God’s Hand’, nearly passim.
17 See ‘Manichaean Imagery’, section 2 B: Testimonies from Manichaean Art?
18 Knauer, Psalmenzitate, 42 n. 1.
19 Or perhaps, if we follow the reading ablutura (as O’Donnell has most recently done in his Confessions, I, 71; cf. II, 386), in A.’s baptism which is briefly mentioned in conf. 9. However, I deem this reading less likely: see the phrase ‘dextera tua suscepit me et inde ablatum’ in 8,2 (text xv below).
20 Cf. his ‘sanare tumorem’ in 7,24: ‘verbum enim tuum, aeterna veritas ... sanans tumorem et nutriens amorem’.
21 See ‘Manichaean Imagery’, in particular the quotes from the Coptic Manichaean Psalmbook in section A 2, iii.
xiii. *Conf.* 7,21 (CCL 27,106): *Et respecxi alia et uidi tibi debere quia sunt et in te cuncta finita, sed alter, non quasi in loco, sed quia tu es omnitenens manu veritate ...*

*Transl.*: And I reflected upon other things and saw that to You they owe their being and that in You all things are finite, but in another way, not as though contained in a place, but because You hold all things in Your *Hand* of Truth ... 

*Comm.*: ‘Manu veritate’ may also be translated as ‘in/by Your Hand, in/by Your Truth’, but translating ‘veritate’ as an appositional genitive seems preferable. Either way, Your Hand here appears to denote Christ, who is also the Truth (among the many instances in Augustine’s œuvre, see e.g. *en.* in Ps. 39,18: ‘Vnde ueritas Christus? ego sum ueritas’; *en.* in Ps. 103, s. 3,14: ‘ueritas est, ueritas Christus est’; *Io.* *eu.* *tr.* 46,4: ‘quid est Christus? ueritas’; *ep.* *Io.* *tr.*, *tr.* 3: ‘quis est Christus? ueritas’).

xiv. *Conf.* 7,27 (CCL 27,111): *Et gravata est super nos manus tua ...*

*Transl.*: And Your Hand has grown heavy upon us (cf. Ps. 31:4) ... 

*Comm.*: Your Hand here might denote Christ. In his *conf.*, Augustine sometimes speaks of humiliation and other chastisements as God’s manner to correct (cf. e.g. the passage 2,4: *et excessi omnia legitima tua nec euasi flagella tua ...* etc. and his speaking of *amaritudo* in 6,17: *Et in omni amaritudine, quae nostros saeculares actus de misericordia tua sequebatur ...*). Besides, he terms Christ as *uirga tui* in 9,17.

xv. *Conf.* 8,2 (CCL 27,114): *... et dextera tua suscepit me et inde ablatum posuisti, ubi connualescerem ...*

*Transl.*: ... but Your *Right Hand* upheld me (Ps. 17:36; cf. 62:9) and took me thence and placed me where I could recover ... 

*Comm.*: Early in the pivotal book telling Augustine’s conversion to Catholic Christianity, God’s Right Hand seems once again to denote Christ, while the text also resonates his rescuing22 and being a physician. Manichaeans spoke of Christ in the same way.

xvi. *Conf.* 9,1 (CCL 27,133): *Tu autem, domine, bonus et misericors et dextera tua respiiciens profunditatem mortis meae et a fundo cordis mei exhauriens abyssum corruptionis.*

*Transl.*: But You, Lord, are good and merciful (Ps. 85:12; 102:8), and Your *Right Hand* took notice of the profundity of my death, and removed even from the bottom of my heart that abyss of corruption. 

*Comm.*: At the beginning of the book relating his baptism, Augustine once more appears to speak of Christ in the metaphor of God’s Right Hand. Many

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22 *Suscipio* also means ‘to take up’ and ‘adopt’; cf. e.g. Vergilius’ use. Perhaps the full quote resounds the Roman custom to take up a new-born child from the ground, signifying its rescue and acknowledgement.
Manichaean texts not only contain this metaphor, but they also typically refer to this material world and—not least—the material body as ‘the abyss’.\(^{23}\)

xvii. \textit{Conf.} 9,9 (CCL 27,138): \textit{Et tu, domine, iam magnificaueras sanctum tuum, suscitans eum a mortuis et collocans ad dexteram tuam, unde mitteret ex alto promissionem suam, paracletum, spiritum ueritatis. Et miserat eum iam, sed ego nesciebam.}

\textit{Transl.:} And You, Lord, had already magnified Your holy one (Ps. 4:4), raising him from the dead and placing him at \textit{Your Right Hand} (Eph. 1:20), whence from on high he would send his promise (Lk. 24:49), the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth (John 14:16-17). And He had sent him already (cf. Acts 2:1-4), but I did not know it.

\textit{Comm.:} ‘Your Right Hand’ here means the place, but at the same time seems to denote the person sitting there, i.e. Christ. The Manichaeans spoke of Christ in the same manner, but greatly differed in their view of the Holy Spirit. The whole paragraph and its context, having a strong anti-Manichaeian focus and being dispersed with biblical quotes,\(^{24}\) opposes their opinion on Mani as being the Paraclete and Spirit of Truth, a view Augustine—in his ignorance—once shared.

xviii. \textit{Conf.} 9,35 (CCL 27, 153): … \textit{exaudi me per medicinam uulnerum nostrorum, quae pependit in ligno et sedens ad dexteram tuam te interpellat pro nobis.}

\textit{Transl.:} Hear me (e.g. Ps. 142:11) through the medicine of our wounds, who hung upon the wood (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13) and who, sitting at \textit{Your Right Hand} (Ps. 109:1), makes intercession to You for us (Rom. 8:34).

\textit{Comm.:} Again we encounter Christ at God’s Right Hand, a biblical image well known to both Augustine and the Manichaeans. The same is not true, however, for the metaphor of Christ as medicine: strictly speaking it is not biblical, but obviously shared by both Augustine\(^{25}\) and his former coreligionists.\(^{26}\)

xix. \textit{Conf.} 10,5 (CCL 27,157): \textit{Animus ille hoc faciat fraternus, non extraneus, non filiorum alienorum, quorum os locutum est vanitatem, et dextera eorum dextera iniquitatis …}


\(^{24}\) See e.g. Kotzé, ‘Psalm 4’ (n. 2).

\(^{25}\) See in the \textit{conf.}, among many other other texts, the passages quoted from 7,12 above and 10,69 (as well as 10,42 and 10,44!) below. Cf. e.g. \textit{ep.} 63,2: ‘... \textit{sub illius medicinalem dexteram confugiendo sanarentur}’.

\(^{26}\) See the many texts quoted in ‘Manichaean Imagery’. 
Transl.: Let it be a brotherly mind that does this, not the mind of a stranger nor that of the sons of strangers, whose mouth speaks vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of iniquity (Ps. 143:7-8).

Comm.: Although in its second part a ‘simple’ quote from Ps. 143, this sentence might be a direct stab at the Manichaeans’ concept of the Right Hand, as may be evidenced both by the context and the quotes from the same Psalm directed against the Manichaeans elsewhere in the conf.28 The whole paragraph 5 is a plea for true Christian brotherhood and may be read in contrasting parallel with Augustine’s former Manichaean brotherhood as, for instance, described in conf. 4,13.

xx. Conf. 10,42 (CCL 27,177): Numquid non potens est manus tua, deus omnipotens, sanare omnes languores animae meae atque abundantiore gratia tua lascivos motus etiam mei soporis extingueres?

Transl.: Is not Your Hand able (Num. 11:23), almighty God, to heal all the diseases (Ps. 102:3; Mt. 4:23) of my soul and by Your more abundant grace to extinguish even the lascivious stirrings of my sleep?

Comm.: The passage apparently interweaves Num. 11:23 (‘Numquid ... manus tua’) and Ps. 102:3 (‘sanare omnes languores’). Again, the Hand of God, which heals all ills (cf. Mt. 4:23), seems to denote Christ.

xxi. Conf. 10,44 (CCL 27,178): His temptatibus cotidie conor resistere et invoco dexteram tuam et ad te refero aestus meos, quia consilium mihi de hac re nondum stat.

Transl.: Every day I try to resist these temptations, and I invoke Your Right Hand and I bring my impulses before You, because in this matter I have not yet achieved a resolution.

Comm.: As in the just quoted case of his sexual impulses, Augustine here invokes God’s Right Hand—i.e., in all likelihood, Christ—to cure his temptations in the matter of eating and drinking.


Transl.: So, then, have I considered the diseases of my sins in that threefold concupiscence (cf. 1 Jn. 2:16) and invoked Your Right Hand to my salvation.

Comm.: Again the invocation of God’s Right Hand, which seems to refer to Christ as the physician who cures.

27 Sc. ‘love in me what You teach us to be worthy of love, and deplore in me what You teach us to be deplorable’.
28 E.g. conf. 3,19 (above); 11,40 (‘Videant itaque nullum tempus esse posse creatura et desinant istam uanitatem loqui’; cf. Ps. 143:8).
xxiii. *Conf.* 10,69 (CCL 27, 193): *Merito mibi spes ualida in illo est, quod sanabis omnes languores meos per eum, qui sedet ad dexteram tuam et te interpellat pro nobis: alioquin desperarem. Multi enim et magni sunt idem languores, multi sunt et magni; sed amplior est medicina tua.*

*Transl.*: With good reason is my hope fixed on him, because You will heal all my diseases (Ps. 102:3; Mt. 4:23) through him, who sits at Your Right Hand (Ps. 109:5) and intercedes with You for us (Rom. 8:34); otherwise, I would despair. Many and great are those diseases, many and great indeed; but wider-reaching is Your medicine.

*Comm.*: Near the end of the book in which Augustine reflects on his present state, he once again evokes the image of Christ at God’s Right Hand⁵⁹ and stresses that Christ is God’s medicine.

xxiv. *Conf.* 11,4 (CCL 27,196): *Obsecro per dominum nostrum Iesum Christum filium tuum, nimirum dexterae tuae, filium hominis, quem confirmasti tibi mediatorem tuum et nostrum, per quem nos quaestisti non quaerentes te … per eum te obsecro, qui sedet ad dexteram tuam et te interpellat pro nobis, in quo sunt omnes thesaures sapientiae et scientiae absconditi.*

*Transl.*: I beseech through our Lord Jesus Christ Your son, the man of Your Right Hand, the son of man, whom You have established for Yourself (Ps. 79:18) as Your mediator and ours (1 Tim. 2:5), through whom You sought us when we were not seeking You (Rom. 10:20; cf. Isa. 65:1) … I beseech You through him, who sits at Your Right Hand and intercedes to You for us (Rom. 8:34), in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3).

*Comm.*: Christ is both the man of God’s Right Hand and He who sits at God’s Right Hand. The words ‘in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col. 2:3) may be appreciated by (former) Manichaeans in particular.⁶⁰

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⁵⁹ And, at the same time, being God’s Right Hand; cf. e.g. the quoted passages from Book 10 above. As in the NT and—as we saw in the preceding article, ‘Manichaean Imagery’—in Manichaean parlance, Christ is described both as sitting at God’s Right Hand and being God’s Right Hand. For the NT manner of speaking, see e.g. L. Hurtado, ‘Two Case Studies in Earliest Christological Readings of Biblical Texts’, in: M.R. Malcolm & M. Keynes (eds.), *All that the Prophets Have Declared: The Appropriation of Scripture in the Emergence of Christianity*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press 2015, 3-23.

xxv. Conf. 11,39 (CCL 27,214): *Sed quoniam melior est misericordia tua super uitas, ecce distentio est uita mea, et me suscepit dextera tua in domino meo, mediatore filio hominis inter te unum et nos multos ...*

*Transl.*: But ‘because Your mercy is more than lives’ (Ps. 62:4), see how my life is but a distraction, and *Your Right Hand* upheld me (Ps. 17:36; 62:9) in the person of my Lord, the son of man who is mediator between You, the One, and us, the many (1 Tim. 2:5) ...

*Comm.*: The Plotinian (but also Manichaean) language of *distentio* is surrounded by quotations from the Psalms, including a final one on ‘God’s Right Hand’, which denotes—without a doubt—Christ.

xxvi. Conf. 13,1 (CCL 27, 242): *... et praeuenisti omnia bona merita mea, et retribueris manibus tuis, quibus me fecisti ...*

*Transl.*: ... and You have anticipated all my good merits, rewarding the work of *Your Hands* by which You made me (Ps. 118:73) ...

*Comm.*: As already seen above (n. 3), according to *en. in Ps.* 118, s. 18,1, it may be accepted that the image of God’s Hands refers both to Christ and the Spirit. However, it is imperative to see that, in terms of God’s act of creation, it is Christ who is in view: ‘Liberum est igitur quomodo intellegantur manus Dei: dum tamen nec ea quae facit manibus, Verbo facere negetur’.


*Transl.*: For also the sea is Yours and You made it, and the dry land *Your Hands* have formed (Ps. 94:5).

*Comm.*: Yet again on God’s Hands in His work of creation. Augustine’s identification of God’s Hands which formed the dry land with Christus Verbum is explict in *Gn. litt.* 6,12: ‘Certe enim caelum uerbo fecit, quia dixit et factum est; scriptum est tamen: et opera manuum sunt caeli [Ps. 101:26]. Et de hoc imo quasi fundo mundi scriptum est: quoniam ipsius est mare, et ipse fecit illud, et aridam terram manus eius finxerunt [Ps. 94:5’.

3. Summary and Preliminary Conclusion

From the above overview we see that, in his *Confessions*, Augustine speaks ten times of God’s *dextera* (6,26; 8,2; 9,1; 9,9; 9,35; 10,44; 10,66; 10,69; 11,4; 11,39, to which might be added 10,5 as the eleventh instance). Although it does not become evident from the first instances, while also in a number of cases *dextera Dei* refers to the place at God’s right side, in 11,39 (but see already 11,4: *Iesum Christum filium*

31 Cf. e.g. BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 2, 330-331.
Augustine most explicitly states that he understands God’s Right Hand to be Christ. It is difficult to suppose that a top rhetor such as Augustine, who moreover addresses a reading public which as a rule is very well acquainted with rhetorical devices, uses a metaphor purporting a different meaning at different times. There seems to be good reason to suppose that in most or even in (nearly) all cases in his Confessions in which he speaks of ‘God’s Right Hand’, he means Christ.

We may discover the same denotation in his reference to manus tua. Augustine uses this expression, either literally or in an equivalent sense (e.g. lenem manum; manus mitissima et misericordiae, manu nulidissima et misericordissima), as well as ten times in his Conf., i.e. in 1,24; 2,3; 3,19; 5,1; 5,13; 6,7; 6,13; 7,12; 7,27 and 10,42. Rereading all these passages from the perspective that God’s dextera often seems to denote Christ, the same can be said of manus tua. This means, for instance, that ‘Your Hand’ in 3,19 (Misisti manum tuam ex alto: ‘You put forth Your Hand from above’) is a metaphor of Christ.

The three instances in which Augustine only speaks of ‘Hand’ (6,21; 6,24; 7,21) can possibly be read from the same perspective, namely that the ‘Hand’ [sc. of God] denotes Christ. Perhaps this even applies to those four passages (5,13; 6,6; 13,1; 13,20) in which Augustine uses the plural ‘Hands’: as it has become evident from the just mentioned passages, and also from remarks of Augustine made elsewhere, he understands God’s Hands (manus, pl.) as essentially denoting Christ.

The main results of our overview of the texts may be summarized as follows:
— in his Confessions, Augustine frequently speaks of God’s ‘(Right) Hand’ in an emphatic way;
— in many of these cases, God’s ‘(Right) Hand’ turns out to be a metaphor for Christ;
— again and again, God’s ‘(Right) Hand’ is characterized by its rescuing, protecting and healing function.

32 As a matter of fact, the metaphor is also present in other writings of A. See, e.g., his en. in Ps. 108,29 (‘Et sciant quoniam manus tua haec, et tu, Domine, fecisti eam [Ps. 108:27]? Intelligamus itaque manum Dei esse Christum? unde alibi dicitur: Et brachium Domini cui reuelatum est? [Isa. 53:1]. Haec manus et erat, et fecit eam, quia in principio erat Verbum, et Verbum caro factum est [Ioh. 1:14] ...’; adu. Iud. 7: ‘et perfice eam quam plantavit dextera tua et super filium hominis, quem confirmasti tibi [Ps. 79:16]. ... Non enim Christus aliam plantavit ... Fiat manus tua super uirum dexterae tuae, et super filium hominis, quem confirmasti tibi [Ps. 79:18]. Per hunc filium hominis, id est Christum Iesum ...’; c. s. Arrian. 19, with reference to Isa. 48:12-16; s. 20,1: ‘dei medicinalem dexteram’; etc. See also n. 3 above.

33 The passage from conf. 10,5 (text xix above) may only be included when it is a direct stab at the Manicheans’ concept of God’s Right Hand.

34 Conf. 1,24: eruisti, eruas; 3,19: eruisti; 6,13: eruisti; 8,2: suscepit; 11,39: suscepit; cf. 6,26: raptura; 9,1: respiciens; 10,44: inuoca; 10,66: inuocati. On the interchange of eruere with eripere in the Latin Bible
All this strikingly coincides with the Manichaean parlance of Christ as God’s (Right) Hand. However, the metaphor not only occurs in Augustine and in Manichaeism, but also has its place in the writings of some of Augustine’s predecessors. A few brief remarks on this phenomenon are in order.

4. Remarks on God’s Hand in the pre-Augustinian Tradition

In searching the writings of Augustine’s predecessors in the mainstream Christian tradition, one finds the first clear use of the metaphor in Irenaeus. I already mentioned his *Haer.* 5,28,4, where he speaks of Christ and the Holy Spirit as the two Hands of God. Several other texts of Irenaeus, most of which occur in his *Haereses* and one in his *Demonstratio*, state the same. Sometimes he speaks of only one Hand, which at least in one case (and for several OT instances!) is identified as the Son of God. More or less clear identifications occur already in Justin Martyr as well as, for instance, in Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Athanasius, Cyrill of

MSS, Knauer, *Psalmenzitate*, 64 n. 1 remarks: ‘α [= Veronensis, s. VI-VII] hat statt “eripio” fast immer “eruo”: Ps. 6,5. 16,13. 17,44. 24,20 usw. ...’, which turns out to have become the predominant verb used in the MSS of A.’s *conf.* Curiously, the Latin Manichaean texts (cf. ‘Manichaean Imagery’, section A 1,ii) always have the verb *eripere.*

In the just mentioned texts speaking of *eruere* or *suscipere*, the rescuing and protecting function partly overlap. Protection may be especially heard in 5,13 (*procuratio*, cf. n. 10) and in 10,44: *innoco dexteram tuam* (sc. to protect against temptations).

In *Haer.* 5,5,2 (SC 153, 66-68): *‘Quae igitur illis adfuit manus Dei et inopinata et impossibilia naturae hominum in eis perficiens, quid mirum si in his qui translati sunt effecit alquid inopinatum, deserviens voluntati Patris? Hic autem est Filius Dei ...’.*


See n. 3.


*Haer.* 5,5,2 (SC 153, 66-68): *‘Quae igitur illis adfuit manus Dei et inopinata et impossibilia naturae hominum in eis perficiens, quid mirum si in his qui translati sunt effecit alquid inopinatum, deserviens voluntati Patris? Hic autem est Filius Dei ...’.*

Alexandria, and Gregory of Nyssa.\footnote{Tert., \textit{adv. Herm} 45,2 (CCL 1,434; SC 439,198 with commentary by F. Chapot on p. 428-429); Hipp., \textit{Dan.} 2,33,2 (GCS Hippol. 1,107); Cypr., \textit{ad Quir.} 2,4 (CCL 3,22); Ath., \textit{decr. Nic. Syn.} 7,4 (cf. G.W.H. Lampe, \textit{A Patristic Greek Lexicon}, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1961, 1521 11 i: ‘theol. of Logos or Son as hand of God’, who here and also sub 12 mentions some other instances); Cyr. Alex., \textit{in Ps.} 97 (PG 69,1253 BC); Gr. Nyss., \textit{vit. Moys.} 2 (7,1,41f. Jaeger/Musorillo) re Ex. 4:6. Cf. e.g. K. Groß, \textit{Menschenhand und Gotteshand in Antike und Christentum}, Stuttgart: Hiersemann 1985, 431-432 and 446.} While one could expect the identification of God’s (Right) Hand with Christ to have been a leading motif of early Christian theology and biblical interpretation, as far as I can see\footnote{Curiously, there is still no in-depth study of the theme. The usually thorough R\textit{AC} and its ‘Nachträge’ in \textit{Jb-AC} do not contain a separate lemma on the theme of Christ as (God’s) Hand (although such a one was promised in the lemma on ‘Christus epitheta’, R\textit{AC} 3, 1957, 26, while sub ‘Hand I’, \textit{RAC},13, 1986, 402 it runs: ‘s. die Nachträge’). Lemmata such as ‘Finger’ (R\textit{AC} 7, 1969, 909-946, ‘Jesus, II-III’ (R\textit{AC} 17, 1996, 821-837; 837-878) or ‘Dextrarum iunctio’ (R\textit{AC} 3, 1957, 881-888) are of little help. A very extensive treatment of the subject of God’s Hand has, however, been provided by Karl Groß in his just mentioned book \textit{Menschenhand und Gotteshand}. Also here I would like to express my sincere thanks to Prof. Dr. Georg Schöllgen, Director of the Franz Joseph Dölger-Institut at Bonn and editor-in-chief of the R\textit{AC}, for his reference (email 9-8-2017) to the 537 paged book of Groß, who originally was commissioned to write the lemmata ‘Hand’ and ‘Handauflegung’ (cf. ‘Vorwort’ by Wolfgang Speyer to Groß’ book, p. VII). Yet even Groß only deals with the metaphor of Christ as God’s (Right) Hand in passing.} the testimonies are relatively scarce and less manifest than one might suppose. An evident exception, however, turns out to be Ambrose, in whose writings the metaphor abounds. Following the sequence of his works as presented in Brepols’ \textit{Library of Latin Texts},\footnote{See \url{http://www.brepolis.net} (last consulted 2017-07-20).} one first encounters the identification of Christ with God’s Right Hand in Ambrose’s \textit{Exameron}\footnote{Exam. 2,1,3 (CSEL 32,43) ‘unde et ipse [sc. Moses] att. dextera manus tua, domine, glorificata est in uirtute, dextera manus tua, domine, confregit inimicos [= Ex. 15:6] (from the wider context as well as Ambrose’s explanations elsewhere—see the next one and further below—it is evident that, according to him, Christ is God’s Right Hand); 6,9,69 (CSEL 32,257): ‘… manus … cuius vocabulo non designatus est se dei filius declarare dicente David: dextera domini fecit uirtutem, dextera domini exaltatuit me [= Ps. 117:16]’. Etc.} and \textit{De Isaac et anima}\footnote{Isaac 8,75 (CSEL 32,694): ‘Christus … ipse dextera, per quem patri deo nostrum sacrificium deferamus’.} \footnote{See \textit{expl. Ps. XII}, \textit{expl. Ps.} 43,12 (CSEL 64,270): ‘sed dextera dei credat se esse protectum dicens: dextera domini fecit uirtutem, dextera domini exaltatuit me [= Ps. 117,16] … in quibus omnibus Christus est protector, dextera, defensor et gladius’ and \textit{expl. Ps.} 47,18 (CSEL 64,357-358).} We find the same identification in his \textit{Explanatio Psalmorum XII}\footnote{E.g. \textit{Exp. Ps.} 118,11,4 (CSEL 62,235): ‘sitiuit in te anima mea subiecit infra adhaesit post te anima mea, me suscepit dextera tua [Ps. 62,2; 62:9]. (...) suscipliens ergo dextera [tua] animam meam et de sua uirtute mibi in pertiens facit eam esse quod non erat, ut dicit: uiuo autem iam non ego, uiuit autem in me Christus [Gal. 2:20]’; \textit{Exp. Ps.} 118,22,22 (CSEL 62,499):}. In the last mentioned exposition the author not only depicts Christ as God’s \textit{dextera},\footnote{E.g. \textit{Exp. Ps.} 118,11,4 (CSEL 62,235): ‘sitiuit in te anima mea subiecit infra adhaesit post te anima mea, me suscepit dextera tua [Ps. 62,2; 62:9]. (...) suscipliens ergo dextera [tua] animam meam et de sua uirtute mibi in pertiens facit eam esse quod non erat, ut dicit: uiuo autem iam non ego, uiuit autem in me Christus [Gal. 2:20]’; \textit{Exp. Ps.} 118,22,22 (CSEL 62,499):} but also identifies God’s Hand with the Hand of...
the Son and, with reference to *Cant. 2:6*, repeatedly speaks of Christ’s own *dextera* and *laeva*.\(^{49}\) One may suppose that this interpretation has been influenced by Origen’s exegesis, according to which the Left Hand is seen as referring to the temporal benefits of richness and honour brought about by Christ, while the Right Hand is described as providing the eternal reward of ‘length of life’.\(^{50}\) In Ambrose’s *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, the metaphor of Christ as *dextera Dei* is also clearly present,\(^{51}\) as well as in his *De officiis*\(^{52}\) and, for instance, *De spiritu sancto*.\(^{53}\)


\(^{50}\) Cf. e.g. *Exp. Ps. 118,22,22* (CSEL 62,499-500).


\(^{52}\) *De eff. 3,15,95* (CCL 15,189) with reference to Ex. 4:6f.: ‘*Merito manum misit quia dextera Dei Christus est* …’. 

There seems to be clear evidence that Augustine, during his time in Milan in 387, heard sermons of Ambrose on the Gospel of Luke which, moreover, not infrequently targeted the Manichaens. The same goes for the Exameron sermons, which even appear to date from the Holy Week of 386, i.e. the time of Augustine’s baptism and its preceding instruction. As regards Ambrose’s *De spiritu sancto* and his explanations of the Psalms (respectively dating from before and shortly after Augustine’s arrival in Milan), one can safely assume Augustine’s familiarity with them, as with so many of Ambrose’s other works. With Antoon Bastiaensen one may conclude: ‘l’influence d’Ambroise a été décisive et permanente’.

5. Conclusion

The specific place of the metaphor of Christ as God’s ‘(Right) Hand’, both in Augustine’s *Confessions* as well as in Manichaeism and a predecessor like Ambrose, gives rise to the following conclusions. The first one is that, by emphatically using a well-known metaphor, Augustine is able to address his Christian ‘brothers’ who appear to have been his first readers. Many of them will have been acquainted with Ambrose’s writings, or even belonged to his Milanese circle. The second one is that Manichaeism seems to have primed Augustine to gravitate to the image of the Right Hand. Via this metaphor he was able to subtly appeal to the Manichaens. It may be recalled that Augustine creates a strong impression of having already obtained a thorough knowledge of their writings after becoming a Manichaean auditor. As we have seen, in their texts (and maybe their art) the figure of Christ as God’s Right Hand had a prominent place. By employing this metaphor, the ‘protreptic-paraenetic purpose’ of the *Confessions* with regard to the Manichaens excellently comes to the fore. In the preceding article on the imagery of God’s Hand in the Manichaean texts, I also indicated that the Roman Manichaean Secundinus already stressed the central role of Christ as ‘the Right

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54 See e.g. Courcelle, *Recherches*, 97-98.
57 See e.g. A. Bastiaensen, ‘Augustin et ses prédécesseurs latins chrétiens’, in: den Boeft & van Oort (éd.), *Augustiniana Traiectina* (n. 37), 30-34.
59 For those Christian (i.e., Catholic) ‘fratres’, see e.g. *conf.* 10,4-5 and *retr.* 2,6.
60 Who in *conf.* 9,9 are even directly addressed, while in the context (see text xvii above) Augustine speaks of God’s *dextera*.
61 Cf. e.g. J. van Oort, ‘Young Augustine’s Knowledge of Manichaeism. An Analysis of the *Confessions* and Some Other Relevant Texts’, *VC* 62 (2008) 441-466.
62 See e.g. Kotzé, *Augustine’s Confessions. Communicative Purpose and Audience* (n. 2), passim.
Hand of the truth’. From his letter to Augustine, we know how much he was incited to address his former co-religionist after reading his *Confessions*.\(^{63}\)

An essential aspect of Augustine’s *Confessions* may thus be read in a new way. In light of the previous analyses one could also infer, as a likely probability, that it is not by chance that Augustine so often characterizes his *conf.* as a *sacrificium* or *hostia*.\(^{64}\) It brings to mind an imagery which may have been co-inspired and excellently understood by the Manichaeans as well.

\(^{63}\) E.g. Courcelle, *Recherches*, 236-238.

\(^{64}\) E.g. *conf*. 4,1; 5,1; 8,1; 9,1; 11,3; 12,33. But also see, for instance, *conf*. 9,17: ‘*Accipe confessiones meas et gratiarum actiones ...*’.