

The few and the many: A motif of Augustine's controversy with the Manichaeans

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It is one fundamental conviction of ancient philosophy that, in contrast to the vast majority, only few are able to gain knowledge of truth. This axiom, which also underlies Cicero's *Hortensius*, is adapted by the young Augustine. When looking for a concept of truth that combines the ideal of a philosophical existence with Christianity, he decides to join the Manichaeans. As opposed to the 'mainline church' of the *catholica* in which 'the many' are gathered, the Manichaeans appear to him as a small, elitist Christian community meeting higher intellectual as well as ethical demands. This claim seems to be particularly and impressively confirmed by the '*pauci electi*'. Their approach has apparently strengthened Augustine's belief that true, higher Christianity is to be found amongst the Manichaeans. When he later devotes himself to the *catholica* and leads the fight against the Manichaeans, Augustine adheres to the conviction of the 'few wise'. Also within the *catholica* only few attain maximum insight and lead an appropriate life. At the same time, however, Augustine increasingly considers 'the many' as positive. These two aspects are combined in his epistemological concept of '*auctoritas*': by means of their *auctoritas*, the few 'wise' within the Catholic Church are supposed to guide the many towards truth on their journey of faith and cause them to improve their moral conduct. Its big success is a major argument for the *catholica*, whilst the '*paucitas*' of the Manichaeans (and all heretics) can be considered evidence of the groundlessness and absurdity of their doctrine.

Introduction

At first glance, the concepts of the 'few' and the 'many' appear to be a very special side issue. But from my point of view, this first impression needs to be revised on closer inspection. The contrast of the two groups is not only a topos of ancient philosophy in particular (Voigtländer 1980), but the comparison itself and its judgements play a repeated and important role in Augustine's intellectual biography. My focus will be on the significance of the contrast in the progression of the young Augustine from the *Hortensius* to Manichaeism and in his anti-Manichaean struggle. The following major questions have to be considered: What is the significance of the motif of the few and the many in Augustine's intellectual development? What influence does it have on his shift towards Manichaeism? Which role does it play in his return to the *catholica* and in his later fight against Manichaeism?

Hortensius

Together with the impulse to search for truth,¹ the *Hortensius* leads Augustine to the conviction that this truth can only be found amongst the 'few'. 'The gods have given philosophy only to a few' and this is the greatest gift they gave to the humans and the greatest gift they could have ever given. Augustine himself ascribes this statement to Cicero in *De ciuitate dei*, unfortunately without indicating any sources. Grilli included this passage into his edition of the *Hortensius* as fragment 111, combining it with a statement by Cicero that was preserved by Lactantius and claims that philosophy is not '*uulgaris*', because only scholars can achieve it.² It is however controversial whether these two fragments can really be attributed to *Hortensius* or not (cf. Doignon 1999:169–171; Straume-Zimmermann 1990:328). But according to my point of view it is obvious that the 'elitist' trait of philosophy corresponds to the overall intention of the *Hortensius* and is also clearly expressed by Cicero. According to fragment 115 (ed. Grilli), which is explicitly considered a Hortensian utterance the philosophical existence (*uita contemplatiua*) presents very high challenges, both intellectually and ethically:

1.Cf. Augustinus, *Confessiones* 3, 7f.; Augustinus, *De beata uita* 4. Contemporary overview of the *Hortensius*: Schlapbach (2004–2010) 425–436; still fundamental: Feldmann (1975), especially 369–529, 589–734.

2.Cf. Cicero, *Hortensius* fragment 111 (ed. Grilli); (Augustinus, *De ciuitate dei* 22, 22, 4): '... (*philosophia*) quam dii quibusdam paucis (*ait Tullius*) veram dederunt; nec hominibus (*inquit*) ab his aut datum est donum maius aut potuit ullum dari'; Cicero, *Hortensius* fragment 88 (ed. Grilli) (Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 3, 25, 1): '*summus ille noster Platonis imitator existimavit philosophiam non esse vulgarem, quod eam non nisi docti homines adsequi possint*'; cf. also fragment 89, below footnote 3.

quae nobis dies noctesque considerantibus acuentibusque intelligentiam quae est mentis acies caventibusque ne quando illa hebescat, id est in philosophia viventibus, magna spes est: aut si hoc quo sentimus et sapimus mortale et caducum est, iucundum nobis perfunctis muneribus humanis occasum neque molestam extinctionem et quasi quietem vitae fore; aut si, ut antiquis philosophis iisque maximis longeque clarissimis placuit, aeternos animos ac divinos habemus, sic existimandum est quo magis hi fuerint semper in suo cursu, id est in ratione et investigandi cupiditate, et quo minus se admiscuerint atque implicuerint hominum vitiis et erroribus, hoc his faciliorem ascensum et reditum in caelum fore. (Cicero, *Hortensius* fragm. 115 [ed. Grilli]; Augustinus, *De trinitate* 14,26)

The one who ‘lives in philosophy’ – and the fortune which all people desire can be found herein – has to be concerned with the search for truth ‘day and night’, to sharpen one’s comprehensive capabilities and pay attention to constantly keep up these standards. A thorough education in the sciences is a crucial precondition for this objective and the intellectual efforts must be linked to a lifestyle determined by the virtues. Earthly goods, such as reputation, wealth, gain or pleasure are certainly not part of that, but the masses consider these worldly possessions signs of happiness and pursue them. Cicero forcefully warns against them (especially against sexual desire as the ‘greatest *voluptas*’, contradicting reasonable thought and being its strongest enemy) (Cicero, *Hortensius* fragm. 84 [ed. Grilli] = 84, in Straume-Zimmermann 1990). True wealth can be acquired only through the possession of virtues. Anyone who stays on track, that is, who is determined by reason and the constant search for truth, does not get involved with the delusions and vices of ‘mankind’ (Cicero, *Hortensius* fragm. 115 [ed. Grilli] = 102, in Straume-Zimmermann 1990). This manifests the contrast between the few who are able to lead such a life and the broad, non-philosophical masses.

Thus, there can be no doubt concerning the ‘elitist’ attitude of the *Hortensius*. This attitude furthermore corresponds with a widely accepted axiom in philosophy. Cicero follows the platonic tradition. Only few can philosophise, the broad masses are unable to do so (cf. esp. Plato, *Respublica* 6, 491ab; 494a; cf. Fuhrer 1997:102–105). Also Lactantius refers to this principle and adds the hint that the Stoics and Epicureans promoted it as well. Lactantius concludes referring to Cicero, that philosophy is inaccessible to the masses.³

Manichaeism

Prompted by religious memories of his childhood, which were roused by the reading of the *Hortensius*, Augustine started to search for truth within the realm of Christianity. ‘Within a few days’ he affiliates himself enthusiastically not with the *catholica*, but with the Manichaeans.⁴ Apparently, the Manichaeans seem to offer the very true, higher Christianity Augustine is looking for. They identify themselves as Christians by their reference to the Holy Scriptures of

3.Cf. Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 3, 25, 7–12 (Cicero, *Hortensius* fragment 89 [ed. Grilli]): ‘... *Ob eam causam Cicero ait abhorrere a multitudine philosophiam.*’

4.Cf. Augustinus (1891/1892g), *De duabus animabus* 1. For the motifs, cf. especially Feldmann (1995:103–128).

Christianity, their ‘Trinitarian’ creed and their Christ-like piety. In contrast to the mainline church, however, they define themselves as a small elite demanding higher standards. Whilst they already constitute a community of the ‘few’ as opposed to the many other (Catholic) Christians, they also clearly differentiate within their community between the ‘ordinary’ *auditores* and the *pauci electi*. Both the intellectual and the ethical demands of the Manichaeans are Augustine’s central motifs to affiliate with Manichaean Christianity and both of them are tightly connected with the motif of the few and the many.

Intellectual demand: The few ‘enlightened’

There is a lot of evidence for the intellectual demands of the North African Manichaeans (cf. Hoffmann 2001:77–85). The promise to provide reasonable insights into truth is based on the *gnosis*, the *scientia* which was brought by Mani. Mani is the Paraclete who has been augured by Christ and who guides ‘into all truth’ (Jn 16:13). The Manichaean Felix decidedly phrases this fundamental conviction:

In his proclamation, Mani taught us (*docuit nos*) about the beginning, the middle and the end; he taught us (*docuit nos*) of the creation of the world, why (*quare*) it was created, what it was created from and which powers shaped it; he taught us (*docuit nos*) why there is day and night; he taught us (*docuit nos*) about the course of the sun and of the moon. As we neither find this with Paul nor in the writings of the other apostles, we are urged to believe that Mani is the Paraclete.⁵

In this context, ‘the whole truth’ is understood in a very pointed manner. The teachings of Mani fill in the gaps left by the New Testament of the *catholici* (the Old Testament is to be rejected anyway); they illustrate the beginnings, explain the present along with its cosmic phenomena, and inform about the *eschata*. The anaphora of *docuit nos* and *quare* underlines the rational character of this message. The proceedings of the world are supposed to become comprehensible by means of the teaching of the two principles. According to Fortunatus, the *scientia rerum*, the knowledge of matters, which is able to explain the natural state of the world, lies in the cognition of this dualism (cf. Fortunatus, in Augustinus, *Acta contra Fortunatum Manicheum* 14.20). This thesis is reminiscent of the Ciceronian ideal of cognition concerning the ‘understanding of both divine and human matters and their causal relations’ (Cicero, *Hortensius* fragm. 94 [ed. Grilli] = 6, in Straume-Zimmermann 1990). Within the Manichaean tradition, however, cognition is based on the revelation which is given by the Paraclete’s proclamation. It is, and that is entirely in accordance with the Gnostic self-conception, redeeming knowledge. The *Epistula fundamenti* distinctly expresses this basic conviction: anyone who listens to the words of the Paraclete Mani, ‘believes’ in them and observes them (in their conduct of life) will not be subjected to death. They gain a liberating, ‘divine knowledge’ which enables them to stay within the realm of eternal life (cf. *Epistula fundamenti* fragm. 2, in Feldmann 1987). By listening to the *epistula*, the

5.Augustinus, *Contra Felicem Manicheum* 1, 9: ‘(et quia Manichaeus) per suam praedicationem docuit nos initium, medium et finem; docuit nos de fabrica mundi, quare facta est et unde facta est, et qui fecerunt; docuit nos quare dies et quare nox; docuit nos de cursu solis et lunae: quia hoc in Paulo non audivimus nec in ceterorum apostolorum scripturis, hoc credimus, quia ipse est paracletus.’

individual is initiated, achieves the previously mentioned knowledge, and thereby comes into 'enlightenment'. This distinguishes the disciples of Mani from 'almost every people' in terms of his discipleship and this is the reason why the Manicheans make for a small, exclusive group in contrast to the rest of the world.⁶

Ethical demand: The few 'saints'

The Manichaean claim for ethical exclusivity is also obvious. Especially Secundinus and Faustus reflect the self-conception of the Western Manichaeans. For Secundinus, who is an auditor himself, the 'people' in its entirety (*populus*), the 'crowd' (*multitudo*), the 'masses' (*turba*), especially the mass of women, cannot attain virtue, virtue remains beyond their reach. The strict demands of Manichaean ethics have to be complied with in order to reach eternal life, but only the few are able to manage this.⁷ Secundinus makes use of Matthew 7:13f. to support his contention: the devil tries to lead people astray from the 'narrow path of the saviour' and therefore Secundinus urgently summons Augustine, his former brother in faith, to follow the narrow path (Secundinus *Epistula* 1.3). With this argumentation he fosters the contrast between the many walking on the broad path and the few walking on the narrow path and justifies it with reference to Jesus' sayings.

Faustus proves that the Manichaeans are a minority as opposed to the mainline church, which is mainly due to their higher ethical demands. He deals with the reproach that the Manichaeans would not accept the gospel, because they do not believe in Jesus' (physical) birth:

... et tamen age, ponamus, quia ita uis, duo haec partes esse fidei perfectae, quarum una quidem constet in uerbo, id est fateri Christum natum, altera uero in opere, quod est obseruatio praeceptorum. uides ergo quam arduam ego et difficiliorem mihi partem elegerim; tu uide quam leuissimam et faciliorem. nec inmerito plebs ad te confugit, a me refugit, nesciens utique, quia regnum dei non sit in uerbo, sed in uirtute. quid ergo est, quod me lacessis, si difficiliorem fidei adgressus partem tibi ut infirmo reliqui faciliorem? sed ego ad tribuendam, inquit, salutem animis hanc partem fidei efficaciorum puto ac magis idoneam, quam tu reliquisti, id est Christum fateri natum. (Faustus, in Augustinus, *Contra Faustum Manicheum* 5, 2)

Faustus emphasises in his counter argumentation that the 'acceptance' of the gospel includes two dimensions, namely the intellectual affirmation of confessional statements and the practical realisation of ethical demands. He clearly regards the former to be the easier part and the latter to be more difficult and more valuable. As Manichaean he meets both aspects, even if he rejects Jesus' human nature arguing that he himself had spoken of his heavenly father. His major focus is however on the ethical aspect. He holds it against the Catholics that they would only verbally confess everything, including Jesus' human birth, but they would not meet the

6.Cf. *Epistula fundamenti* fragment 4a, in Feldmann (1987) (= Augustinus, *Contra epistulam Manichaei quam uocant fundamenti* 12,14); Augustinus, *Contra epistulam Manichaei quam uocant fundamenti* 5, 6.

7.Cf. Secundinus, *Epistula* 4: 'Illa nunc addo, quae praesens actitat multitudo, a qua tantum uirtus procul est, quantum populo clausa est. Nec enim uirtus est, ad quam turba peruenit, et turba quam maxime feminarum.'

ethical demands. In doing so, the Catholics have chosen the easier way: 'The masses (plebs) therefore rightly turn to you and away from me, not knowing that the kingdom of God does not depend on words, but on behaviour.' So the Manicheans are the few because of their high ethical demands.

Within the borders of the small Manichaean communities, the '*pauci electi*' have to be distinguished from the *auditores*, as they have to meet even higher ethical demands. As opposed to the *auditores*, they are considered the 'few saints' (*pauci sancti*) (cf. Augustinus, *Contra Adimantum Manichei discipulum* 15). The Codex of Tebessa addresses the topic of the 'two classes' within the Manichaean communities and their mutual relations. In this dichotomous church, the Electi are the 'perfect' (*perfecti*) disciples:

... sunt [eni(m)] / et opib(us) pauperes e[st] / numero pauci et p[er] / artam uiam incedun[t] / [a]ngusto tramit[e] / [non] stipati sunt [...] / [...] sunt pauci [...] / [...] fideles, qu[on]iam in reg[no] / [nu]m caeloru[m] ingre- / d[i]untur, sicut [dic]- / tum est: „multi qui- / dem sunt uocati, pau- / ci autem electi. (Codex Thevestinus A 43, 4–16 [Stein])

The Electi are poor as far as worldly possessions are concerned and they are few in numbers. The text underlines this with several allusions to central New Testament passages: firstly the picture of the small path (Mt 7:14) that leads to life and is walked upon only by few, secondly Jesus' warning that only few will enter the kingdom of heaven, although many counted themselves as belonging to the Lord (Mt 7:21f.), and thirdly Matthew 20:16 and 22:14, which deals with the 'chosen few' in contrast to the many who were invited. With that, the 'Electi' as the few who are explicitly connected to Jesus himself and the contrast to the many is implied, yet not particularly mentioned.

It is highly likely that Augustine draws on his biographical background when depicting 'chaste life' as one of the Manichaeans' finest enticement (cf. Augustinus, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 1, 2). One can therefore proceed on the assumption that to the young Augustine the Manichaeans seemed to be the small elite, which makes both higher intellectual as well as ethical demands than the *catholica*, which again functions as venue for the 'many' who are not able to conceive of higher standards. They correspond to the essence of the *Hortensius* also in this aspect. This might have additionally fostered Augustine's impression that with them he found a group conforming to the Ciceronian ideal. Belonging to this elitist group certainly had its own attractiveness.

The Few and the Many in the controversy with the Manichaeans

When he realises that they can neither meet their intellectual nor ethical standards, Augustine breaks with the Manichaeans. Whatever *Platoniorum libri* Augustine has read in Milan – Plotin and also Porphyrios readopt the platonic concept of the few who have these cognitive faculties, and they even intensify the idea. So the elitist trait in Augustine's thinking

is supported by neoplatonic literature. In his early writings, which are considerably characterised by an epistemological optimism, Augustine reserves the knowledge of truth for the 'few' with harsh judgements. Truth only reveals itself to the 'very few and chosen admirers' (Augustinus, *Soliloquia* 1, 22). As opposed to them, the 'stupid' and 'simple-minded' make for an 'incredibly large mass'.⁸

But how does this fit together with Augustine's affiliation with the 'mainline church' of the *catholica*? Does he thereby not align himself with the 'many'? His controversy with the Manichaeans plainly reveals that Augustine has dealt with this tension consciously. His argumentation in *De utilitate credendi* against Honoratus, 'Still-Manichaean' and friend of his youth, shows that Augustine is aware that this topic is central at least to the educated and philosophically trained. 'But truth can only be found among the Few' (Augustinus, *De utilitate credendi* 16) – this prejudice can potentially blight every approximation to the *catholica* in the search for truth.

Considering the most important lines in Augustine's argumentation, one observes the tendency to stick to the principle of the perfect few and to complement or soften this principle by the positive assessment of the many. The background seems to be the argument of the *consensus omnium* (Oehler 1961:103–129).

The core argument regarding the elitist-rational approach is: actually there are only few 'wise men' amongst the *catholica* who have come to know truth, that is, God. These few possess a certain authority, that is, a personal effective and persuasive power enabling them to impress the many and to guide them towards truth.⁹ Although the masses are not able to 'comprehend' this truth intellectually, they 'believe' in it, that is, they accept it as truth and try to realise it in their lives. The background to this is Augustine's epistemological approach of the two ways of cognition, *credere* and *intellegere*. They are directly linked with the two cognitive powers *fides* and *ratio* as well as with the concept of *auctoritas* (cf. TeSelle 1996–2002:119–131; Lütcke 1986–1994:498–510; Hoffmann 2007:461–466). It is possible to reach truth by means of cognition (*intellegere*) or faith (*credere*). The former option is obviously to be valued higher, but only the few manage to walk this way. The latter approach is valued lower, but it is the only one for the many. Therefore, Augustine demands them to follow an authority. Accepting a reliable authority, that is the *catholica*, is thus the 'more salutary', if not the only possible option for the uneducated masses (cf. Augustinus, *De ordine* 2, 26; cf. Trelenberg 2009:273–276). So the *catholica* is the Christian community in which the *multitudo* fills the churches, but only few attain maximum insight and also guide the many there (cf. Augustinus, *De utilitate credendi* 16).

Augustine uses the same approach with Honoratus regarding ethics. The hint at the great success of the *catholica*,

8.Cf. Augustinus, *De Academicis* 1, 2; *De uera religione* 27, and other passages.

9.Cf. for example Augustinus, *De utilitate credendi* 16: "At enim apud paucos quosdam est veritas." Scis ergo iam, quae sit, si scis, apud quos sit. Nonne dixeram paulo ante, ut quasi rudes quaereremus? Sed si ex ipsa vi veritatis paucos eam tenere coniectas, qui vero sint, nescis: quid, si ita pauci sunt, qui verum sciunt, ut auctoritate sua multitudinem teneant, unde se in illa secreta expedire et quasi eliquare paucitas possit?; *ibid.* 18; cf. Hoffmann (1997:218–225).

however, is a lot more explicit here. Just like in other anti-Manichaean passages Augustine emphasises the high ethical achievements of members of the Catholic Church. The creed of the indiscernible, immaterial God corresponds with the ethical dissociation of everything physical-material and of the 'world'. As concrete examples, Augustine mentions asceticism in terms of the renunciation of food and sexuality, the willingness to suffer, charity as well as the contempt of worldly affairs. By listing the extremes, he illustrates on the one hand that these ethical demands can compete with those of the Manichaean Electi, and on the other hand he clarifies that there is a certain span in realisation. This establishes the basis for the conclusion:

Pauci haec faciunt, pauciores bene prudenterque faciunt, sed populi probant, populi laudant, populi favent, diligunt postremum populi, populi suam inbecillitatem, quod ipsa non possunt, non sine propectu mentis in deum nec sine quibusdam scintillis virtutis accusant. (Augustinus, *De utilitate credendi* 35)

Augustine underlines the contrast between the 'few' and the 'many' by means of stylistic devices: the anaphora of '*populi*' is followed by the climax '*pauci – pauciores*'. These two groups form content-related contrasts (*sed*), but they are embraced by the alliteration ('*pauci – pauciores – prudenter – populi probant – populi – populi – postremum populi – populi – possunt – propectu*'). The first three statements about the peoples are parallel and isocolic; they are followed by two further statements with a pointed chiasm emphasising the 'peoples' appreciation (*diligunt*) of the ethical ideals of Christianity. Again, the core thought is that the elite of the few should convert the masses and improve them ethically.

This lays the basis for a positive assessment of the great number of those who have joined the *catholica*. The Catholic Church gains a large number of members who reach the truth and improve ethically by following its doctrine. This is particularly hard to reach and hence particularly notable (cf. Augustinus, *De utilitate credendi* 35). Here the *catholica* reaches what Plato and his school could not reach and even did not dare to reach, and this is a strong argument against the Platonists. In contrast to the Manichaeans he underlines that incredibly many, especially also simple *catholici*, achieve the highest ethical standards (Augustinus, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 1, 65–71.77). Augustine opposes Faustus's claim to meet Jesus' radical ethical demands as Manichaean Electus with a forceful iteration stressing 'how many' Catholics actually meet these demands. The Catholic Church can therefore boast an extraordinary (God-given) 'progress and success' (*profectum fructumque*) (Augustinus, *De utilitate credendi* 35). This success gives the church credibility and authority and suggests that the truth seeker should start searching here.

By implication, the negative evaluation of the 'few', which also and particularly concerns the Manichaeans, results from the same argument. They do not have any authority whatsoever to support their doctrines or sacred writings, precisely because they are 'only few'.¹⁰ In his answer to

10.Cf. Augustinus, *De utilitate credendi* 31. In addition to that they are '*turbulenti*' and '*novi*' whilst the *catholica* distinguishes itself by '*consensione*' and '*vetustate*' (*ibid.*).

Secundinus Augustine takes up Secundinus's claim who asserts that as Manichaeans, he belongs to the few walking on Jesus' narrow path (Mt 7:14). Then, however, he turns the claim into the warning not to belong to the group of the few very bad people.¹¹ Only few are without sin (*innocentes*), but at the same time only few are felons. Amongst those who do something wrong are fewer murderers than thieves, fewer commit incest than adultery, fewer women are like Medea and Phaedra or men like Orest (Ochos) and Busirides than other criminals. The *paucitas* is hence a two-edged category. The Manichaeans are indeed few, but they belong to a 'negative elite' advocating lunatic ideas. It is even more wondrous that people fall for them at all, than the mere fact that they are few. The few saints walking on the narrow path are definitely not the Manichaeans, but those amongst true Christians who fulfil the commandments. As opposed to the vast number of sinners, the righteous are the few. Augustine does not delude himself about this and freely admits it in front of the Manichaeans. The righteous will be revealed at the Last Judgement.

This presupposes Augustine's conviction that the Manichaeans' standards are untenable both in the intellectual and in the ethical realm. The reasonable insight is an unjustified 'presumption' (*praesumptio*) and a 'promise' (*pollicitatio*) which they do not keep. Particularly the radical ascetic ethics of the Electi is fictitious. Augustine goes so far as to claim that the Manichaeans had big problems spotting only one Electus amongst their '*paucitas*' who meets the ethical standards of Manichaeism (cf. Augustinus, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 1,75; *De utilitate credendi* 2.21.36). These harsh and partly also unfair accusations show Augustine's great personal disappointment about his own deception, which is now mixed with the pastoral endeavour to preserve others from the same mistake.

Conclusion

The motif of the few and the many can be found throughout Augustine's intellectual biography. In the beginning, there is the defining axiom of the few wise men and the unphilosophical masses. The young Augustine adopts this conviction from his reception of the Hortensius and abides by it until his time as mature theologian. It is certainly also due to this basic conviction that the Manichaeans seemed more attractive to him than the *catholica*, who gather the many, and the fact that he joined them. They appear as a small Christian community with elitist aspirations, explaining the world and all its proceedings from the macrocosmic movement of

11.Cf. Augustinus, *Contra Secundinum Manicheum* 26: 'fuge ista, obsecro, non te decipiat species paucitatis, quoniam ipse dominus dixit angustam viam esse paucorum. inter paucos uis esse, sed pessimus. nam uerum est, quod pauci sunt omni modo innocentes, sed in ipsis nocentibus pauciores sunt homicidae quam fures, pauciores sunt incestatores quam adulteri; denique etiam ipsae antiquorum uel fabulae uel historiae pauciores habent Medeas et Phaedras quam facinorum aliorum flagitiorumque mulieres, pauciores Ochos et Busirides quam impietatum aliarum et scelerum uiros. uide ergo, ne forte apud uos nimis horror impietatis faciat meritum paucitatis. talia quippe ibi leguntur, dicuntur, creduntur, ut in illum errorem magis aliquos quam paucos inruere uel illic remanere mirandum sit. sanctorum autem paucitas, quorum angusta uia est, in comparatione ponitur multitudinis peccatorum: quae quidem paucitas in multo maiore numero palearum latet; sed in ipsa area catholicae ecclesiae est nunc congreganda et tritrandanda, in fine autem uentilanda atque purganda. ad quam te oportet conferas, si fideliter fidelis esse desideras, ne fiendo falsis, sicut scriptum est, uentos pascas, id est, immundis spiritibus esca fias.'

the stars to the microcosmic human nature and yielding the highest ascetic performances. The appreciation of the few is supported by neoplatonic writings. In his steering towards the *catholica*, Augustine holds on to the elitist approach. Nevertheless, he develops a complementary line in which he evaluates the *multitudo* positively. The consideration of philosophical schools, in particular the Platonists, and the controversy with the Manichaeans have largely contributed to this notion. It is decisive for the balance of the two arguments that Augustine integrates the few and the many in his hermeneutic concept of the two approaches to truth. Those who obtain the highest possible insight by their respective moral conduct are also considered the few 'wise' (or saints) within the *catholica*, but they impress the many and guide them towards truth, which they accept in their faith. Augustine increasingly rates the big success as an argument for the authority of the *catholica*. This concept combines the principle of the perfect few with the positive assessment of the many followers. Thus, the controversy about the Manichaeans considerably contributes to the development of this concept. Augustine can make use of this argument against them as well as against 'all heretics' who praise themselves in front of the *catholica* because of their *paucitas* (Augustinus, *Contra aduersarium legis et prophetarum* 2, 42).

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