CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE DISPUTATIONES:
ITS METHOD, CONTENTS, AND PURPOSES

A. Introduction

In chapter III we discovered that the Manichaean missionaries whom Augustine encountered discussed many of the subjects criticized in the Disputationes. Furthermore, it seemed to be quite probable that Augustine did study this work of Adimantus himself in order to collect arguments for his own missionary activities when he was a Manichaean Auditor.¹ So it is reasonable to suppose that the Disputationes had a missionary purpose. If this observation—which needs to be substantiated by a thorough analysis of the subject matter—turns out to be correct, we have only addressed the first of many questions about the Disputationes such as: How does the debate about the Old Testament and New Testament passages relate to the message of Mani? What can reasonably be inferred from the Disputationes about the importance of the Old Testament and the New Testament to the Manichaeans? Was the method of antithetical exegesis just intended to demonstrate the inconsistency or even the sheer absurdity of Catholic Christian beliefs, or anything else? Further, we may mention the problem of the relationship of Adimantus’ Disputationes and Marcion’s Antitheses. In chapter II, we came across the fact that both books have much in common² and it is tempting to claim that Marcion influenced Adimantus. If Adimantus depended on Marcion when he wrote his Disputationes, the question arises: What should be regarded as specifically Manichaean in the Disputationes? In this chapter we start to examine these and other questions.

The reconstruction of the Disputationes consists mainly of biblical passages. Therefore, in the following section, we will examine the texts in

¹ See Ch. III, part B, section 2. The Manichaean years.
² See Ch. II, part B, section 1. Adimantus’ background.
these quotations. We have already observed that Augustine sometimes criticized Adimantus' reproduction of a biblical passage, because he knew another form of the text.\(^3\) We will examine these and the others of Adimantus' quotations from Scripture. The task is mainly to describe Adimantus' treatment of the quotations from both the Old and New Testament by means of examining the variations we can find in Adimantus' rendering of the texts. By means of a close observation of the texts \textit{per se} we should be able to draw some important conclusions about Adimantus' attitude towards the biblical texts, and perhaps we may also find some indications about the kind of textual tradition which he was quoting.

One of the most striking features of the \textit{Disputationes} is that Adimantus set biblical passages from, on the one hand, the Old Testament, and, on the other hand, the New Testament in an antithetical framework. In the third section of this chapter the possible origin (which may well have been Marcion's \textit{Antitheses}) and the implications of this method will be discussed, especially with respect to the significance attached to the Old and New Testament. Furthermore, we attempt to describe several other aspects of Adimantus' exegetical method. Augustine repeatedly rebuked the exegetical skills and methods of Manichaeans in general and of Adimantus in particular. These observations of Augustine could well be important for a thorough examination of Adimantus' way of dealing with the Scriptures. Therefore, Augustine's reproaches are taken into account as well.

In the fourth section, the Old Testament themes that Adimantus criticized in the \textit{Disputationes} are the main point to be discussed. An analysis of the subjects chosen by Adimantus, compared with those in dispute in the \textit{Antitheses}, will enable us to formulate some conclusions about Adimantus' intentions with the \textit{Disputationes}. Adimantus' arguments that Augustine quoted in full are all crucially important, because they clarify several more of Adimantus' purposes. They will be discussed in the second part of the fourth section.

In the fifth section, we will summarize and evaluate the results of this analysis.

\(^{3}\) See Ch. III, n. 83.