This paper was born of a series of happy coincidences. There were, firstly, those that led to the realisation that the text of the Manichaean daily prayers was by no means lost to modern scholars, but preserved in multiple copies from very different times and places of the community’s history. Further, when this realisation was first published in the recent Festschrift for Johan-
nes van Oort,¹ there were other papers in that volume that provided useful correlations to my line of thought. I think particularly, though not exclusively, of Nils Arne Pedersen’s discussion of the veil that hides the face of God, the Father of Greatness.² And then, further, I find an impressive and fertile new interest in the connections between Augustine and his (once) Manichaean heritage, evidenced in the recent work of many of the scholars participating in the conference.³ I am indebted to all of the above in this paper, the theme of which is that saying of the saviour (to use Mani’s preferred nomenclature): “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:8).

1. The Manichaean Daily Prayers to the Sun and the Moon

When we look at the daily prayers we find a formal ritual punctuating the day and night at set hours, and accompanied by a specific set of actions.

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² N.A. Pedersen, “The Veil and Revelation of the Father of Greatness”, ibid. pp. 229–234. Of course, whilst reading Pedersen’s paper stimulated some of the ideas discussed here by myself, he is not responsible for these.

These were a fundamental building-block for the community’s practice, providing a crucial unity of endeavour and a focus that belies the fragmentation of languages and cultures that have drawn so much scholarly attention. When, in the past, it was supposed that al-Nadim’s account of the prayers was the only detailed source available, there was always the concern that what he recounted was somehow an adaptation to Muslim practice in the Abbasid empire. However, whilst some questions do remain about details of the times of day and the physical actions of prostration, we now know that the (incomplete) text he provided in Arabic is fundamentally the same as that utilised in fourth century Egypt or medieval Sogdia. There is no reason to suppose that it differed from that practised in Roman North Africa, so that—if Augustine’s ‘Manichaean’ experience has any meaning—it must have been the same as known to and undertaken by the later Catholic bishop in his youth. This is what he tells directly, maintaining (one might observe) a studious distance in his account:

In the daytime they offer their prayers towards the sun, wherever it goes in its orbit; at night, they offer them towards the moon, if it appears; if it does not, they direct them towards the north, by which the sun, when it has set, returns to the east. They stand while praying.

There were ten prayers, the first addressed to the supreme God, the Father of the Lights; and then descending down the hierarchy of being (as it were) through the emanations, Christ, the angels and finally to the community of the righteous. In conclusion, the practitioner asks for help and favour from all the ones who have been worshipped and named; in order to be freed from pain and rebirth, and at the last to attain the peace and eternal life of the realm of light.

My concern here is not to discuss the content of the text of the prayers. Rather, I want to focus on the required moral state of the subject, the one who prays; and on the object that is addressed, the sun by day or moon by night. It is specified that the practitioner must pray with ‘a pure heart and

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