Augustine’s work *On True Religion*, *De vera religione*, reflects a wide variety of influences, Manichaean, Platonist, Classical, Biblical, early Christian. Accordingly, its intended purpose can be judged as rather complex. That it can be considered an anti-Manichaean work is generally accepted and confirmed by Augustine himself, who states as much both in *vera religione* itself and later in the *Retractationes*. In a key passage of *vera religione* he writes that the work is ‘most suitable’ (*potissimum*) against those who claimed the existence of two irreducible natures or substances rebelling against each other. This clearly refers to the Manichaeans. The phrase itself, *duae substantiae singulis principiis adversus invicem rebelles*, echoes the Latin Manichaean *Epistula Fundamenti*, which claims the existence of ‘two substances divided from each other from the outset’: *in exordio fuerunt duae substantiae a se divisae*. This in turn echoes a similar phrase in the Cologne *Mani Codex*, where Mani’s teaching is introduced as being in principle

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3. Augustine, *vera religione*. 9.16 (CCL 32:98.4–6): *Contra eos tamen potissimum est instituta, qui duas naturas vel substantias singulis principiis adversus invicem rebelles esse arbitrantur*. Compare *retr*. 1.13.1 (CCL 57:36 l. 8–9): *Maxime tamen contra duas naturas Manichaeorum liber hic loquitur*. Both statements are significant. They confirm that on the one hand Augustine himself acknowledged that there are other dominant themes in the work but that on the other hand he consistently (both in 390 and in 427) saw the anti-Manichaean theme as predominant.
about ‘the division of the two natures and the things concerning beginning, middle and end.’

Now Augustine immediately qualifies his statement. He insists that *vera rel.* was not meant to be a one-by-one refutation of Manichaean teachings. He had delivered such refutations elsewhere and ‘with God’s help’ would do so further in the future. But the purpose of *vera rel.* was different. It was to demonstrate, as best as possible, with reasoned arguments, ‘which the Lord was so kind to provide’ (*quas dominus dare dignatur*, i.e. through his revelation), that the Catholic Faith was safe from these people and that that which made contemporaries of insecure disposition fall for their preaching should not really perturb anyone’s mind.

It was in line with this latter passage that scholarship traditionally tended not to list *vera rel.* among the anti-Manichaean works. Rather, it was counted among the ‘theological’ works. The arguments *quas dominus dare dignatur* were identified as basic tenets of orthodox Christian teachings and *vera rel.* as a whole as an *in nuce* systematic (dogmatic) theological treatise with a Platonist edge. Wilhelm Geerlings once referred to it as ‘Augustine’s first attempt at a comprehensive presentation [a “Gesamtsystem”] of Christian Philosophy / Theology.’ The first to interpret *vera rel.* in this way was again

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6 Augustine completed *vera rel.* early in 391 at the latest. Anti-Manichaean works he wrote before *vera rel.* include *De moribus* and *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (both ca. 388). Many more such works followed in the years to come (between 391 and 405), and it is interesting to note here that Augustine was anticipating this future activity; *vera rel.* 9.17 (CCL 32:198.21–22): *Neque nunc eorum opiniones refellimus ... partim quantum deus siverit faciemus.*

7 The phrase used in *vera rel.*, e.g. 7.13 (CCL 32:196.20–21) is ‘the history and prophecy of the temporal dispensation of God’s providence for the salvation of humankind’, *historia et prophetia dispensationis temporalis divinae providentiae pro salute generis humani.*


9 W. Geerlings, *Augustinus. Leben und Werk. Eine bibliographische Einführung* (Pader-