THE DATE OF THE DE CATECHIZANDIS RUDIBUS

BY

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In their edition of St Augustine's De catechizandis rudibus J. Farges and G. Combès express the opinion that this treatise was composed in the year 405.¹ Their argument is as follows: "In the Retractationes St Augustine mentions this treatise between the Annotationes in Job and the De Trinitate. From this the Maurini, followed by Stilting, Schaeinemann, Loofs and Rotmanner, inferred that it was written around the year 400, but Dom De Bruyne is certainly right in pointing out that the De cat. rud. was placed by St Augustine a little after the De Actis contra Felicem Manichaeum and that the latter work dates from 404, so that the former was probably composed in 405. A second reason mentioned by De Bruyne is that, if the De cat. rud. had been written in 400, St Augustine would have composed seven or eight works in that year, including some very big ones, whereas he would have produced little between 400 and 410. This observation, too, is correct—even an author as active as St Augustine could hardly have written seven or eight works within twelve months, let alone nine, among which the Confessiones, consisting of 13 books, the Contra Faustum (33 books!), the Contra Epistulam Parmeniani (3 books), and the De baptismo contra Donatistas (7 books)." Besides quoting De Bruyne, Farges and Combès refer to M. Wundt, who defended the same view in a paper.³

Let us now examine the question whether it is really necessary to abandon the usual date of 399/400. First of all it may be useful to list the opinions of several specialists:

As we see, most of these scholars put the De cat. rud. in 399; those who attribute it to 400, do so, because they date the De Trinitate differently. That this work was completed by the middle of 419 is evident from St Augustine's letter to Aurelius (Epist. 174) which he regarded as a prologue to the De Trin. and which dates from that time. The last three or four books of the De Trin. were written in the last two months of 418 and the first months of 419. St Augustine himself says that he finished this work at the instigation of many brethren, and especially at the command of Aurelius, the bishop of Carthage (Epist. 174; Retract. II 15, 1). He tells this when speaking about his stay at Carthage in the summer of 418, where he met many bishops who stimulated him to complete his work after his return to Hippo.9

The beginning of the composition of the De Trin. may be dated in connection with the date of the De Actis contra Felicem Manichaeum. The Retractationes tell us that between the De Actis (mentioned in II 8) and the De Trin. (discussed in II 15) Augustine only wrote six small books, two of which were, moreover, completed

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4 Saint Augustin et l'augustinisme (Paris s.d.), p. 183, 186.
5 Cf. for these data the index of St Augustine's writings in Joseph Barbel, Aurelius Augustinus, Enchiridion (Düsseldorf 1960), pp. 244/251.
8 Augustinus. Leven en werken (Kampen 1957), p. 346.
9 Hendrikx, op. cit., p. 308.