

VU Research Portal

Koren en kaf op de dorsvloer

ten Hove, J.B.

2020

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

ten Hove, J. B. (2020). *Koren en kaf op de dorsvloer: De kerk in het licht van het laatste oordeel. Een onderzoek naar de betekenis van de area als metafoor voor de ecclesia bij Augustinus*. Labarum Academic.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

SUMMARY DISSERTATION

Title dissertation: Wheat and Chaff on the Threshing Floor: the Church in the Light of Judgment Day. An Investigation into the Significance of the *area* as a Metaphor for the *ecclesia* in the Works of Augustine

Author: Jan Bernard ten Hove

Chapter 1 explains why the threshing floor (*area*) is an important metaphor in Augustine's works that relates to both ecclesiology and eschatology. Furthermore, the description of the research done so far shows that the significance of the threshing floor in the works of Augustine has not yet been thoroughly investigated, taking into account his entire oeuvre, the chronology of the texts including the corresponding development process, and the different contexts in which the metaphor appears. The methodological decision has been made to discuss the texts in chronological order as much as possible. The non-homiletic and homiletic works are discussed separately, because of the difference in genre, and because of the problematic chronology of the sermons. The research field has been found to consist of 50 non-homiletic and 102 homiletic works.

Chapter 2 deals with various *ante dicenda*. Partly, these are about the literal significance of the *area* in the annual agricultural cycle. It has been demonstrated that the Latin word *area* for Augustine unequivocally means: threshing floor. One exception was found. *Conf.* 2.9 describes how the plans for the well-known theft of pears in his childhood have been made *in areis*. Here, the meaning is probably: in the cemeteries, implicating that Augustine situates this act at the time of his former spiritual death in the place of death in the most literal sense. For Augustine, the threshing floor usually functions as a metaphor of the church. The most important Bible text for the symbolic meaning of the threshing floor, is Matthew 3.12 / Luke 3.17 (the coming of Christ on the threshing floor with the winnowing fork). Furthermore, Judges 6.36-40 (the fleece and the threshing floor of Gideon) is a Biblical source with its own symbolic meaning. The only patristic source Augustine explicitly refers to concerning the threshing floor as a metaphor for the *permixtio* of the church, is Cyprian. He quotes Cyprian where Cyprian uses this metaphor in confrontation with the Novatians who have seceded from the Catholic church because of its lack of holiness. Augustine refers to these words in his own struggle against the Donatists who have also seceded because of the impurity of the church. When the Church Father of Hippo Regius makes use of the threshing floor metaphor against the schismatic Donatists, he deliberately continues the path that Cyprian has taken previously. In chapter 2 we also searched for possible patristic sources that were not explicitly mentioned by Augustine in the works of: (a) Ambrose, as an important teacher for Augustine, (b) Tertullian, as an early representative of the North African tradition, and (c) Origen, as an influential Bible expositor.

Augustine probably got to know the allegory of Gideon's threshing floor (Judges 6.36-40) via his teacher Ambrose. Maybe he also found it himself in Origen's works, for both Church Fathers use this allegory. Furthermore, Origen admits that he has borrowed the basic pattern of this allegorical exegesis from others. It is therefore a more or less well-known allegory in the early church, although it appears to be unknown to the North African church members. The coming of Christ on the threshing floor (Matthew 3.12 / Luke 3.17) is explained by Tertullian and Origen as a purification of the church in the present. For Origen the winnowing refers to the personal sanctification of believers, for Tertullian to the persecution of the church and the separation from the church of the unworthy Christians who are the chaff. Nevertheless, Irenaeus in an earlier period had already interpreted this text as self-evidently eschatological. This eschatological interpretation can be found later in the works of Cyprian, Ambrosius and Augustine.

With regard to the North African Church Fathers, the common view in current research is that Augustine radically breaks with the North African tradition concerning ecclesiology. For example, according to Tilley and Gaumer, Augustine's perception of the *permixtio* of the church, says goodbye to the ecclesiastical holiness ideals of his predecessors. In addition, Tertullian and Cyprian are presented as representatives of the North African martyr's church, in contrast to Augustine as a representative of the state church. This representation is untenable, considering the analysis of the

threshing floor texts. In Tertullian's writings, the threshing floor (Matthew 3.12 / Luke 3.17) does not yet function as a metaphor for the temporary *permixtio* of the church, but in the later works of Cyprian it actually does. In this respect, Augustine can therefore legitimately rely on Cyprian. With regard to ecclesiology, it is important to take into account the difference in context between Cyprian and Augustine on the one hand and Tertullian on the other. Both Cyprian and Augustine, as representatives of the Catholic church, use the threshing floor metaphor in confrontation with a schismatic church, the Novatians and the Donatists respectively. Unlike Cyprian and Augustine, Tertullian had separated himself from the church because of its lack of holiness. This difference in context makes it understandable that Augustine, in his controversy with the schismatic Donatists, finds connection with his North African predecessor Cyprian, but not with Tertullian.

Chapter 3 thematizes the significance of the threshing floor as a metaphor for various dispensations in salvation history. In the secondary literature this significance is usually ignored, because the focus is on the *area* as one of the metaphors for the *permixtio* of the church. However, chapter 3 investigates how the threshing floor is used to present the difference between the Old and New Testament times, and how this image functions in a chiliastic framework.

The distinction between the Old and New Testament dispensations is illustrated by the threshing floor metaphor in three ways. First, the early texts (up to around 400 AD) speak of two threshing floors. Second, exceptionally two types of grain on one threshing floor are mentioned (around 395 AD or earlier). Third, in the later texts (from around 400-402 AD) the two threshing floors give way to the allegory of the fleece and threshing floor of Gideon.

The two threshing floors are presented by Augustine in the context of his exegesis of Matthew 3.12 / Luke 3.17. These threshing floors represent the (Old Testament) Jewish people and the (New Testament) worldwide church. The winnowing of the first threshing floor is related to the first coming of Christ, the winnowing of the second threshing floor to his eschatological coming. The explanation about the Jewish threshing floor that has already been winnowed (*uentilata est*), Augustine probably got to know during his Manichaean period. It may seem unlikely that Augustine introduces a Manichaean exegesis in the period in which he radically distances himself from Manichaeism. Yet on closer inspection it appears that he is not introducing Manichaean ideas into the Catholic church, but is actually fighting them. In a creative way, he combines the explanation of the Jewish threshing floor that has been winnowed with the well-known explanation of the church threshing floor that is yet to be winnowed. The result is a new concept in which both threshing floors function to provide insight into two different phases in the history of salvation, namely the Old and the New Testament. In this way Augustine honours the importance of the Old Testament and allows the Jewish people their own place in the history of salvation. In this way he deliberately opposes the ideas of the Manichaeans, who reject the Old Testament and condemn the Jewish people. For example, he points to the many saints among the Jewish people in the Old Testament period. He also draws attention to the similarity between the Old and New Testament threshing floors, in that both threshing floors show a *permixtio*. He also emphasises the continuity between the two threshing floors: the New Testament worldwide church originated from the Old Testament Jewish people. Moreover, the Church of the New Testament has been joined together from Jews and Gentiles. However, Augustine confirms that the Old Testament threshing floor of the Jewish people has been winnowed (*uentilata est*). By this he implies that there is no salvation outside the church for the Jews, as for all other people. Yet he explicitly opposes the view that God has rejected the Jewish people. He emphatically calls attention to the continuity of God's plan of salvation for the Jewish people, and proves to be a defender of the Old Testament. However, the fact that Augustine repeatedly turns against anti-Jewish sentiments not only in his writings, but even more in his sermons, is an indication that these sentiments live with the members of the Catholic church.

Augustine exceptionally distinguishes between the old and the new dispensation by mentioning two types of grain on one threshing floor (only *diu. qu.* 61 and s. 130). The Old Testament era is compared to the threshing of barley, the New Testament era to the threshing of wheat. This reflects the qualitative distinction between the two dispensations, i.e. (a) the difference between

concealment and disclosure of the mysteries of salvation and (b) the difference between carnal and spiritual life. When the Church Father mentions barley in distinction from wheat, he speaks rhetorically about the Old Testament Jewish people, and communicates about the carnal (in distinction of the spiritual) members of the church.

In his later works (from about 400-402 AD) Augustine uses the *area* in a different way as a metaphor for the *distributio temporum*, employing the dual sign of Gideon's fleece and threshing floor (Judges 6.36-40). In this allegory, the first sign (the soaked fleece on the dry threshing floor) symbolizes the Old Testament era in which salvation is limited to the people of Israel. The second sign (the dry fleece on the soaked threshing floor) symbolizes the New Testament era of the worldwide church. This allegory has the advantage that it visualizes both the quantitative and qualitative distinction between the two dispensations in salvation history. Specifically, to Augustine it is a metaphor of (a) the difference between one ethnic group and all nations (the worldwide church) and (b) the difference between the concealed and revealed form in which God's grace in Christ appears. The imagery of the dry fleece on the soaked threshing floor could give the impression that the gentiles have replaced the people of Israel, but this is not Augustine's intention. As in his early works, Augustine repeats in his later works that in the New Testament church Jews and gentiles are joined together in unity. He also continues to mention the many believers among the Jews. He expressly communicates that the present-day dryness of the fleece does not imply that the Jews as ethnic group would have no place in God's plans of salvation anymore. This line of thought is especially evident in his sermons, like before usually in opposition to anti-Jewish sentiments. Granted that the visual language of the dry fleece is a negative judgment on the contemporary Jews who do not believe in Christ, however, according to Augustine the current dryness of the fleece is only temporary: the Jewish people will yet come to believe in Christ.

As a metaphor for the dispensations in salvation history, the *area* also functions in a chiliastic framework, namely in s. 259. Here the coming of Christ with the winnowing fork heralds the beginning of an eschatological interval, preceding the eternal destinations of wheat and chaff. In s. 259 there is a moderate form of millennialism, even more moderate than the millennialism that he later calls *tolerabilis* (*ciu.* 20.7). In later times, Augustine distances himself from the expectation of a future earthly kingdom of peace, probably even before he was ordained as a bishop (halfway 395 AD). Yet initially he does not openly distance himself from a chiliastic view of salvation history. This is especially clear in s. 260C (= Mai 94). In this sermon, the preacher still uses terms that sound chiliastic, and in the secondary literature they are repeatedly interpreted as such. But in reality the so-called chiliastic elements in s. 260C (=Mai 94) are meant non-chiliastic. Yet it can be deduced that the expectation of a future earthly kingdom of peace is still alive among the North African Christians. Apparently, in the early days of his pastoral ministry, Augustine does not think it wise to criticize these chiliastic expectations explicitly.

Chapter 4 focuses on the distinction in salvation history between the time before and after Judgment Day, or the difference between now and later (*nunc et tunc*). In this context, the threshing floor functions as a metaphor of the temporary *permixtio* of the church. In the secondary literature, the issue of the mixed nature of the church is directly linked to the controversy with the Donatists. However, when the different contexts in which the threshing floor appears are taken into account, it becomes clear that this metaphor is already relevant in the controversy with the Manichaeans. The Manichaeans consider themselves the true Christians. They condemn the unholiness of the church, and present themselves as the better alternative. In reply to this Manichaean criticism on the church, Augustine argues that the church in its present form is like a threshing floor with wheat and chaff mixed together for the time being. In this way he opposes the Manichaean idea of a pure church in the midst of an unholy world. In doing so, he criticizes not only the ecclesiological ideal of holiness of the Manichaeans, but also the, in his opinion, disappointing practice with the Manichaeans.

Like the Manichaeans, the Donatists boast about their holiness as a community of true Christians, distinct from the Catholic church. Although the Donatist polemic is different from the Manichaean, the threshing floor functions in a similar way, namely to counter criticism of the sinful

life of church members. Augustine uses the threshing floor in the defense against the Donatist criticism of the lack of holiness of the church, and subsequently also in the attack on the Donatist own holiness pretensions.

In the defense against the Donatists, the *area* draws attention to three different issues: (1) the issue of persecution (*persecutio*), (2) the issue of betrayal (*traditio*) and (3) the personal integrity of Augustine.

Regarding *persecutio*, the chronological analysis of the texts reveals a development from rejection, through inner ambivalence to deliberate justification of government action against the Donatists. In concrete terms, this means that Augustine initially identifies those directly involved in the *persecutio* with the chaff (*ep.* 23, 392 AD). But that identification already becomes less self-evident in *ps. c. Don.* (393-394 AD). In the first book of *c. litt. Pet.* (book 1: 400 AD) he defends a moderate form of governmental measures against the Donatists, but still attributes the excesses to the chaff. Later (from *ep.* 105, 409 AD) his earlier reservedness disappears. He frankly states that the Donatists have no right to claim *persecutio*. He no longer considers coercive measures to bring the Donatists back to the Catholic church characteristic of the chaff.

The Donatist charges that have to do with *traditio* are mainly historical. This historical issue is less emotionally charged than the contemporary issue of the *persecutio*. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of the Donatist schism, seen from a theological point of view, depends on it. Initially (*ps. c. Don.*, 393-304 AD), Augustine limits his defense to the position that the old accusations against Caecilian have not been proven. Moreover, the case was legally decided in favor of the Catholic church: *causa finita est*. When it becomes clear that the Donatists do not agree, Augustine digs deeper into the matter. He tries to prove his case by all kinds of historical details. Yet his main argument is the ecclesiological principle that the church in its present form is still a *corpus permixtum*. He uses the visual language of the threshing floor to transcend the level of mutual accusations. By means of this metaphor, he creates room in his rhetorical line of reasoning to admit that the Donatist accusations could make sense. He emphasises the ecclesiological principle that the presence of chaff is no reason to leave the threshing floor of the church. In short, the allegations of betrayal do not constitute a legitimate justification for the Donatist schism.

With regard to the third issue, that of personal charges against Augustine, the threshing floor functions in a similar way to transcend the level of a debate about the actual accusations. Although the Church Father responds in detail to attempts by Petilian and Cresconius to undermine his integrity as a bishop of the Catholic church, yet he does not focus on evidence of his personal innocence, but on the theological principle of the temporary *permixtio* of the church. In the worst case the accusations can only prove that he as a person is not wheat, but chaff in the church. Even in that case, the threshing floor proves that the charges do not give the Donatists the right to persist in their schism.

In addition to the defense, Augustine also uses the threshing floor to launch the counterattack. For this, he returns to the issues of *persecutio* and *traditio*. The Church Father makes the charges against the Catholic church boomerang back to the Donatists. Regarding the *persecutio*, from the beginning he maintains that the Donatists are hypocritical, given the violent behaviour of the *circumcelliones*. In recent secondary literature, Catholic criticism of the *circumcelliones* is mainly interpreted as political rhetoric to motivate the civil authorities to take more severe action against the Donatists. But this interpretation ignores the meaning that the threshing floor acquires in Augustine's work. This metaphor shows that he is primarily concerned with the ecclesiological debate, namely with the holiness claims the Donatists use to justify their schism theologically. This is even more clear when the *traditio* issue is used in the counterattack. Regarding the *persecutio*, the Church Father initially feels burdened because of the negative role played by the Catholics, but with regard to betrayal (*traditio*), he immediately returns the accusation to the Donatists. Referring to legal evidence, he argues that some of the schismatic bishops who have condemned Caecilian because of *traditio* are themselves known as *traditores*. In this way he wants to force the Donatists, who have seceded because of the alleged betrayal by Caecilian, to recognize that the chaff of the betrayers can also be found among themselves. For if they acknowledge that there are also *traditores*

in their own church, this would imply that the historical case of betrayal can no longer be a theological justification for their schism.

To prove that the Donatists cannot sustain their ecclesiological holiness claims, Augustine repeatedly confronts them with the case of Maximian (*causa Maximiani / maximianensium*). For the Donatists it is an unsavory issue. It is a schism in their own church, a reason why Augustine regards it as just retribution from God. The Church Father uses this case for example to counter the charge of *persecutio*. He states that the Donatists, who claim to be the martyr, have themselves called on the civil authorities to act violently against their own schismatics, the Maximianists. The *causa maximianensium* is especially used by Augustine to argue that the way the Donatists have dealt with the Maximianists is contrary to their own ecclesiological principles. According to these principles, the Donatist schism was necessary because the sins of the chaff (in particular the alleged betrayal of Caecilian) would contaminate the wheat. But according to Augustine, in their generous attitude towards the returning excommunicated Maximianists, they have unintentionally acknowledged that the church is a *corpus permixtum*, and that the sins of the chaff do not pollute the wheat. So they have in fact given up the most important theological justification for their schism. Although the *causa maximianensium* provides no new substantive points of view for the ecclesiological debate, in practice it becomes the historical crown witness of Augustine against the Donatist schism.

An important part of chapter 4 is the section about the threshing floor as the Biblical crown witness in the Donatist debate. In studies about the *permixtio* of the church, relatively little attention has been paid to the parable of the *area* (Matthew 3.12 / Luke 3.17), especially compared to the *ager* (Matthew 13.24-30 and 36-43). Yet already in *mor.* (387-389 AD) Augustine expresses preference for the *area* over the *ager*. In addition, the threshing floor also has the primacy over all other metaphors for the mixed nature of the church in the Donatist polemics. This is particularly striking because Optatus of Mileve, Augustine's predecessor in the Donatist controversy, only uses the parable of the field (*ager*) in his anti-Donatist works. However, this parable seems to be less useful to Augustine, especially since the visual language of the weeds among the wheat can also be used for a pure church in the middle of an unholy world. Presumably he is already familiar with this interpretation of the *ager* from his Manichaean years. It is certain that this interpretation will appear later in the Donatist controversy. Nevertheless, over time (from *ep.* 43, 396 AD) Augustine also uses the field with regard to the temporary *permixtio* of the church, just as his Catholic predecessors in North Africa, in particular Cyprian and Optatus. In addition to the threshing floor and the field, he uses more other metaphors of the *permixtio*, such as the fishing net with good and bad fish, the house with good and bad vessels, and the herd of sheep and goats. But the threshing floor remains in the foreground, and after a while dominates again. This becomes particularly clear during the *Carthaginensis collatio* (June 411 AD). So far, no attention has been paid to this in the study of this Carthaginian Conference. Nevertheless, this is an important development regarding the substantive debate with the Donatists. In the course of the theological dispute about the church, the Donatists are especially cornered with the *area* as Biblical proof against schism. When Augustine later looks back on the *collatio*, he even regards the threshing floor as the Biblical crown witness in the theological debate about the *permixtio* of the church. He then concludes that in particular this metaphor has been successful in defeating the Donatists.

In the anti-Pelagian works the threshing floor hardly makes an appearance. The discussion with the Pelagians addresses the holiness of the church, just as the discussion with the Manichaeans and the Donatists. However, in the Pelagian controversy the debate focuses on the holiness of the individual believers. Augustine mentions a certain *permixtio* of the individual members: the believers have a lifelong struggle against their inner sinfulness (*concupiscentia*). Nevertheless he does not use the visual language of the threshing floor for this. Exceptions are some passages that describe a discussion about original sin, insofar as it relates to the aspect of the guilt (*reatus*) that is washed away by baptism. But in passages about original sin relating to the permanent inner sinfulness, the Church Father argues with other Biblical data than the threshing floor.

In the context of his own church, the threshing floor is again given an important place as a metaphor for the temporary *permixtio*. In the non-homiletic, even more so in the homiletic works,

Augustine communicates through this metaphor that in the present, there will be no pure church on earth. In this way, as a pastor and preacher, he prepares his own church members against the attraction of holiness movements outside the church, such as the Manichaeans and especially the Donatists. The threshing floor functions as an exhortation to remain faithful within the Catholic church, instead of separating oneself because of the unholiness of bad Christians, in short, as an exhortation to *tolerare* instead of *separare*. In particular in the context of his own church it becomes clear that the *permixtio* also has a confronting and distinctive element. The presence of chaff in the church implies that it cannot be taken for granted that all members of the church are wheat. Especially in the sermons Augustine keeps complaining about the large amount of chaff that can be found in the church. The Church Father experiences the presence of so much chaff as a heavy burden in his pastoral responsibility. Nevertheless, he repeatedly expresses his confidence that God guarantees a good result in the end. In the meantime, the presence of many bad Christians (the chaff) represents a potential danger to the other church members. In the context of the Donatist controversy, the Church Father tends to downplay this potential danger. The Donatists confront the Catholics with the contagious effect of the alleged sinfulness of Caecilian and others, but Augustine argues that each is responsible for his own guilt, and that nobody is contaminated by other people's sin. In this regard, it is all about the imputation of sin. However, as a pastor and preacher of his own parish, he is aware of another potential chaff threat to the wheat, the influence of a sinful life. In his works, especially in the sermons, the Church Father considers it as his responsibility to warn against this threat. This shows that his opposition to the schismatic holiness pursuit of the Donatists is accompanied by his own desire for holiness in the church. Moreover, it has been found that Augustine consistently places the *permixtio* of the church and the corresponding *tolerantia* in the light of the eschatological separation of wheat and chaff. Therefore, the exhortation to *tolerare* instead of *separare* is not intended as unlimited tolerance.

Chapter 5 demonstrates that the threshing floor in Augustine's works not only functions as a metaphor of the *permixtio* of the church, but also as an image of the future separation of wheat and chaff that is already apparent to some degree in the present. In the secondary literature this aspect of the 'already' of the last judgment has often been left out of the picture, because the attention is mainly focused on the aspect of the temporary mixture. But for the Church Father, the threshing floor also acquires meaning as an image of the distinction (a) within and outside the church and (b) between wheat and chaff within the church.

Regarding the distinction within and outside the church, Augustine presents the Catholic church as the only threshing floor of Christ. From his earliest to his last works, he communicates the ecclesiastical adage that there is no salvation outside of this church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Already in *uera rel.* (390 AD) he clearly distinguishes between on the one hand the *ecclesia catholica* and on the other hand the pagans (*pagani*), the heretics (*haeretici*), the schismatics (*schismatici*) and the Jews (*Iudaei*). In practice, the threshing floor hardly functions to distinguish the Christian church from the pagans and the Jews, who consider themselves non-Christian. After all, this difference is so obvious that little attention needs to be paid to it. The case is different when it comes to the Manichaeans and the Donatists who consider themselves Christians. In debate with them, Augustine argues that the wheat of the true believers can only be found within the threshing floor of the Catholic church. He thinks considerably more positively about the Donatists (*schismatici*) than about the Manichaeans (*haeretici*), although this is not always clear in the heat of polemics. As early as *uera rel.* (390 AD) he writes that there is agreement with the Donatists in the doctrine (*doctrina*) and in the sacraments (*sacramenta*), but not with the Manichaeans. As an example of this more positive attitude, Augustine participated in a proposal to reunite with the Donatists. According to this unification proposal, the bishops would be allowed to return while retaining their church positions. With regard to the Manichaeans, this attitude would be unthinkable. Remarkable is in particular that Augustine never blames the Donatists for their orthodoxy or their way of life, as he does with the Manichaeans. There are even indications that he more or less acknowledges that the Donatists are more serious about the sanctification of life than the Catholics, for example in his letter to Felicia (*ep.*

208, after 411 AD). The more he blames the Donatists for separating themselves from the worldwide church. He consistently describes them as chaff that blows away from the threshing floor before the winnowing actually takes place. In the large anti-donatist works (from *c. litt. Pet.*, 400-404 AD) he even characterizes the Donatists as the lightest chaff (*leuissima palea*). By this he means that because of their schism they are even more condemnable than the 'ordinary' chaff of the carnal Christians within the church. In the same period (also for the first time in *c. litt. Pet.*) the Church Father no longer refers to the Donatists as *schismatici* but also as *haeretici*. In the secondary literature this has often been explained by political and practical motives. In the time of Augustine it is indeed the intention of the North African bishops to apply the anti-haeretic legislation to the Donatists, as it used to be common in earlier times. However, Augustine also has a theological motivation. He wants to articulate how severely he blames the Donatists for their schism. He accuses them of pride, the lack of love as the fruit of the Holy Spirit, even fratricide.

Sometimes Augustine nuances his ecclesiastical exclusivism. He mentions grains of corn among the Donatists, though not among the Manichaeans. However, the warning remains that these grains are picked up by the birds before they reach the heavenly granary. For their salvation's sake they must therefore be swept back to the threshing floor of the Catholic church. There are also some texts (*uera rel.* 11, 390 AD, and *bapt.* 1,26, 400-405 AD) about wheat grains that ended up outside the threshing floor against their will. In the secondary literature, it is assumed that this is about Christians who are wrongly excommunicated. On closer investigation, another explanation seems more likely, namely that it concerns tenants or laborers (*coloni*) who can not go to the Catholic church because their lords have forbidden them. Although objectively speaking this is wheat outside the church, according to Augustine an inner, spiritual connection with the Catholic church remains indispensable for sincere believers. In these texts, too, he wants to stick to his starting point, namely that it is imperative to come to and / or to stay on the threshing floor of Christ, which is the Catholic church. Meanwhile, these texts show that the dividing line is not always as absolute as it seems.

The 'already' of the eschatological separation not only becomes visible in the distinction within and outside the church, but also in the distinction between wheat and chaff within the boundary of the threshing floor. Whoever belongs to the worldwide church is in the right place, but according to the Church Father this is not a guarantee of salvation. He clearly states that the distinction between wheat and chaff concerns the whole church, including the church members who participate in the sacraments and the clergy. In his pastoral role Augustine exhorts his parishioners to critically examine themselves. In doing so, he exposes as chaff not only Christians who openly live in sin, but also church members who have the appearance of godliness but lack the essence of it.

In the early works (from *mor.*, 387-389 AD), Augustine not just distinguishes between wheat and chaff, but also between two categories of wheat, namely the 'ordinary' believers and the 'perfect' believers (*perfecti*). The description of the *perfecti* shows a high ideal of holiness, evidenced by an ascetic way of life withdrawn from society. Yet Augustine is somewhat ambivalent, especially when he criticizes the radical ascetic ethics of the Manichaeans. In reply to the Manichaeans, he argues that true believers do not have to refrain from all kinds of food, the possession of material goods, and marriage. When Augustine exchanges his own prior reclusive life for the intensive pastoral ministry in Hippo Regius, the ascetic ideal soon fades away as a characteristic of the wheat. In *exp. Gal.* (394-395 AD) the withdrawal from public life is no longer mentioned. In *cat. rud.* (400-405 AD) the most pious category (*perfecti*) of the wheat is no longer in the picture at all. That does not imply that the Church Father completely abandons the ascetic ideal. Personally, he remains a participant in a monastic community in Hippo Regius for life.

The fading of the ascetic ideal can be related to two developments. First of all there is the sobering reality of everyday life. Initially, Augustine was optimistic about the holiness of the church members. In *mor.* (387-389 AD) he wanted to prove that the Catholic way of life surpasses the Manichaean way of life. But when he becomes active as a presbyter, and later on as a bishop in the church, his earlier optimism gives way to worries about the many chaff in the church. In the context of his own church he is busy combatting all kinds of popular sins and the spiritual lukewarmness of many church members. As a pastor and teacher of the church, he focuses on the basics of Christian

sanctification. In this context, it is understandable that the focus on ascetism, which is relevant to only a select group of believers, disappears into the background. The second development is a theological one. In the early years of his pastoral ministry, Augustine intensively studied the letters of Paul. As a fruit of this study, he wrote *exp. Gal.* (394-395 AD). In this commentary, Augustine distances himself from a legalistic pursuit of holiness. Instead, he advocates an evangelistic sanctification of life, that is, sanctification combined with humility, a sense of one's own sinfulness and dependence on God's grace in Christ. These new emphases explain that the Church Father focuses less than before on the ascetic achievements of the 'grains of wheat', and puts more emphasis on God's unmerited grace.

Augustine already nuances his own ecclesiological holiness ideal in his earliest works by using the threshing floor metaphor (*mor.*, 387-389 AD). According to him, at least some form of tolerance is characteristic of the wheat: for the time being on the threshing floor the presence of the chaff must be tolerated. Especially in the Donatist controversy, this tolerance receives a lot of attention as the fruit of love (*caritas*), in contrast to schism. Although for Augustine the *tolerantia* is an essential characteristic of the wheat, this tolerance does not mean neutrality or acceptance of a sinful way of life. The tolerance is partly limited by the *ecclesiastica disciplina*: Augustine argues for a properly functioning church discipline that is medical in nature. Even more important to him is another limitation of the *tolerantia*, namely the spiritual separation (*separatio spiritualis*) as a characteristic of the wheat in the church. This means that the wheat dissociates itself from the sins of the chaff, although it does not separate itself from the chaff. This involves an aversion to these sins (*non consentire*) and a separation in the heart (*in corde*) despite the physical mixing (*in corpore*) with the chaff in the church. This spiritual separation therefore implies a holy way of life, which distinguishes the wheat from the chaff. In this context, Augustine reminds his church members of their own responsibility to each other. He exhorts them to warn each other if church members live a sinful life. This is the practical application to the responsibility of the ordinary man that he mainly makes in his sermons.

The importance of sanctification to Augustine becomes especially clear when he communicates in the context of his own church. In particular in his sermons, out of his pastoral responsibility, he warns against an easygoing Christianity that cannot stand criticism. Already in the earliest works (both homiletic and non-homiletic) the distinction between wheat and chaff has to do with the inner man: the focus on God and eternal life. How this translates into everyday life is already present in the early years, but it gains more substance when Augustine becomes bishop. He does not hesitate to call sin by name. For example: drunkenness, greed, visiting theater performances, causing unrest in the church, cursing, blaspheming God, visiting fortune tellers or sorcerers, wearing amulets or occult objects, deception, adultery and living together outside marriage. In short, he mentions a wide range of popular sins, with sexual sins receiving relatively little attention. Characteristic of the wheat is that it distances itself from such sins, that it focuses on God in faith and begs his forgiveness, that it puts its trust in Christ, and calls on his help to persevere in doing good. The wheat is moved by the love that the Holy Spirit pours out into the heart. This love is not only the love towards God, but also towards the neighbour. For example it is about hospitality, marital fidelity, honesty, and the selfless lending of money. So, the Church Father does not distinguish between wheat and chaff based on mystical experiences or a radical ascetic ethics. Instead, he is concerned with the focus of the heart (*in corde*) and the daily way of life (*in moribus*) as an inseparable unity. With regard to the sanctification of life the basic tones of the *sola gratia* already sound clear in the early years of his pastoral ministry, but they sound louder over time, especially in the Pelagian controversy. At the same time, the former ideal image of the perfect Christian gives way to a different description of the wheat. Though the inner focus on God and the practical sanctification of life remain essential in his description of the wheat, the wheat now clearly has more in common with the publican who begs for mercy than the Pharisee who boasts in himself.

Chapter 6 investigates to what extent the 'already' of the future separation is definitive. The visual language of wheat and chaff seems to imply an irreversible state of affairs: chaff normally cannot turn

into wheat and vice versa. This fact seems to be consistent with interpretations of Augustine in which it is assumed that his theology is imbued with a determinism that paralyzes paraenesis. However, it has been demonstrated that Augustine uses the metaphor in a non-deterministic way. The threshing floor is not the place where wheat and chaff remain unchangeable until Judgment Day. Instead, for Augustine the threshing floor is the place where the ministry of salvation takes place. Therefore, the threshing floor is the place of hope for change for the better. It is the place where chaff turns into wheat. This expectation of change for the better is an important motivation for Augustine to take his responsibility as pastor and preacher in the church and it motivates him to actively participate in the various polemics. It also encourages him in his missionary attitude. Already in one of his earliest writings (*uera rel.*, 390 AD) he expresses his intention to bring 'outsiders' onto the threshing floor of Christ. These 'outsiders' are referred to as erring (*errantes*), and consist of the earlier mentioned categories of pagans, heretics, schismatics, and Jews. They are referred to as the growth potential for the church. Furthermore, Augustine already articulates the expectation of a future conversion of the Jewish people in *exp. Gal.* (394-395 AD). His missionary attitude is also found in later writings, such as *agon.* (396 AD) and in particular in *cat. rud.* (400-405 AD), a text that could be characterized as a missionary catechesis. Even more clearly than in the non-homiletic works, the missionary attitude of Augustine is expressed in his sermons. So far, in Augustine research little attention has been paid to the missionary attitude of the Church Father, and even less to the way in which he reminds his church members of their own missionary responsibility. Sometimes it is assumed that he considers charity as the core business of missionary activities. But when analyzing the texts, it has become clear that he is mainly interested in communicating the Christian truth. In his non-homiletic works, he thematizes the mission of the church to bring those who wander outside back onto the threshing floor of Christ. In his sermons, he urges the congregation to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others in personal contacts, for example with Jews and pagans. In doing so, he draws attention to the importance of a way of life that is inviting instead of offensive, and moreover the Christian calling to pray for the conversion of others. An important motivation for his missionary attitude is the gracious patience of God. Anyone's conversion is possible as long as he is alive, according to the Church Father.

With regard to the means that contribute to the intended change for the better (conversion), for Augustine the most important is the Word. In the context of his own church, this is first and foremost the preaching of the Word, and furthermore also the communication of the Word in catechesis and pastoral care. Outside the context of his own church, the Word has its place in polemics and in all kinds of personal contact. In addition to the Word, the Church Father mentions the significance of prayer and the sacraments. Church discipline is also relevant because of its medical function, albeit of course only for members of the church. For 'outsiders', even coercive measures by the government can be effective means (see Chapter 4). Within the context of his own church, Augustine repeatedly reminds the church members of their responsibility for each other. It is everyone's Christian duty to admonish each other when necessary, hoping that they will repent, that is, that chaff will turn into wheat. The change from chaff to wheat is a change from disbelief to faith, from disobedience to obedience, from darkness to light, from death to life. In short, it is all about an inner change that becomes visible in a holy way of life focused on God.

When Augustine has broken free from Manichaen determinism, at first he relates the intended change to human free will (*uera rel.*, 390 AD). But when he is called into pastoral ministry, he emphasises the grace nature of salvation. Already in his early years as a pastor and preacher, he attributes the change from chaff to wheat to God. In the early sermons that are dated while he is a presbyter, he no longer relates the change of wheat and chaff to human free will, as was the case in *uera rel.* Yet afterwards, when he has become a bishop, he again feels free to appeal to human freedom of choice to be wheat or chaff. From this it can be deduced that the confession that the intended change is effected by God does not undermine the paraenesis in Augustine's works. Yet his view on sin and grace finds further depth in the course of his pastoral ministry, especially in the Pelagian, and later Semi-pelagian, polemics. This means, for example, that the Church Father repeatedly reminds his congregation of their own origins. The grains of wheat must acknowledge that they, like the chaff, were born from Adam and Eve, and therefore were sinners before. In addition to

this, the presence of wheat on the threshing floor is attributed to God's gracious election.

An important result of the analysis of Augustine's 'threshing floor texts' is that the confession of *sola gratia* continues to be accompanied by an urgent paraenesis. In his pastoral ministry, both in his early and later works, he consistently urges the chaff to become wheat. This paraenesis mainly functions in the sermons, which is obvious because the paraenetic element belongs to the genre of preaching. However, it cannot be inferred from this that there would be a fundamental difference between the homiletic and the non-homiletic works concerning the relationship between God's grace and human responsibility. This is suggested e.g. by Straw in her article about Augustine's exegesis of the parables of the field and the threshing floor. But in reality, Augustine practices and theologically defends the paraenesis, including the appeal to human responsibility, even in his last dogmatic writings in which his thoughts about predestination are fully developed. The conviction that it is God who converts the human heart is not at the expense of the paraenesis in his writings, catechesis, pastoral care, and last but not least his preaching. On the contrary, from this conviction the Church Father derives a positive expectation in his pastoral ministry, that is to say his hope that his laborious efforts for the intended change from chaff to wheat will not be in vain. For him, God's election is the guarantee for the presence, multiplication, and preservation of the wheat on the threshing floor.

Chapter 7 deals with the significance of the *area* as a metaphor for the final judgment. In Augustine's works the threshing floor has a clear eschatological meaning. This meaning comes into the picture in the future winnowing (*uentilatio*) of the threshing floor. As it is written in Matth. 3.12 / Luk. 3.17, Christ will appear on the threshing floor to definitively separate wheat and chaff. The wheat will be stored in the granary (*horreum*), which indicates eternal life. The chaff will be burned with fire (*ignis*), which indicates eternal punishment.

Investigating the eschatological meaning of the threshing floor, the applied differentiation in different contexts had little value. In the context of the Pelagian polemics, the threshing floor hardly plays a role. In the context of the Manichaean and Donatist controversy, the metaphor has its eschatological meaning, but the debate is not about eschatology. There is a difference of opinion with the Manichaeans about, for example, the resurrection of the body, but not about the future separation of wheat and chaff as such. Regarding the Donatists, Augustine agrees with them in doctrine (*doctrina*), which includes eschatology. Nevertheless, he disagrees with them about the criteria for the final judgment. From a Donatist point of view, participation in the Catholic church would pose a threat to future salvation. On the contrary, Augustine communicates that toleration of the chaff within the Catholic church is a necessary condition for eternal salvation.

The eschatological meaning of the threshing floor is often mentioned by Augustine, but he usually limits himself to the 'that', not the 'how' of the future separation of wheat and chaff. The aspect of winnowing (*uentilatio*) primarily serves to interpret the *permixtio* of the church as a limited period in salvation history in the light of Judgment Day. In the context of his own church, Augustine pays more attention to various aspects of the eschatological expectation than he does in the other contexts. It can be deduced that he counts the expectation of the second coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead among the basics of the Biblical preaching and the instruction of faith in the church. For Augustine the announcement of Judgment Day has a clear element of warning. He is aware of his pastoral responsibility for the salvation of his church members. It is important to notice that the warnings for the final judgment are part of his ministry of salvation. As a preacher, Augustine wants to give hope to his audience. This is especially clear when the eschatological coming of Christ with the winnowing-fork is related to his first coming. Before Christ will come to judge (i.e. *uentilare*), He has already come to be judged. In this way the eschatological judge is proclaimed as the present Saviour. The intention of this Gospel ministry is that Christ will not have to condemn at his second coming, or in other words that chaff will turn into wheat.

In his description of the eternal destinations of wheat and chaff, Augustine barely allows for speculation. Based on the testimony of Scripture and the confession of faith (*symbolum*) about the resurrection of the body, he states, for example, that future life is not purely spiritual, but also physical. But he hardly elaborates on what this means in concrete terms. The Church Father realizes

that he is talking about things that are beyond human sight and human experience. He deliberately stays as close as possible to the literal text of the Holy Scriptures, sometimes with some comment added. In the secondary literature (for example Eger, Kelly, Daley) it is generally assumed that he interprets the Bible text literally. This appears to be partially true, namely in that he literally quotes the Scripture. But the aforementioned authors do not mention that according to Augustine these matters are beyond all human imagination, and are therefore more or less unknowable. In this respect, 1 Cor. 2.9 functions in Augustine's works as a hermeneutic key to his ideas about eternal life. The texts that deal with the eternal destiny of the wheat must therefore be read less literally than assumed at first sight. The same can be said concerning the eternal destiny of the chaff. Although the Church Father mentions a physical aspect because of the resurrection of the body, he also argues that eternal fire is of a different order than ordinary fire. Because the eternal punishment is unknowable during earthly life, the relevant texts from Scripture do not have to be interpreted unequivocally literal. In fact, for Augustine the worst thing in hell is not the fire, but the eternal abandonment of God. In contrast to this is eternal life, where the deepest joy will not consist in the gifts but in the Giver: in enjoying (*perfrui*) the immediate presence of God.

The eschatological expectation of Christ's coming with the winnowing fork makes clear that Augustine in his ecclesiology is primarily interested in the invisible church, that is to say the church in its future form in which it is purified from all chaff. At the same time, as a minister on the threshing floor of Christ, he gives full weight to the visible church as well. In this respect this dissertation confirms the insights of them we have previously called attention to the significance of the visible church in Augustine's works. For even though the visible, mixed form of the church is only temporary, according to Augustine participation in the visible church is necessary for salvation.

In chapter 8 the final conclusions are presented. Specifically, this concerns the research method (8.1), the *area* as a metaphor for the salvation history (8.2), the sources that Augustine used (8.3), the agreement with Cyprian and the difference with Tertullian (8.4), a chiliastic interpretation of the *area* (8.5), the *area* in relation to the Old and the New Testament period (8.6), Augustine and the Jews (8.7), the *area* in Manichaean polemics (8.8), the *area* in Pelagian polemics (8.9), the special place of the *area* in the Donatist polemics (8.10), the *area* as a theological metaphor (8.11), the principle of no salvation outside the church (8.12), the limitation of the principle of *tolerantia* (8.13), the presence of wheat and chaff in the church (8.14), the difference between wheat and chaff (8.15), the change from chaff to wheat (8.16), predestination and paraenesis (8.17), the eschatological significance of the *area* (8.18), the twofold destination of wheat and chaff (8.19), the visible and invisible church (8.20), the difference between the homiletic and non-homiletic works (8.21), Augustine as a trained orator (8.22), new translations (8.23), new datings (8.24), and four proposals for further research (8.25).

It was concluded that there is no real substantive difference between the homiletic and non-homiletic works, although there is a difference in the representation and thematisation of the insights. As a trained orator, Augustine takes into account the people whom he addresses with his message. Various examples are mentioned which show that one must take into account his rhetorical professionalism when interpreting the texts. For example, there is much more agreement with the Donatists than one would at first sight infer from his words, which shows that there is also rhetoric in his polemics. In addition to this, it can be concluded that the research method, in which the homiletic and non-homiletic works are discussed separately, has proven to be useful regarding the chronology of the texts. It has also led to new arguments for the dating of a number of sermons.