

AUGUSTINE ON THE DEACON-PREACHER- MARTYR STEPHEN

The early Christian writers were profoundly impressed by Stephen, the first martyr. The Greek homiletic tradition contains a number of sermons in his honour, sermons by John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Asterius of Amasea, Proclus of Constantinople, and Hesychius of Jerusalem.¹ In the west, it is mainly the oeuvre of Augustine which deserves our attention. A few years ago Father Mayer collected a large amount of data from the sermons of Augustine regarding the celebration of Stephen the first martyr.² In what follows, an attempt is made, to add to Father Mayer's work by analyzing this data and offering some comments on the results.³

I The earliest Latin records

Tertullian

A good place to begin is with a look at the pre-Augustinian Latin tradition. It becomes immediately obvious that Tertullian took a lively interest in the life, ministry, and death of Stephen (cf. Acts 6-7). For him, Stephen is a model of patience in the face of suffering precisely because he 'while being stoned prays for the forgiveness of his enemies' (*De patientia* 14,1).⁴ In *Scorpiace* 15,2, Stephen is important as one of many who are persecuted because of Christ: in Acts it reads: 'Stephen is buried (under the stones)'.⁵ In *De resurrectione mortuorum* 55,9, Tertullian shows that a human remains human even when he receives preferential treatment from God. He uses the examples of both Moses and 'Stephen, who looked like an angel, but whose mortal human knees had nevertheless given way during the stoning (Ac 6,15 and 7,60)'.⁶ In *Adversus Praxean* 30,5, and with

¹ See the list in the *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*.

² C. Mayer O.S.A., "'Attende Stephanum conservum tuum' (Serm. 317, 2, 3). Sinn und Wert der Märtyrerverehrung nach den Stephanuspredigten Augustins", *Festschrift Bartelink*, ed. Bastiaensen – Hilhorst – Kneepkens, Steenbrugis 1989, 217-237.

³ Here, Chadwick-Healy's CD-ROM edition of the *Patrologia Latina* has been a great help. For patristic quotations, however, the best available critical editions were consulted.

⁴ *Lapidatur ... et veniam hostibus suis postulat* (Ac 7,60).

⁵ *Stephanus opprimitur*.

⁶ *Stephanus angelicum iam fastigium induerat, sed non alia genua in lapidatione succiderant*.

regard to the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Trinity, Tertullian states that the Son *sits* at the right hand of the Father. The fact 'that Stephen, while being stoned, saw Him still *standing* at His right hand (Acts 7, 55), was an announcement that He would sit afterwards, when the Father puts all his enemies under his feet (cf. *Ps* 109[110],1 and *Heb* 1,13)'.⁷ As we will see, the question of whether Stephen was sitting or standing at the right hand of the Father will also capture the attention of Ambrose and Augustine.

Cyprian

In the extant writings of Cyprian, Stephen appears only once. The text of *De bono patientiae* 16 is very similar to the aforementioned passage quoted from Tertullian: here, too, his *patientia* is praised. It is praised precisely because Stephen 'although killed by violence and by stones, did not pray for revenge, but for forgiveness for his murderers'.⁸

Hilary

Just after the middle of the fourth century, Hilary of Poitiers, in his comments on Psalm 58 (59),6, a verse which contains the exclamation: "*Exsurge in occursum mihi!*" ('Rise and come towards me!'), places these words in the mouth of Stephen and notes that he was the first martyr in name of God the Father. He also notes that, in response to Stephen's call, 'the Father descended to the edge of heaven as it were to meet him'.⁹

Stephen also plays a part in Hilary's wonderful allegorical interpretation of *Mt* 17,13. Matthew 17,24-27 relates the story about the miraculous payment of the temple tax, when the Lord asks Peter to cast his hook – the hook of the heavenly teachings – in the water – the water of the world – and to pay for both of them by means of the coin he found in the mouth of the first fish he caught. Hilary writes: 'Peter indeed cast ... the hook of the heavenly teachings ... into this, the blessed first martyr sank his teeth ... Stephen came up first; he had the coin in his mouth' and it was the equivalent of the two

⁷ *Hunc (Filium) vidit Stephanus cum lapidaretur, adhuc stantem ad dexteram Dei, ut exinde sessurum donec ponat illi Pater omnes inimicos sub pedibus suis.*

⁸ *Qui cum ... vi et lapidibus necaretur, non sibi vindictam sed interfectoribus veniam postulabat.*

⁹ *... cum primo nominis sui martyri Stephano velut in primoribus caeli in occursum a Deo Patre descensum sit.*

didrachmas that were owed: 'one for Christ, and one for the preaching of Christ'.¹⁰

The image of Stephen as the first fish caught by the new teaching of Christ is also present in the work of Ambrose. Ambrose's source for his comments is not immediately apparent. Origen does not involve Stephen in his interpretation of this passage of Matthew, which he, by the way, interprets unfavourably.¹¹ Did Hilary serve as a source of inspiration for Ambrose?

Ambrose

In *Exameron* 5,6,16, Ambrose also calls Stephen the fish that was caught 'in Peter's' net. As the first follower of the gospel, he came out of the water with the coin of justice in his mouth. He then cried out: 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand.' The fish was actually the Lord Jesus, because he knew that Stephen's mouth contained the exact amount of tax that was owed. Indeed, through his glorious martyr's death, the well-spoken defender (*locuples adsertor*) has done justice to both the judgement and the teaching of Peter as well as to the grace of Christ'.¹² A similar train of thought is to be found in *Expositio evangelii Lucae* 4,75. Here Peter has caught 'the first fish, possibly the first martyr, who carried the drachma, the tax amount owed, in his mouth. Our drachma is Christ. The first martyr, Stephen, carried a treasure in his mouth, due to the fact that he was proclaiming Christ by means of his martyr's death'.¹³ Comparable to this is *De virginitate* 119, in which we read that 'the martyr who was the first to come up from the sea to heaven, was caught by Peter before the service at the altar, not with a net, but with a hook, in order to ascend to heaven

¹⁰ *Petrus ... doctrinae hamum misit in saeculo;... huic adhaesit beatus ille primus martyr hamo Stephanus igitur primus ascendit, Stephanus staterem ore continuit, ... quia talis ... stater et pro Christo erat et pro Christi praedicatione solvendus.*

¹¹ See F. Ledegang, *Mysterium ecclesiae. Beelden voor de kerk en haar leden bij Origenes*, 2 pts., diss. Nijmegen 1992, 1,184.447-448.

¹² *Petrus ... misit retia et complexus est Stephanum, qui de evangelio primus ascendit habens in ore suo statera iustitiae; unde ... clamavit dicens: ecce video caelos apertos et Filium hominis stantem ad dexteram Dei. Pro hoc pisce stabat Dominus Iesus; sciebat enim esse in ore eius pretium sui census; denique glorioso martyrio et Petri iudicium atque doctrinam et Christi gratiam locuples adsertor inplevit.*

¹³ *Et fortasse primus hic piscis primus est martyr in ore habens didragma, hoc est pretium census. Didragma nostrum Christus est. Habebat igitur primus ille martyr, Stephanus scilicet, in ore thesaurum, cum Christum in passione loqueretur.*

in the stream of his blood, with a treasure in his mouth, since he proclaimed Christ through the testimony of his martyr's death'.¹⁴

In the story of the stoning, Stephen sees Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father (*Ac* 7,55). Ambrose, in *Epist.* 63,5, comments: 'Jesus stood there as a supporter, He stood there as a devoted helper to assist his athlete Stephen in battle; He stood there as one prepared (*paratus*) to crown his martyr'.¹⁵ Here, for Stephen, in full accord with the traditional terminology for martyrdom as a battle against the devil, the designation "athlete of Christ" is used.

In *Explanatio psalmi* 45,13, Ambrose states that 'when someone sins heavily, God is disposed toward him in such a way that he departs from him [and] this is why Adam saw God walking away from him after his sin and that is why Stephen saw Him standing (*Acts* 7,55); one fell because of his evil sin, the other received the crown of martyrdom'¹⁶: The statement of Acts that Stephen saw the Lord standing and Paul's wish for believers to remain standing (*I Cor* 15,58: *stabiles estote et immobiles*; *Col* 1,23 *immobiles a spe evangelii*) lead Ambrose, in *Explanatio psalmi* 61,18, to conjure up the image of a "double standing": 'by faith, the immovable standing Stephen was seeing the immovable standing Christ,' the two motionless ones compare favourably with 'the children of the traitor, who according to the psalm have to wander about aimlessly and are reduced to beggary'.¹⁷

Finally there is the passage from *De fide ad Gratianum* 3,17,137-141, where, just like Tertullian in *Adversus Praxean*, Ambrose poses a question about both the standing and sitting (*stare et sedere*), of the Son of Man at the right hand of the Father. Ambrose's text is anti-Arian; he emphasizes the equality between Father and Son. Could it have been that the words of Stephen were used by the Arians to support their opinion? In any case, the passage deserves to be quoted in full. In passing it should be noted that the same terminology of a fight against the devil is used to indicate the martyrdom:

¹⁴ *Martyr ... ille qui de mari ad caelum primus ascendit, captus a Petro minister altaris, non reti sed hamo levatur, ut rivo sui sanguinis elevaretur ad caelum; cuius in ore thesaurus erat, cum Christum in confessione loqueretur.*

¹⁵ *Stabat Iesus quasi advocatus; stabat quasi sollicitus, ut Stephanum athletam suum certantem iuaret; stabat quasi paratus, ut coronaret suum martyrem.*

¹⁶ *Ubi ... aliquis gravius peccat, commovetur in eo Deus, ut ab eo transeat. Unde et Adae peccanti deambulare visus est et Stephano stare, quia ille in praevaricatione lapsus est, hic in martyrio coronatus.*

¹⁷ *Immobilis ergo fide Stephanus immobilem Christum videbat; ... non movit se Stephanus, non movit et Christus; ... commoti amoveantur filii eius et mendicent.*

'With regard to the standing at the right hand of God, this is only found in one place, [the one] where Stephen says that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Why does it always say that He is sitting at the right hand of God, and only in one place that He is standing? He is sitting as the judge of the living and the dead, He is standing as the defender of his friends. So he was standing as a priest, when He offered his Father the sacrifice of the good martyr; He was standing, when he went to present, as his protector, the well-deserved reward to the good wrestler for his exhausting battle. To indicate even more clearly that the standing did not imply a deficiency, but, on the contrary, power, Stephen pleaded with the Son to recommend him to the Father with the words: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." To demonstrate the equality in power of the Father and the Son, he spoke again and said: "Lord, do not blame them for this sin." The Lord says the same thing to the Father during his own suffering as the Son of Man (*Lk* 23,34); it is also the prayer of Stephen to the Son of God in the hour of his torture. That the request for a blessing is addressed equally to both Father and Son, proves the equality of their power. If they (the Arians) claim that Stephen said this to the Father, they must have noted that the preceding request was addressed to the Son. Even if we follow their reasoning, the unity in majesty of Father and Son is demonstrated by us, then if the request is made to Father and Son, the equality of the prayer indicates equality of doing. If they object to the fact that the Son is addressed with 'Lord', we conclude that they are also trying to deny Him the designation 'Lord'.¹⁸

II Augustine

Augustine is, or has, a 'Stephen's story' all on his own. Mayer's research on the series of sermons he composed on

¹⁸ *Uno tantum loco stantem ad dexteram Dei Iesum Stephanus vidisse se dixit... Cur ... ubique ad dexteram sedere ostenditur, uno legitur in loco stare? Sedet quasi iudex vivorum et mortuorum; stat quasi advocatus suorum. Stabat ergo quasi sacerdos, quando Patri hostiam boni martyris offerebat; stabat quasi bono luctatori bravi-um tanti praesul certaminis redditurus....* (140) *Ut autem evidentius cognosceretur nulla esse stantis iniuria, sed potestas, Filium Stephanus obsecrabat, ut se amplius commendaret Patri, dicens: Domine Iesu, recipe spiritum meum. Et ut eandem Patris et Filii potestatem esse ostenderet, repetivit dicens: Domine, ne statuas illis hoc peccatum. Hoc Dominus in passione propria quasi Filius hominis Patri dicit; hoc et Stephanus Filium Dei in suo martyrio deprecatur. Cum eadem gratia a Patre Filioque deposcitur, eadem potentia declaratur.* (141) *Aut si volunt Stephanum Patri dixisse, ... advertant tamen ... quod Filius prius sit rogatus. Nos autem et secundum eorum interpretationem ostendimus unitatem paternae maiestatis et Filii; nam cum Pater rogatur et Filius, aequalitas precatationis operationis indicat unitatem. Si autem illis non placet Filio dictum 'Domine', videmus quod etiam Dominum eum negare conantur.*

Stephen¹⁹ have already made this clear, but, if Mayer's research is supplemented with other examples from Augustine's oeuvre, the picture can be completed.

Stephen in Augustine's oeuvre

§ 1. *The martyr Stephen*

What applied to the church of his time, also applied to Augustine once he had become a Christian and began to preach. Devotion to the martyrs was both popular and important, and Augustine, being the liturgist and preacher that he was, went along with this. Stephen, the first martyr, could count on receiving his sympathy and his eloquence. This is especially because, as he states in *Sermo* 315,1,1, Stephen's *passio* is to be found in the canonical book of the Acts of the Apostles and, as such, possesses an inherent guarantee of dependability which invites both preaching and reflection. In a sermon on the words 'The harvest is bountiful ...' Augustine says (*Sermo* 101,2,2) that 'the first preachers of the gospel, the apostles, were sent out as harvesters and, wielding the scythe of the gospel, brought the sheaves to the threshing floor of the Lord, where Stephen' – the first of the new crop – 'had to be threshed'.²⁰ Obviously in the background is the thought that Stephen is the first martyr of the New Testament. In *Sermo* 315,1,1, 316,1,1 and 317,1,1 Augustine, in passing, draws attention to the fact that Stephen, appointed by the apostles as deacon and as such their inferior, has preceded them in martyrdom.

He also pays attention to the attitude of Stephen, who first sees the heavens opened during the stoning and who sees Jesus standing at God's right hand (*Acts* 7,56), but who, when kneeling down before his death, pleads with the Lord not to hold his persecutors accountable for their sin (*Acts* 7,60). In *Sermo* 315,3-4,5 and 6,7, this is commented on: 'standing' (*stans*) Stephen was praying for himself, asking as a martyr for his just reward; 'kneeling down' (*fixo genu*) he prayed for mercy for his persecutors. In *Sermo* 49,10,11, the question is again: why first standing, and then kneeling down? The preacher answers: 'Who prays for a just man has an easy task, and that is why

¹⁹ See also footnote 2. This series consists of *sermones* 314-324. Sermons 320 – 324 describe what happened in Hippo, probably during the years 425 and 426, with regard to Stephen's relics. Note well that they are of secondary importance in Augustine's reasoning.

²⁰ *Missi messorum cum falce evangelii portaverunt manipulos ad aream dominicam, ubi Stephanus tritureretur.*

Stephen was praying for himself standing. When he then had to pray for the Jews, for the murderers of Christ, for the murderers of the saints, for his own murderers: he was aware of the fact that their godlessness was enormous, even gigantic and difficult to forgive, and he kneeled down'.²¹ The same train of thought is to be found in the sermons on Stephen. In *Sermo* 316,3,3; 317,4,5; and 319,4,4, Augustine makes it a point to note that Stephen prays for himself standing and for his executioners kneeling down. This is also the case in *Sermo* 90,9.

Augustine also connects the standing of Stephen with the standing of Jesus, who, in Stephen's vision, is standing at the right hand of God (*Acts* 7,55). In *Sermo* 314,1,1, he explains: 'Stephen saw Jesus standing and that is why he was standing himself and did not fall: Jesus was standing high above and was looking down on his warrior below and gave him, his soldier, invincible strength not to fall'.²² In the explanation of the *Credo*, Augustine remarks, with reference to this 'standing' of Jesus, on the apparent contradiction with the creed's 'He is sitting at the right hand of the Father'. In *Sermo* 213,4,4, a speech delivered for *traditio symboli*, i.e., the introduction of the baptismal candidates to the creed, he poses the following question to the text of the *symbolum*: 'How can Stephen say that he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of the Father?' He gives the answer by means of the Latin *sedere* 'to sit', a verb with a wide range of meanings. The *sedet* of the creed means: 'he remains', 'he is'.²³ We find the same explanation in *Sermo* 214,8, yet another sermon delivered at a *traditio symboli*. We should not interpret the term *sedere* literally. For example, we often say about a person that 'he has sat so and so years in a convent, meaning: he has remained or lived there'.²⁴ 'Sitting' is 'remaining', is 'being'. In a word, it is the Latin idiom with its large number of meanings for *sedere* that provides Augustine with a solution to the problem.

The fact that Stephen suffered death by stoning also presents an opportunity for a variety of observations. Specifically, Augustine connects the hardness of the stones with Stephen's

²¹ *Qui pro iusto orat non laborat: ideo stans pro se oravit. Ventum est ut oraret pro Iudaeis, pro interfectoribus Christi, pro interfectoribus sanctorum, pro lapidatoribus suis; attendit nimiam et magnam esse impietatem ipsorum, quae difficile donari posset, et genu fixit.*

²² *Iesum stantem videbat; ideo stabat et non cadebat; quia stans sursum et deorsum certantem desuper spectans, invictas militi suo vires ne caderet suggerebat.*

²³ *Sedet ... dictum est: manet, habitat.*

²⁴ *Tot annos ... in monasterio sedit: hoc est, ... commoratus est, habitavit.*

reproach to the Jews that they are '*dura cervice*' or 'hard-headed' (Acts 7,51). This detail is presented in the most surprising manners. In *Sermo* 317,4,5: 'when (the persecutors) had gone to the stones, hard people to hard stones, they threw their equals on him; he was stoned with rocks, he who died for the Rock, the rock that was Jesus'.²⁵ In *Sermo* 49,9,10, 'stones threw stones, hard people threw hard stones, those who received the Law on stone, threw stones'.²⁶ *Sermo* 315,3,5 offers more of the same, though here Stephen is presented as a teacher of law. 'What law? The law they received on the stone tables. Rightly turned to stone themselves, they stoned the friend of Christ'.²⁷ In *Sermo* 316,2,2: 'Under their stones Stephen had to endure hard men, who threw what they were themselves. Do you want to know that he had to endure hard men? These are his words: "Hard-headed ..."'.²⁸ In *Enarrat. in Ps* 147,25-26, Augustine speaks about the hardness of crystal which characterized Saul/Paul at and after the death of Stephen. 'Among those who threw stones at the holy martyr Stephen, was that hard one (Saul), who was maybe even harder than the others: he was holding the coats of all those who were throwing stones, so that by the hands of all of them he might be stoned ... Behold Saul that block of crystal had become, after the death and the stoning of Stephen, desensitized towards Christ by a sort of hardness; he requested letters to the high priests (Acts 9,2) to gather christians from all over ... Saul hard as crystal persecuted Stephen to death'.²⁹ Similar to this is *Sermo* 229 1,4: 'Seven deacons were appointed, among whom Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, took pride of place. When they were appointed, the spirit of the holy Stephen did not back away from the preaching of the truth: he was blazing, sparks were flying, he inflamed others, until the Jews, filled with fanatical anger, threw from the

²⁵ *Cum ad lapides cucurrissent, duri ad duos, iactabant in illum pares suos; petris lapidabatur qui pro Petra moriebatur ... petra autem erat Christus.*

²⁶ *Lapides ... mittunt lapides, dura duri. Qui in lapide legem acceperunt, lapides mittunt.*

²⁷ *Quam legem ...? Quam illi in tabulis lapideis acceperunt. Merito lapidei facti amicum Christi lapidaverunt.*

²⁸ *Inter lapides patiebatur duos, mittentes quid nisi quod erant? Ut sciatis quia duos patiebatur, hoc illis dixit: Dura cervice ...*

²⁹ *Inter lapidatores sancti Stephani martyris, ibi erat iste durus, et forte ceteris durior: omnium enim lapidantium vestimenta servabat, ut omnium manibus lapidaret. (26) ... Ecce venit illud crystallum Saulus post caedem et lapidationem Stephani, duritia quadam stupidus in Christum, petiit litteras a sacerdotibus, ut undique exhibeat christianos... Saulus durus ut crystallum Stephanum est persecutus ad mortem.*

hardness of their heart hard stones on him, and provided us, in that way, with a martyr, the precursor of all martyrs'.³⁰ Augustine also speaks about the hard stones thrown by hard people in *Enarrat. in Ps 132*,8 and *Sermo 319*,2,2.

A peculiarity in Augustine's description of the persecutors, who reacted to Stephen's words by plugging their ears and by attacking him (*Acts 7,57*), is that he quotes a Psalm text about a viper depriving itself of hearing and that he then connects this to a chapter from the *Physiologus*, a popular work on natural phenomena (with a special emphasis on animal behaviour) interpreted from a Christian point of view.³¹ The Psalm verse reads: the wicked have poison as from a snake 'as from a deaf viper, that plugs its ears' (*sicut aspidis surdae et obturantis aures suas Ps 57*[58],5). This verse is also referred to in *Sermo 315*,3,5, since there is mentioned that the persecutors 'plugged their ears' (*aures obturaverunt*). In *Sermo 316*,2,2, the behaviour of the viper is elaborated on in great detail, and in exact accord with the text of the *Physiologus*: 'You recognize them (the persecutors) in the Psalm: "as from a deaf viper, that plugs its ears to avoid hearing the voice of the enchanter". About vipers it is said' (here the text of *Physiologus* begins) 'that, when the enchanter approaches them with his entreaties, and they refuse to appear from their holes, they press one ear to the ground and plug their other ear with their tail; even so the enchanter succeeds in getting them out In the same way the persecutors did not come outside yet, they plugged their ears. Yet' (it was going to happen anyway) 'let them come outside now, let them show who they are: let them run to the stones. They ran to them, they stoned him'.³² Augustine has taken even more from the *Physiologus*. For another example, note that once

³⁰ *Ordinati sunt septem diaconi, inter quos eminebat plenus Spiritu sancto Stephanus. Illis ordinatis sancti Stephani spiritus a praedicatione veritatis se non continebat: fervebat, scintillabat, accendebat, quousque Iudaei impleti zelo pro durtia cordis sui iniecerunt super eum duram lapidationem, et nobis fecerunt martyrem omnium martyrum metatorem.*

³¹ This is a very early work on 'christian physics'. It may have been written as far back as the second century. It is certain that it was originally written in Greek. What was to become a very popular Latin translation was made sometime in the fourth century. In my view, the text about the viper is a welcome addition to our knowledge of the *Physiologus* as used by Augustine.

³² *Agnoscis illos in psalmo "Sicut aspidis", inquit, "surdae et obturantis aures suas, ne audiat vocem incantantis ..." Sicut enim dicuntur aspidēs, quando incantantur, ut non prorumpant et exeant de cavernis suis, premere unam aurem ad terram et de cauda sibi alteram obturare, et tamen incantator producit illas ..., sic et isti ... nondum prorumpēbant: obturaverunt aures suas. Iam prorumpant, appareant qui sint: ad lapides currant. Cucurrerunt, lapidaverunt.*

when he commented on the text of Jeremias 17,11, he used the description of the angry partridge to symbolize the devil.³³

Two more remarks on Augustine's representation of the martyr Stephen will be helpful. Once he uses the fact that in Greek the name Stephen means 'crown'. Thus he says in *Sermo* 204,3: 'not all Jews are rejected: remember the crowd that greeted Jesus on Palm Sunday; remember the first disciples and apostles, remember 'Stephen, who in Greek was called "crown", and who was the first to achieve the crown of martyrdom after the resurrection of the Lord'.³⁴ This is formulated in an even more graphic way in *Sermo* 314,2: Stephen 'finally obtained what he was called; in glorification of his name he was led to the crown'.³⁵ In *Sermo* 229 C,1 the Latin-speaking listeners also have the meaning of the name Stephen explained to them.

In *Sermo* 49,10,11, the idea that the martyr is a type of warrior leads Augustine, during a lyrical speech addressed directly to Stephen, to use the honorary title, also used by Ambrose, *athleta*: 'come, athlete of Christ, look at Him who for your sake has hung on the Cross (ligno)'.³⁶

§ 2. "Pray for those who persecute you"

Augustine constantly emphasizes that the martyr Stephen imitates Christ by praying for his persecutors. The reason for his doing this, at least according to *Enarr. in Ps* 69,3, was the great commandment given in the sermon on the Mount: 'Love your enemies ... and pray for those who persecute you (*Mt* 5,44)'. In *De sermone domini in monte* 1,21,69, Stephen is also referred to when these are considered. Regarding the difficult obligation to forgive one's enemies, Augustine repeatedly mentions the example of Jesus and Jesus' imitation by Stephen. For example, notice *Enarr. in Ps* 108,4: 'Hanging from the cross (the Lord) said: "Father, forgive them, for they know

³³ See A.A.R. Bastiaensen, *La perdrix animal méchant figure du diable: Augustin héritier d'une tradition exégétique*, *Collectanea Augustiniana. Mélanges T.J. van Bavel*, published by Bruning – Lamberigts – Van Houtem, 2 pts., Leuven 1990, 1,193-217; which offers more detailed information on the history of the text from the *Physiologus*. The text on the viper is *Physiologus* 59, in German translation by Ursula Treu, *Der Physiologus. Naturkunde in frühchristlicher Deutung*, ²Hanau 1987, 106-107.

³⁴ *Stephanus in graeca lingua coronae nomine appellatus, et prior post resurrectionem Domini martyrio coronatus.*

³⁵ *In fine quod vocabatur adeptus est; sui nominis gloria Stephanus perductus est ad coronam.*

³⁶ *Eia athleta Christi, inspice illum qui pro te pependit in ligno.*

not what they are doing". The holy Stephen followed his example ... and prayed for his murderers with the words: "Lord, do not hold them accountable for this sin"³⁷. A similar point of view is to be found in *Enarr. in Ps 132,8*. In *Sermo 90,9*, Stephen's prayer 'Lord, do not hold them accountable for this sin' is claimed to be the equivalent of 'let me die physically, do not let them die spiritually'.³⁸ Typical is also the reflection of *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus 6,3* on the raven and the dove that Noah sent out from the ark to explore the drying earth. The dove is Stephen, the raven are his persecutors. Stephen forgave just like the Lord: 'Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, was honest, because he wronged no one; he was devout, because he tried to persuade to the impious. He also spoke out against the Jews: "Hard-headed and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you have always resisted the Holy Spirit". It was a violent attack, but the dove continues on without gall, without bitterness. What followed, shows clearly that the dove preached without bitterness. When they heard those words, the raven(s) ran immediately to the stones and stoned Stephen. Shortly before, he had attacked them with fiery conviction, as if they were his enemies, and he came down on them with these blazing words ... "Hardheaded and uncircumcised in heart and ears". If you had heard those words, you might have thought that Stephen, if it were up to him, had wished that they would be consumed (by the fire). Then, when the stones came flying from their hands, kneeling down he said: "Lord, do not hold them accountable for this sin" ... As had been demonstrated by the Master before him ... Hanging from the cross He had said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing"³⁹. With regard to Stephen's harsh reproach addressed to his opponents: 'Hardheaded and uncircumcised

³⁷ *Pendens in cruce dixit: Pater, ignosce illis, quia nesciunt quid faciunt. Cuius vestigia secutus sanctus Stephanus ... oravit pro lapidantibus, dicens: Domine, ne statuas illis hoc delictum.*

³⁸ *Ego moriar in carne, non illi in corde.*

³⁹ *Stephanus plenus spiritu sancto simplex erat quia nemini nocebat, fervens erat quia impios arguebat. Non enim tacuit Iudaeis, cuius sunt verba illa flammantia: 'Dura cervice, et non circumcisi corde et auribus, vos semper restitistis Spiritui sancto'. Magnus impetus, sed columba sine felle saevit. Nam ut noveritis quia sine felle saeviebat, illi auditis his verbis qui corvi erant, ad lapides statim adversus columbam cucurrerunt, coepit Stephanus lapidari; et qui paulo ante fremens et fervens spiritu, tamquam in inimicos impetum fecerat, et tamquam violentus invecus erat in verbis igneis atque ... flammantibus ...: 'Dura cervice, et non circumcisi corde et auribus': ut qui ea verba audiret, putaret Stephanum, si ei liceret, statim illos velle consumi, venientibus in se lapidibus ex manibus eorum, genu fixo ait: 'Domine, ne statuas illis hoc delictum' Prior ... illud fecerat Magister, ... qui pendens in cruce ait: 'Pater, ignosce illis, quia nesciunt quid faciunt'.*

...’ Augustinus sums up Stephen’s motivation in an eloquent and short formula that we can find in *Sermo* 317,4,5: ‘his voice cries out loudly, because it loves’.⁴⁰

The *conservus*-theme, which recurs frequently in later sermons, is especially noteworthy. Its context is rather pastoral: Augustine points out to his audience that it is difficult to forgive enemies, but not impossible. He exhorts them to look at Stephen: they are servants of the Lord, just like he is. Together with him we are all servants, *conservi*, of the Lord. If it is possible for one *conservus*, Stephen, to forgive his enemies in imitation of the example of Jesus, the same should be possible for and might even be required of us, his *conservi*. In *Sermo* 49,9,10, Augustine lets an imaginary Christian utter: to forgive one’s enemies, yes, Christ is capable of that, but this cannot be expected of me, an ordinary human being. He answers: ‘Just look at Stephen, your *conservus*; ... he was human (too); ... he was speaking to the Jews, he was furious with them and he loved them’.⁴¹ In *Sermo* 56,12,16 Augustine lets the resisting Christian speak again: ‘yes, Christ could forgive, He was Christ, the only-begotten Son, but I, poor human being cannot ...: ‘Remember your *conservus*. Stephen was stoned ... and he prayed for his enemies’.⁴² The same in *Sermo* 149,15,16: ‘If we find it too difficult to follow the Lord, who forgives his enemies, let us follow our *conservus*’.⁴³ In *Sermo* 284,6, at the occasion of the commemoration of the martyrs Marianus and Jacob, we find the following answer to the complaint that it is too difficult to imitate the Lord: ‘Follow, as gift of the Lord, your *conservus*, follow Stephen, follow Marianus and Jacob. These were human beings, these were your *conservi*, born just like you, but crowned, by Him who was born differently’.⁴⁴ The *conservus*-theme is set in sharpest relief in two sermons specifically dedicated to Stephen. In *Sermo* 315,6,8, the answer to the appeal to human weakness is: ‘Are you not aware of the fact that Stephen is your *conservus*? ... Nobody must say in his heart: who does such a thing? Look, Stephen did it. Out of his own

⁴⁰ *Lingua clamat, quod amat*. According to the version noted by Wilmart (*Revue Bénédictine* 44[1932], 203, n. 2), to be preferred over that of P.L.: *Lingua clamat, cor amat*.

⁴¹ *Attende Stephanum conservum tuum; ... homo erat; ... loquebatur Iudaeis, saeviebat et diligebat*.

⁴² *Cogitetur a te conservus tuus. Stephanus lapidabatur, et ... pro inimicis orabat*.

⁴³ *Si ergo multum est ad nos imitari Dominum, imitemur conservum*.

⁴⁴ *Ex gratia Domini imitare conservum, imitare Stephanum, imitare Marianum et Iacobum. Homines erant, conservi erant, sicut tu nati, sed ab illo qui non sic natus est, coronati*.

accord? By himself? If he did it through the gift of God, has he entered first and then closed the door in your face? Has he first crossed the bridge and then destroyed it? Is it too heavy for you? Then you too must pray. The fountain flows, the fountain has not dried up'.⁴⁵ The appeal and its rebuttal sound almost enchanting in *Sermo* 317,2,3: 'He was able to do this, as Son of God ... for His body was hanging on the cross, but within [it] God was present. Who is able to do such a thing? Has God deceived us (when He ordered us to love our enemies)? That is out of the question; He has not deceived us. If you are finding it too difficult to follow your Lord, then look at Stephen, your *conservus*. Christ the Lord is the only-begotten Son of the Father: does this apply to Stephen too? He has been born just like you, he is born from a body just like you, he is reborn due to Him through whom you are also reborn, he is redeemed for the same price as you, he is equally expensive. One deed of sale was drawn up for all of us. The gospel is the deed of sale which states that all of us have been bought: you are in it, he is in it. It is a deed of sale, because we are slaves; it is a testament, because we are children. Look at him, look at your *conservus*'.⁴⁶

§ 3. *Stephen and Paul*

Stephen and Saul/Paul are a favorite pair in Augustine's reflections: they recur frequently throughout his oeuvre. The two of them were tied together in Acts 7:59 and speaking or writing about one of them often led him to speaking or writing about the other.⁴⁷ Even prior to 400 Augustine, in *Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio* 15, in commenting on the text about a word spoken against the Holy Spirit that cannot be forgiven (*Mt* 12,32), notes that Stephen, himself

⁴⁵ *Nescis quia Stephanus est conservus tuus? ... Nemo dicat in corde suo: Quis illud facit? Ecce Stephanus fecit: de se, de suo fecit? Si autem de dono Dei fecit, numquid intravit et contra te clausit? Numquid pontem transivit et praecidit? Multum est ad te? Pete et tu. Fons manat, non siccavit.*

⁴⁶ *Ipse hoc potuit, tamquam Filius Dei ... Caro enim pendebat, sed Deus intus latebat. Nos autem quid sumus, qui ista faciamus? Fefellit qui iussit? Absit: non fefellit. Si multum ad te putas imitari Dominum tuum, attende Stephanum conservum tuum. Dominus Christus, unicus Dei Filius: numquid hoc Stephanus? ... Sic natus est ut tu; inde natus est, unde et tu; ab eo renatus est a quo et tu, eo pretio redemptus quo et tu; tanti valet quanti vales. Unum instrumentum nobis factum est. Evangelium instrumentum est, ubi omnes empti sumus: ubi tu, ibi ille. Quia servi sumus, instrumentum est; quia filii sumus, testamentum est. Ipsum attende, conservum attende. With regard to Stephen's kneeling pose during the prayer for forgiveness for his enemies and persecutors, see §1 entitled 'The Martyr Stephen' supra.*

⁴⁷ In §1 *supra* we quoted from *Enarr. in Ps* 147,25-26 regarding both of them.

full of the Holy Spirit (Ac 6,5 and 7,55), reproached the Jews for having sinned against that same Spirit: *Vos semper spiritui sancto restitistis* (Ac 7,51). Saul was also among those Jews who were opposing the Holy Spirit and were stoning Stephen, 'with his own hands he held onto the coats of the ones throwing stones: this was a deed which he later, having been totally filled with that Holy Spirit, ... reproaches himself for'.⁴⁸ The example of Christ and Stephen, who both prayed for their persecutors, is quoted in the equally early *De sermone domini in monte* 1,22,73, in connection to the command to 'pray for those who persecute you' (Mt 5,44). In 1,22,77, the former persecutor Paul is speaking: 'as Paul himself said, he chastened his body (1 Cor 9,26) and 'that rejected and negated ... his behaviour during the persecution of Stephen and the other christians'.⁴⁹ Both men are also mentioned in *De consensu evangelistarum* 1,10,16. Paul, who, after the stoning of the deacon-martyr Stephen, was still called Saul, persecuted the christians (Acts 8,3).

Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum 11,30 is directed against the Donatists and in connection with the Catholic belief in the expansion of the church throughout the entire world: that expansion began with the *passio Stephani diaconi*, when Saul as persecutor caused a first dispersion of the believers outside of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 8:1-3). Augustine's commentary the First Epistle of John, the *In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus*, dates back to the beginning of the fifth century. In 5,4, Jesus' forgiveness for his executioners is seen as the lesson, which his disciples including both Stephen and Paul, put into practice: 'Stephen was being stoned, and, kneeling down, he said: "Lord, do not hold them accountable for this sin" ... Also pay attention to what Paul says: "I too would like to sacrifice myself for you (2 Cor 12,15)". He was among those whom Stephen was praying for, when he was killed by their hands'.⁵⁰ In the opening lines of *Sermo* 278, 1,1, Paul, while still Saul, is said to be full of rage. In that rage he 'dragged the Christians to their deaths; ... he was the executor of the Jews' rage, both in the stoning of the holy martyr Stephen and in the exhibition (*exhibendis*) and punishment of

⁴⁸ ... in manibus omnium quorum vestimenta servabat; quod ipse sibi postea ... increpat, eo ipso Spiritu iam plenissimus.

⁴⁹ Hoc in se prosternebat et debilitabat ... unde Stephanum ceterosque christianos fuerat persecutus.

⁵⁰ Lapidabatur Stephanus, et genu fixo ait: Domine, ne statuas illis hoc delictum... Audi et apostolum Paulum: et ipse, inquit, impendar pro animabus vestris. Inter illos enim erat pro quibus Stephanus deprecabatur, quando eorum manibus moriebatur.

the others'.⁵¹ A passage from another sermon (*Sermo* 279,1,1) mentions that Saul 'was obviously present ... when the first martyr Stephen was being stoned. ... He held on to the coats, in order to assist the hands of those throwing stones: this way he could rage on even more fiercely ... than if he had been throwing stones himself'.⁵² In *Sermo* 116,6,6-7,7, with regard to the expansion of the young church we read: 'Let the Jews rage, let them work, let Stephen be stoned, let Saul hold on to the coats of those throwing stones ...; let Stephen be killed, let the church of Jerusalem be shaken up (*Acts* 8,1), let burning pieces of wood depart (discedant), let them set off and spread fire. For somehow or other the wood of the Holy Spirit was burning in the church of Jerusalem, since they believed they were of one heart and of one soul for God (*Acts* 2,44-45; 4,32). After Stephen's stoning that woodpile had to endure a persecution: the wood got scattered and the world caught fire. ... The raging Saul ... received letters from the high priests (*Acts* 9,2) and set off as a mad man. ... But where is God, where is Christ, where is the one who will crown Stephen? Where but in heaven?'⁵³ With regard to Saul's holding of the coats of the stoners, *Sermo* 175,6,7 says: 'Saul was a terrible sinner...; is he not the one whose one hand was not enough for the stoning of Stephen and who held on to the coats of the others?'⁵⁴ There are also two corresponding passages from *Sermo* 299,6 and *Sermo Dolbeau* 4,6. In the first of these, Saul/Paul is addressed: 'Yet you were the one who ... dragged the christians to their death, and, who, when Stephen was being stoned, held onto the coats of all in order to stone him with the hands of all?'⁵⁵ In the second passage,

⁵¹ ... *pertrahebat christianos ad necem; ... minister furoris Iudaeorum, sive in lapidatione sancti martyris Stephani sive in ceteris exhibendis et adducendis ad poenam.*

⁵² *Quando lapidatus est Stephanus primus martyr ..., evidentius aderat et Saulus.... Ut enim esset in omnium lapidantium manibus, ipse omnium vestimenta servabat, magis saeviens ... quam suis manibus lapidando.*

⁵³ *Insaniant Iudaei, impleantur zelo, lapidetur Stephanus, servet lapidantium vestimenta Saulus Occidatur Stephanus, perturbetur ecclesia Jerosolymitana: discedant inde ligna ardentia, accedant et incendant. Ligna enim quodam modo in ecclesia Jerosolymitana ardebant Spiritu sancto, quando erat in illis in Deum anima una et cor unum. Lapidato Stephano passa est illa congeries persecutionem: sparsa sunt ligna et accensus est mundus (7,7) ... Furens Saulus ... accepit epistulas a principibus sacerdotum, et coepit ire saeviens ... Sed ubi deus, ubi Christus, ubi Stephani coronator? Ubi, nisi in caelo?*

⁵⁴ ... *in iniquitate primus; ... nonne ille est cui ad lapidandum Stephanum manus una non sufficiebat, et aliorum vestimenta servabat?*

⁵⁵ *Tu eras ille ... qui christianos trahebas ad mortem, qui, cum lapidaretur Stephanus, ut in omnium manibus lapidares, omnium vestimenta servabas?*

Saul/Paul is not addressed, but he is talked about: 'Is that not Saul who was present 'when Stephen was stoned, and who held on to the coats of those throwing stones in order to stone him with the hands of all?'⁵⁶

In a sermon given on the occasion of the feast celebration of Peter and Paul, we find a different, but still very "Augustinian" train of thought (*Sermo* 298,1,1): 'Peter is the one who appointed him (Stephen) as deacon, Paul was his persecutor We have said that Paul was Stephen's persecutor. Peter must be regarded as the denier of the Lord. Peter has washed away his disavowal of the Lord with his tears, Paul has paid for his persecution of Stephen with blindness'.⁵⁷

§ 4. *Stephen's oration*

Augustine was not just inspired by Stephen's death as a martyr. He was also interested in the oration Stephen addressed to the members of the Sanhedrin (*Ac* 7,2-53). Augustine was very familiar with this oration. More than once he cited from it without mentioning Stephen – for example in *Enarr. in Ps* 46,6, and *Sermo* 6,2,2, where *Ac* 7,30 and 7,39 are quoted, respectively. Most of the time, however, his name is added. He considers Stephen to be an authority on the history of the Jewish people. In one of the sermons on Stephen, *Sermo* 315,2,3, Augustine presents Stephen as the teacher of his Jewish audience: 'He explained ... the law of God to them from the beginning'.⁵⁸ In *Sermo* 217,4, he recalls an utterance from Stephen from the same oration: 'Listen to the words of the holy Stephen (*Ac* 7,47-48) ... "Solomon built Him a house, but the most High does not dwell in temples made with hands"'.⁵⁹ In *Quaestiones in Exodus* 2, Augustine completes the text *Exodus* 2,12 with an illustration taken from the story about Stephen (*Acts* 7,25). In *Quaestiones in Genesim* 25,3, he tries to reconcile the apparent

⁵⁶ cum lapidaretur Stephanus, qui lapidantibus vestimenta servavit, ut in omnium manibus lapidaret? The same presentation also in *Sermo* 317,4,5 [in addition to Wilmart (see footnote 39), 205]: 'Saul who stoned with the hands of all, who held on to the coats of those throwing stones' *Saulus, qui omnium manibus lapidabat, qui lapidantium vestimenta servabat*.

⁵⁷ *Petrus illius ordinator, Paulus illius persecutor ... Paulum diximus Stephani fuisse persecutorem, Petrum respiciamus Domini negatorem. Petrus negationem Domini lacrimis lavit; Paulus persecutionem Stephani caecitate expiavit*.

⁵⁸ *Hic ... exposuit illis ab initio legem Dei*.

⁵⁹ *Audite sanctum Stephanum ... 'Salomon aedificavit ei domum', sed Summus non in manufactis templis habitat*.

contradiction between the text of *Genesis* 12,1 and the words of Stephen recorded in *Acts* 7,4. In *Quaestiones in Genesim* 56, he makes a similar attempt with *Genesis* 21,32-33 and *Acts* 7,5. *Genesis* 12,1 and Stephen (*Ac* 7,4) are again under discussion in *De civitate dei* 16,15,2. In *ibid.* 16,32,3 the statements of *Genesis* 11,31-32 and of Stephen (*Acts* 7,4) are harmonized.

Stephen's oration also supplies Augustine with material for theological discussion. In his work against the Pelagian Julian of Aeclanum (*Contra Iulianum* 6,24,76), Stephen's claim that it was Moses who 'fled on that word [to Midian]' (*Acts* 7, 29) is used as starting point for a reflection on the meaning of God's word. In the dispute with the Arian bishop Maximinus, the divine nature of the Holy Spirit and its indwelling in the believer is brought up for discussion, and Augustine's response includes Stephen's statement (*Acts* 7,47-48) regarding God's 'dwelling place' (*Contra Maximinum* 2,21,1).

Stephen's words against the Jews frequently lead Augustine to contemplations of the problem of the *visio Dei*: viz. is God visible to man? In the early text of *Contra Adimantum* 1,9, he writes in order to oppose the Manichean rejection of the Old Testament. At issue here is the figure of Moses. Stephen says (*Acts* 7,30-38) that God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and on Mount Sinai. According to Augustine, Stephen uses the expression 'angel of God' to indicate God himself. 'He speaks by means of an angel, as an angel who proclaims the truth; it is correctly said that "God has spoken" and that "the angel has spoken"'.⁶⁰

Augustine deals comprehensively with this problem in *De trinitate* 3,10,24. Here he again emphasizes, with reference to Stephen, that the expression 'the angel of God' can indicate God the Lord himself. He writes: 'Stephen recounts all of this in the Acts of the Apostles (*Acts* 7,30-38), in the same way as it was told in the old books. ... The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham in Mesopotamia ... following these words he says that an angel appeared to Moses ... and that the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the Sinai desert in the burning bush. When he was drawing closer in order to inspect [it], the voice of the Lord said: "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." ... Here he identifies the angel with the Lord as well as with the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of

⁶⁰ *Sic et in angelo ipse loquitur, quando veritatem angelus adnuntiat, et recte dicitur 'deus dixit'... et item recte dicitur 'angelus dixit'.*

Jacob'.⁶¹ The judgement of Stephen (*Acts* 7,51-53) are quoted in *De trinitate* 3,10,26. Augustine comments: "You have received the Law in the utterances of the angels, and you have not kept it!": 'The Law was given to that people by utterances of the angels, but in that Law the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was being prepared (disponeretur) and announced, and He Himself, as Word of God, was present, in a miraculous, indescribable way in the angels through whose utterances the Law was given'.⁶² A passage from *Sermo* 7,6 exhibits a similar thought: 'Our fathers recognized the Lord in angels; ... they gave glory not to the shapes that were carrying, but to the One inhabiting ... Stephen says (*Acts* 7, 53): "'You have received the Law by the disposition of angels, and you have not kept it!": If he had said "from an angel", not "from angels", then some people might have said: "it is Christ", then he is called "the angel of God's decision", He is the Christ because he is called "the angel of the Great Counsellor". An "angel" is thus Christ, are then "angels" not Christ? The apostle Paul said that the seed of Abraham has been, a deposit done through angels by the hand of the Mediator'.⁶³ In his letter to Consentius on religious knowledge (*Epist.* 120,2,9), Augustine argues with reference to Jesus' appearance to Stephen ('I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God' [*Acts* 7,56]), that the corporality of the risen Lord was visible to mortal eyes: 'just as the Lord showed himself after his resurrection to his disciples, and after his Ascension to the apostle Paul and to the deacon Stephen'.⁶⁴ *Epist.* 147 (*De videndo deo*), 6,18 is also worth quoting here: 'God appeared ... to Abraham

⁶¹ *Nam et Stephanus in actibus apostolorum eo more narrat haec quo etiam in veteribus libris conscripta sunt ... Deus gloriae apparuit Abrahae patri nostro cum esset in Mesopotamia ... In consequentibus dicit quod Moysi angelus apparuit. ... Apparuit illi in deserto montis Sinai angelus Domini in flamma ignis in rubo. Qui cum accederet considerare, facta est vox Domini: Ego Deus patrum tuorum, Deus Abraham, Deus Isaac et Deus Iacob. ... Hic certe et angelum et Dominum dicit eundemque Deum Abraham et Deum Isaac et Deum Iacob.*

⁶² *In edictis quidem angelorum illi populo lex data est, sed Domini Iesu Christi per eam disponebatur et praenuntiabatur adventus, et ipse tamquam Verbum Dei miro et ineffabili modo erat in angelis in quorum edictis lex dabatur.*

⁶³ *Patres nostri Dominum in angelis agnoscebant ... non portantibus, sed insidenti gloriam dabant. ... In Actibus apostolorum Stephanus dicit: ... qui accepistis legem in edictis angelorum, et non custodistis. Si diceret 'angeli' et non 'angelorum', non deerant illi qui dicerent: Christus est, quia dictus est magni consilii angelus. Angelus Christus, numquid angeli Christus? Dicit et apostolus Paulus, quoniam semen Abrahae dispensatum est; dispositum, inquit, per angelos in manu Mediatoris.*

⁶⁴ *... sicut se discipulis post resurrectionem Dominus ostendit, sicut etiam post ascensionem apostolo Paulo et diacono Stephano.*

because He willed it; He didn't appear to others because He did not will it. He was also seen by Stephen when he was being stoned by the people, the heavens being opened; Jesus was also seen standing at the right hand of God, but he was not seen by the people'.⁶⁵

Augustine's attention was often drawn to the closing of Stephen's oration when he fiercely rebuked the Jewish leaders: '[You are] hard-headed and uncircumcised in your heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit, just as your fathers did before you. Which of the prophets have your fathers not persecuted? They have slain those who announced the coming of the Just One whom you have now betrayed and murdered. You have received the Law put into effect by the angels, but you have not kept it! (Acts 7,51-53).' Stephen's words are over-simplified in so far as past events are presented as relating to the entire Jewish people. Augustine follows this line of interpretation and just like in the text of *Epist.* 147 cited above, Stephen and 'the people' came face to face with one another. Augustine took 'the people' to mean the Jewish people, as if the whole race was involved against Stephen, and not just a group following their leaders. In *Sermo* 319,4,4, Augustine alludes to Stephen's prayer for his executioners: he prayed for them kneeling down: 'so great was Stephen's humility; but great is the guilt of that people'.⁶⁶ The short expression *Iudaei* 'the Jews' is usually what is used; but there can be no doubt that the whole Jewish people is meant. In *Contra Gaudentium* 1,23,26, we find the identification of Stephen's persecutors and 'the Jews'. The identification is made via a reference to John 16,2: 'The hour will come that they who kill you will think that they are offering service to God'. Augustine writes: 'What the Lord had predicted to his friends ... has been fulfilled by the Jews, who have killed the holy Stephen and many others, thinking that they were offering service to God'.⁶⁷ In *Sermo* 315,6,9, the brief answer to the question of what an angry person can contribute is: 'what the Jews [gave] to Stephen: punishment for themselves, the crown for him'.⁶⁸ In an earlier passage of the same sermon (5,7) the Jews are called 'great criminals'.⁶⁹ The text of *Epist.* 184A,2,4 labels them as 'unbelievers', for

⁶⁵ *Apparuit ... deus Abrahae quia voluit; aliis, quia noluit, non apparuit. Visum est etiam Stephano, cum lapidaretur a populo, aperiri caelum; visus est etiam Iesus stans ad dexteram dei et non est visus a populo.*

⁶⁶ *Tanta humilitas Stephani; magnus reatus est illius populi.*

⁶⁷ *Quod Dominus praedixit suis, per Iudaeos impletum est, qui sanctum Stephanum et multos alios occiderunt, dum putabant se officium Deo facere.*

⁶⁸ ... *quod Iudaei Stephano: sibi poenam, illi coronam.*

⁶⁹ ... *tam scelerati.*

whom the Lord, when He was being mocked by them hanging from the cross, and the blessed Stephan, when he was being stoned, prayed'.⁷⁰ In *Sermo* 47,3,3, amidst a discussion of whether good can spring from evil, we hear something similar: '[this is] what the Jews did to Stephen: by doing evil they sent him to the good [One]'.⁷¹ In *Sermo* 252,4,4, Augustine complains about the amount of chaff among the Christian wheat in his own day and he links this, without immediate cause, to the faulty behaviour for which Stephen reproached the Jews (*Acts* 7,51).⁷² In *Sermo* 49,10,11 – cf. *supra* – the guilt of the Jews is painted in the blackest of terms. Of Stephen Augustine notes that he also 'prayed for the Jews, the murderers of Christ, the murderers of the saints, his own murderers: he was aware of the fact that their godlessness was beyond measure even gigantic while also being difficult to forgive'.⁷³ In §1 *supra*, the harshness of Stephen's murderers was made clear by quoting an excerpt from *Sermo* 229 I,4, where these murderers are called simply 'Jews': '... until the Jews, filled with fanatical anger/zeal, threw hard stones on him from the hardness of their heart'.⁷⁴ In *Sermo* 278,1,1 Saul is called 'the agent (minister) of the rage of the Jews'.⁷⁵

Augustine does not in the least temper the sharpness of Stephen's words. He is however aware of the fact that Stephen himself was a Jew. Stephen belonged to the congregation of Jerusalem, the source of and model for all subsequent Christian churches. Augustine staunchly defended the unique character of this first church and its exceptional sense of community when he wrote against the Donatists, who, due to their focus on African Christianity, could not see anything especially praiseworthy about the city or the church of Jerusalem.⁷⁶ In *Sermo* 204,3 he wrote: 'not all Jews have been rejected: remember the crowd which greeted Jesus on Palm Sunday; 'remember the disciples, chosen from that crowd, becoming apostles,

⁷⁰ ... pro infidelibus ... pro qualibus et Dominus, cum pendens inrideretur, et beatus Stephanus, cum lapidaretur, oravit.

⁷¹ Quod Stephano Iudaei fecerunt: faciendo malum miserunt ad bonum.

⁷² Unde Iudaeos quoque Stephanus accusabat.

⁷³ ... ut oraret pro Iudaeis, pro interfectoribus Christi, pro interfectoribus sanctorum, pro lapidatoribus suis; attendit nimiam et magnam esse impietatem ipsorum, quae difficile donari posset.

⁷⁴ ... quousque Iudaei impleti zelo pro duritia cordis sui iniecerunt super eum duram lapidationem.

⁷⁵ ... minister furoris Iudaeorum.

⁷⁶ See my study *Urbs beata Jerusalem: Saint Augustin sur Jérusalem*, in *The Apostolic Age in Patristic Thought*, ed. Hilhorst, Leiden 2003, 227-240, esp. pp. 230-231.

remember 'Stephen ... being the first to receive the crown of martyrdom after the resurrection of the Lord'.⁷⁷

§ 5. *Corollarium on the chronology of the sermons on Stephen*

A few words on the dating of the specific sermons on Stephen (*Sermo* 314–324) will be helpful at this point. Sermons 316–324 were certainly delivered after 415. This was the year Stephen's relics were discovered in Jerusalem. Some of these relics soon found their way to Africa – in *Epist.* 212,1 Augustine reports 'that the widow Galla and her daughter, the virgin Simpliciola, have brought with them relics of the most blessed and most glorious martyr Stephen'⁷⁸ – just like in *Sermo* 316, Augustine presupposes their presence in Hippo⁷⁹. This is not the case in *Sermo* 315: the relics are not mentioned. The starting point of that sermon *Acts* 6,1–6, the passage which discusses the choosing of the seven deacons. As a matter of fact, this is a real 'Stephen' sermon, the richest of the whole series. Stephen had always been of great interest to Augustine, but here we find an especially strong concentration of his ideas and favorite themes – e.g. "appointed by the apostles, but preceding them as martyr"; "praying standing for himself, and praying kneeling down for his persecutors"; "Stephen our *conservus*" – all of which point to a later period in Augustine's preaching career and which are repeatedly employed in his later sermons on Stephen. The theme of the deaf viper also appears in sermons 315 and 316, suggesting chronological proximity. Although the relics are not mentioned in *Sermo* 315, it is not necessary to consider it as having been preached before 415. There would probably not have been a large chronological gap within this series of sermons on Stephen.

Sermo 314 is probably not significantly earlier than *Sermones* 316–324. Striking, however, is the mention of the date of Stephen's feast day on the 26th of December. Augustine begins with a reminder of the feast of Christmas that had been celebrated the day before: 'Yesterday we celebrated the feast of the birth of the Lord; today we celebrate the feast of his servant; at the feast of the birth of the Lord we celebrated the mercy of his birth, at the feast of his servant we

⁷⁷ *Cogitentur qui discipuli inde electi et apostoli facti sunt; cogitetur Stephanus ... prior post resurrectionem Domini martyrio coronatus.*

⁷⁸ *Galla vidua et eius filia Simpliciola virgo portant secum reliquias beatissimi et gloriosissimi martyris Stephani.*

⁷⁹ See footnote 19.

celebrate that he was crowned'.⁸⁰ *Sermo* 317,4,5 also contains a reminder of the feast of Christmas: 'We have celebrated the feast of the birth of the Lord; let us also celebrate that of his servant'.⁸¹ It is likely that *Sermo* 314 and *Sermo* 317 are closely linked chronologically. It seems necessary to assign all these sermons on Stephen to the same period, i.e., the years after 415. It seems quite possible that the feast of Stephen was introduced in Hippo only after the discovery of the relics in 415 and the arrival of some of these relics in Africa.

Conclusions

1) The comparison of Augustine's sermons on Stephen to those of his predecessors, including Ambrose, reveals several innovations. Augustine uses Stephen's story in his own unique way, although there are some points of contact with earlier writers and preachers. For example, many have claimed that: "martyrdom is a battle" or "the martyr is an *athleta*", just as many have wrestled with "how to reconcile the standing of the Son of Man seen by Stephen with the sitting of Christ at the right hand of the Father". In the end though these similarities are largely superficial. Augustine's interpretation of the coin-episode (*Mt* 17,24-27) as found in *Enarr. in Ps* 137,16 (namely that the fish is Christ and his mouth contains two coins which together are worth four drachmas which symbolize the four gospels), is completely different from those of either Hilary or Ambrose.⁸² It is obvious that these reflections are for the most part Augustine's own.

2) Augustine's interest in Stephen is prominent even in his early works. It is closely linked with his even deeper interest in the story of Paul's conversion from persecutor to apostle. In Augustine's mind, Saul was Stephen's chief executioner precisely because he held the garments of those throwing the stones. For Augustine, this made his conversion on the road to Damascus even more miraculous. Both Paul and Stephen ended their lives as martyrs; in the end, Stephen

⁸⁰ *Natalem Domini hesterna die celebravimus; servi hodie natalem celebramus; sed natalem Domini celebravimus quo nasci dignatus est; natalem servi celebramus quo coronatus est.*

⁸¹ *Celebravimus natalem Domini, celebremus et servi* (in addition to Wilmart, 205; see footnote 38).

⁸² Recall also of the unfavourable interpretation of this offered by Origen (cf. footnote 11). Apparently no solid exegetical tradition existed for this rather intriguing Matthean passage.

welcomes as a friend the man who contributed so significantly to his death.

3) Clearly, Augustine's portrait of Stephen undergoes development. The presentation of Paul holding the clothes of those throwing stones is rather early. The same goes for Augustine's repeated references to Stephen's oration against the stiff-necked Jewish leaders. The problems associated with the *visio dei* and with Christ's sitting and standing at the right hand of the Father are also posed early on. The *conservus*-theme and the theme of the double posture of prayer – standing praying for himself, and praying kneeling down for his executioners – only occurs in works of the later years, when the adoration of Stephen had grown in importance, probably due to the discovery of his relics. This data might prove helpful for the dating of a number Augustine's sermons: particularly *Sermones* 41, 56, 149 and 284, all of which contain the *conservus*-theme. Verbraken's suggests an early date for all these sermons.⁸³ It seems most suitable to place them after 415, together with the sermons specifically devoted to Stephen.

4) Augustine's giftedness as a preacher did not only consist of an amazing ability to vary his themes. Also characteristic of his preaching are his imaginative powers, his force of presentation, his skilful word and thought selection. The biblical story of Stephen's stoning encouraged his imaginative powers. The hard stones represent the hardness of the heart's of the throwers.⁸⁴ He was mainly interested in Saul, who held the coats of those throwing stones. Augustine also regarded him as a stoner, even as the chief stoner, the one who took charge of all stones. In *Sermo* 116,3,3, he says: 'Just throwing stones with his own hands he considered insufficient: he held on to the coats of those throwing stones'.⁸⁵ He expressed the same sentiment in *Sermo* 315,5,7: 'Saul ... held on to the coats of those throwing stones so that he might stone with the hands of all'.⁸⁶ The expression in *Sermo* 175,6,7 is also striking: 'one hand did not suffice to throw stones onto Stephen'.⁸⁷ The same portrayal of the 'stoning' Saul is to

⁸³ See the relevant sections of P.-P. Verbraken, *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de saint Augustin*, Instrumenta Patristica 12, Steenbrugis – Hagae Comitatus, 1976.

⁸⁴ See the discussion in §1 *supra*.

⁸⁵ *Adhuc manus suas quibus lapidaret parum putabat: lapidantium vestimenta servabat.*

⁸⁶ *Saulus vestimenta lapidantium servabat, ut omnium manibus lapidaret.*

⁸⁷ ... cui ad lapidandum Stephanum manus una non sufficiebat.

be found in *Sermo* 168,4,4; 279,1,1; 298,4,4; 299,6; 229 C,1; 317,4,5 and *Dolbeau* 4. These depictions remind us of those we saw in *Sermo* 176,2,2, where, with regard to the necessity of the baptism of children, he paints a powerful image of babies who walk 'on other people's feet' – those of parents, godparents, caretakers – 'with great haste to obtain healing (*sanentur*)'.⁸⁸

Also striking is the depiction of the (scattering fire of the preaching), lit and kindled by the spark of Stephen's word. In *Sermo* 229 I,4, we are told that 'the spirit of the holy Stephen did not refrain from the preaching of the truth: he was blazing, sparks were flying, he inflamed others'.⁸⁹ The next phase of the process (cf. *Acts* 8,1 and recall that after Stephen's death the church of Jerusalem was persecuted and scattered in all directions) is described in *Sermo* 299 B,4: 'After the martyr's passion of the most blessed Stephen, the brothers in Jerusalem were dispersed, and because they were lights, they were on fire with the spirit of God; wherever they came, they started a blaze'.⁹⁰ *Sermo* 116,6,6 is even more exhaustive and expressive: 'Let Stephen be killed, let the church of Jerusalem be shaken (*Acts* 8,1), let the burning pieces of wood depart, let them disperse and catch fire. Then, somehow, those pieces of wood of the Holy Spirit burnt in the church of Jerusalem, since they were of one heart and of one soul for God (*Acts* 2,44-45; 4,32). After Stephen's death, that woodpile was allowed to face persecution: the wood was scattered and the world burst into flames'.⁹¹ This same presentation is also found in *Sermo* 229 I,4: 'After Stephen's murder, the church which had been born in Jerusalem, had to endure persecution The persecution started and the brothers got scattered, because the burning wood of the woodpile started a fire wherever it went throughout the earth'.⁹²

⁸⁸ *Alienis pedibus currunt ut sanentur.*

⁸⁹ *Sancti Stephani spiritus a praedicatione veritatis se non continebat: fervebat, scintillabat, accendebat.*

⁹⁰ *Post passionem beatissimi Stephani dispersi sunt fratres qui erant in Jerosolymis, et quia lumina erant, spiritu Dei ardebant: quocumque venerant accendebant.*

⁹¹ *Occidatur Stephanus, perturbetur ecclesia Jerosolymitana, discedant inde ligna ardentia, accedant et incendiant. Ligna enim quodam modo in ecclesia Jerosolymitana ardebant Spiritu sancto, quando erat illis in Deum anima una et cor unum. Lapidato Stephano passa est illa congeries persecutionem: sparsa sunt ligna et accensus est mundus.*

⁹² *Occiso itaque Stephano persecutionem passa est ecclesia, quae nata est in Hierosolymis ... Facta est persecutio et dispersi sunt fratres; quia de una congerie ignis ligna ardentia dispersa per terram, quocumque venerant, accendebant.*

The words of *Sermo* 315,5,8 will form a fitting conclusion: 'Stephen is humbled, Christ is exalted; Stephen is bent down to the ground, Christ is hung high on the wood. He was seated on the chair of the cross, and from there was teaching Stephen the rule of love'.⁹³ This image is quite typical of Augustine: the bishop-rhetor in his *cathedra* holding up the Lord as the perfect teacher for his flock, and portraying Christ as speaking directly to his disciple Stephen from his throne, the cross.⁹⁴

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⁹³ *Quod Stephanus humilis, Christus sublimis; quod ille ad terram inclinatus, hoc Christus in ligno suspensus. Sedebat in cathedra crucis, et docebat Stephanum regulam pietatis.*

⁹⁴ A final remark. Many passages from Augustine's oeuvre concerning Stephen have been discussed. I noted down several more, but I judge these to be 'neutral' and without being able to add little or nothing to our knowledge. The inquisitive researcher can read *Enarrat. in Ps* 103,1,16 and 108,19; *In evang. Ioh.* 95,3, 101,4 and 120,4; *Sermo* 61 A,5; 128,2,3 and 266,2,2.