

# IMITATIO CHRISTI, IMITATIO STEPHANI

## // AUGUSTINE'S THINKING ON MARTYRDOM BASED ON HIS SERMONES ON THE PROTOMARTYR STEPHEN

### Introduction

102 *sermones*, of the approximately 546 conserved *sermones* of Augustine, are dedicated to feast days of saints and martyrs.<sup>1</sup> Approximately ten sermons have the first martyr Stephen as subject. Augustine probably preached those *sermones* of Stephen in the last decade of his life in the cathedral or in the *memoria* of Stephen in Hippo Regius.<sup>2</sup>

This article presents an analysis of the sermons of Augustine that deal explicitly with the *protomartyr* Stephen. The martyr Stephen features also in other writings of Augustine.<sup>3</sup> The scope of this analysis is limited to Augustine's *sermones*.<sup>4</sup> Augustine speaks about

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of Augustine's sermons on saints and martyrs, with their possible dates and places of predication, see: LAPOINTE, G., *La célébration des martyrs en Afrique d'après les sermons de Saint Augustin*, (Cahiers de Communauté Chrétienne, 8), Montréal 1972, pp. 73-76.

<sup>2</sup> BASTIAENSEN, A. A. R., *Augustin on the Deacon-Preacher-Martyr Stephen*, *Augustiniana* 54/1-4 (2004) 103-127, pp. 123-124. DROBNER, H. R., *The Chronology of St. Augustine's 'Sermones ad populum'*, *Augustinian Studies* 31 (2000) 211-218. LAPOINTE, G., *La célébration des martyrs*, pp. 50-52. PELLEGRINO, M., *General Introduction*, in ROTELLE, J. E., *Sermons I (1-19), On the Old Testament*, (The Works of Saint Augustine, A translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, III/1), New City Press, New York 1990, pp. 13-163, pp. 138-163. REBILLARD, E., *Sermones*, in FITZGERALD, A. D. (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids/Cambridge 1999, pp. 773-792, pp. 774-789.

<sup>3</sup> BASTIAENSEN, A. A. R., *Augustin on the Deacon-Preacher-Martyr Stephen*. MAYER, C., «Attende Stephanum conservum tuum» (Serm. 317, 2, 3). *Sinn und Wert der Märtyrerverehrung nach den Stephenpredigten Augustins*, in BASTIAENSEN, A. A. R., HILHORST, A., KNEEPKENS, C. H. (eds.), *Fructus Centesimus, Mélanges offerts à Gerard J. M. Bartelink à l'occasion de son soixante-cinquième anniversaire*, (Instrumenta Patristica XIX), Steenbrugge/ Dordrecht 1989, pp. 217-237.

C. Mayer (complemented by A. A. R. Bastiaensen regarding Augustine's innovations about Stephen compared with Tertullianus, Cyprianus, Hilarius and Ambrosius and the theme of Stephen outside Augustine's *sermones*) places the content of the Stephen sermons especially within the theological developments in Augustine's thinking. This article aims at a presentation of some specific subjects within the Stephen sermons *an sich*.

<sup>4</sup> In this way this article is restricted to the *sermones (ad populum)* and does not take into account: *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, *In Joannis evangelium tractatus*, *In epistulam Joannis ad Parthos tractatus*.



Stephen in *circa* 30 *sermones*. I have selected 13 *sermones* that have Stephen as main topic.<sup>5</sup> These sermons are in the transmission tradition of the *sermones* clearly linked with the name of Stephen.

Augustine's opinions about the martyrdom of Stephen are situated in the broader framework of his thinking about martyrology in general. Regarding Augustine's general view on martyrdom, I refer to solid studies in the footnotes.<sup>6</sup> The theme of Augustine's *sermones* of Stephen is also a part of Augustine's homiletics. For that broader context and background of the whole of Augustine's sermons, I also refer to more specialised studies.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the limitation of this article to Augustine's explicit sermons on the martyr Stephen, I will summarize in this introduction the framework of Augustine's ideas on martyrdom as represented in the secondary literature.

M. Pellegrino sketches the fundamental characteristics of Augustine's martyrology. Martyrs do not exist outside the Church. They help to build the Church, by their examples, by the miracles that happen by their intercession, by their call to pray to Christ, by their sacrifice, by

<sup>5</sup> *Sermo* 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 319A, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 382.

<sup>6</sup> BOEFT, J. Den, «*Martyres sunt, sed homines fuerunt*». Augustine on Martyrdom, in BASTIAENSEN, A. A. R., HILHORST, A., KNEEPKENS, C. H. (eds.), *Fructus Centesimus, Mélanges offerts à Gerard J. M. Bartelink à l'occasion de son soixante-cinquième anniversaire*, (Instrumenta Patristica XIX), Steenbrugge/ Dordrecht 1989, pp. 115-124. BONNARDIÈRE, A.-M. La, *Les 'Enarrationes in Psalmos' prêchées par saint Augustin à l'occasion de fêtes des martyrs*, Recherches Augustiniennes 7 (1971) 73-103, pp. 90-92: Stephen. LAMBOT, C., *Les sermons de saint Augustin pour les fêtes des martyrs*, Analecta Bollandiana 67 (1949) 249-266, p. 263: Stephen. MAYER, C., «*Attende Stephanum conservum tuum*». PELLEGRINO, M., *Chiesa e martirio in Sant'Agostino*, (Ricerche Patristiche), Bottega d'Erasmus, Torino 1982, Vol. I, pp. 597-633. PELLEGRINO, M., *Cristo e il martire nel pensiero di Sant'Agostino*, (Ricerche Patristiche), Bottega d'Erasmus, Torino 1982, Vol. I, pp. 635-668. SAXER, V., *Morts, martyrs, reliques en Afrique chrétienne aux premiers siècles. Les témoignages de Tertulien, Cyprien et Augustin à la lumière de l'achéologie africaine*, Editions Beauchesne, Paris 1980, pp. 124-149; pp. 170-229. MEER, F. Van Der, *Augustinus de Zielzorger. Een studie over de praktijk van een kerkvader*, Uitgeverij Het Spectrum, Utrecht/Antwerpen 1957 (3<sup>de</sup> herziene druk), deel II, pp. 180-204.

See also the references in footnote 14.

<sup>7</sup> MOHRMANN, Ch., *Etudes sur le Latin des Chrétiens*, (Vol. I), Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 1958: III. 7 *Saint Augustin prédicateur*, pp. 391-402, p. 402. PELLEGRINO, M., *General Introduction*, pp. 13-163. REBILLARD, E., *Sermones*. SCHNITZLER, F., *Zur Theologie der Verkündigung in den Predigten des hl. Augustinus. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Wortes*, Herder, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1968. OORT, J. Van, *Augustinus Verbi Divini Minister*, in OORT, J. Van, REUVER, A. De, VERDUIN, M. (red.), *Verbi Divini Minister. Een bundel opstellen over de dienaar en de bediening van het goddelijke Woord aangeboden aan L. KIEVIET v.d.m. ter gelegenheid van zijn vijftienvestigste verjaardag*, Ton Bolland, Amsterdam 1983, pp. 167-188.



their blood that is as seed for Christianity. Augustine attempts to direct the enthusiasm of the believers to God and Christ.<sup>8</sup> Pellegrino's second study points out the christological focus of Augustine's martyrology. The confession of Christ is the central element in martyrdom. Augustine perceives martyrdom as an imitation of Christ and as a witness of the love for Christ. Christ assists the martyrs and is present within the martyrs. Pellegrino shows that Augustine's martyrology also has an eschatological motivation. The martyrs long for the future life with and in Christ.<sup>9</sup>

J. Den Boeft gives an overview of the recurring themes in Augustine's martyr sermons. Augustine is constantly calling to imitate the martyrs. He frequently contemplates the sufferings and the death of the martyrs, their glorious crown. Genuine martyrdom only results from love. Martyrdom testifies not of human decisions, but of divine grace. Martyrs, during their passion, are not aimed at the temporal but at the heavenly good. Christ actually suffers within the passion of the martyrs. Martyrdom is a testimony of truth, faith and eternal life.<sup>10</sup>

C. Straw distinguishes five features in Augustine's vision on martyrdom. (1) Martyrs find life through their death. By denying themselves, they find themselves. (2) God's grace makes martyrs into martyrs. God gives the capacity to suffer. (3) There is a unity between Christ and the martyrs. That unity is so strong that Christ suffers and dies again in the passion of the martyrs. (4) Martyrdom has a mutual aspect. It is repeating the sacrifice of Christ and giving it back to Him. That is why it is a martyrdom because of Christ, but also a sacrificing for the sake of the neighbour. (5) Martyrs are witnesses, involved in an *agon*, a *certamen*, a battle with the devil. They are humble. They confess the truth and they die because of that truth. They let the number of faithful increase. Martyrs are friends of Christ. They intercede for the sake of others.<sup>11</sup>

G. Lapointe made a study of the liturgical celebration of martyrs in Africa based on Augustine's *sermones*. Lapointe observes that imitation of the martyrs is central in Augustine's thinking about the liturgical celebration of martyrs and in his ideas about the intercession

<sup>8</sup> PELLEGRINO, M., *Chiesa e martirio in Sant' Agostino*.

<sup>9</sup> PELLEGRINO, M., *Cristo e il martire nel pensiero di Sant' Agostino*.

<sup>10</sup> BOEFT, J. Den, «*Martyres sunt, sed homines fuerunt*».

<sup>11</sup> STRAW, C., *Martyrdom*, in FITZGERALD, A. D. (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids/Cambridge 1999, pp. 538-542.



by the martyrs. The celebration of martyrs exhorts to the following of the martyrs. The real celebration of the martyrs actually is the imitation of their virtues and morals. The martyrs are *exempla* because they followed the supreme *exemplum*, the passion of Christ. Christ is imitated by imitating the martyrs. The martyrs give a concrete example of a life that is solely aimed at moral happiness and eternal life (and that holds in contempt the temporary, the earthly and the visible). The following of the martyrs, leading up to the same victory and coronation, is according to Augustine possible for everybody. The intercession is also situated within the centre of Augustine's theology of the martyr cult: imitation. Martyrs pray that their example would be followed. The imitation as the core of the liturgical celebration and the intercession is based on a threefold martyrs theology: (1) the orientation towards God, (2) the central place of Christ, (3) the ecclesiological interpretation of martyrdom. (1) Martyrs are celebrated, but only God is worshipped. Martyrs refuse divine tributes. They identify themselves with God, to the degree that praising martyrs comes down to praising God. Martyrdom is the work of God. Tribute to the martyrs is tribute to God. (2) Augustine's praise of the martyrs always results in a hymn to Christ. Christ is the prototype of the martyrs (*caput et princeps martyrum*). Christ, by His passion, did not only open the way to the martyrs as an exemplary model but He also assists the martyrs permanently. Christ is present in the sufferings of the martyrs and makes them strong enough to endure their passion. This emphasis on the strong connection between Christ and the martyrs tries to avoid that the martyrs cult ends up in a form of polytheism. The christocentric dimension of martyrdom is also visible in Augustine's interpretation of the humiliation, the passion and death of the martyrs as a affirmation, testimony and confession of Christ. (3) The christocentrism of Augustine's martyr theology is connected with an ecclesiological dimension. The blood of the martyrs is the seed for the growth of the Church. Martyrs are the buildingstones of the Church. Martyrs, as members of the body that the Church is, follow their head in their martyrdom. The members have the task to follow the head. Out of an antidonatist reflex, Augustine poses that the genuine martyrdom only finds place within the unity of the Church.<sup>12</sup>

H. von Campenhausen noticed already that Augustine wanted foremost to avoid that the martyrs cult replaced the worship of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> LAPOINTE, G., *La célébration des martyrs*.

<sup>13</sup> CAMPENHAUSEN, H. von, *Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche*, Dandenhoed & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1936, pp. 101-106.



That concern is affirmed in every study about Augustine's martyrology. Based on that concern, the secondary literature distinguishes an evolution in Augustine's thinking on the veneration of relics and on miracles connected with the *memoriae* of the martyrs. Most studies see three periods in the evolution of Augustine's ideas on the cult of martyrs.<sup>14</sup>

- 1) Augustine was not really interested in the subject of martyrdom in the period between 390 and 401. That subject comes up in the context of Augustine's firm reaction against the abuses in the cult of martyrs, especially regarding the meals in honour of the dead and the martyrs (*refrigeria*) during which people frequently ate and drank excessively. Augustine, in the same context, reacts in his *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* against Faustus' accusation that the Christians simply replaced the pagan sacrifices and idols by their veneration of martyrs. Augustine answers that there are three valid reasons to commemorate martyrs: Christians want to imitate the example of the martyrs, they want to connect themselves with the merits of the martyrs, they want to be helped by the intercession of the martyrs. The altars raised in memory of the martyrs are no altars for the martyrs but for God. It is not the martyrs who are venerated, but God. The cult of martyrs is above all a cult of love and community. Drunkenness is always an evil. It can be forbidden, but that does not imply that people will obey that restriction.<sup>15</sup>
- 2) The concept of martyrdom became a clear point of interest for Augustine in the period between 410 and 415. The reason for this is to be found in the controversy with the donatists (and the *circumcelliones*). The schismatic movement of the donatists believed in a literal martyrdom. They sought the martyrdom themselves, e.g.

<sup>14</sup> BAVEL, T. Van, *The Cult of the Martyrs in St. Augustine. Theology versus Popular Religion?*, in LAMBERIGTS, M., VAN DEUN, P. (eds.), *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective, Memorial Louis Reekmans*, (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium CXVII), Peeters/University Press, Leuven 1995, pp. 351-361. BOEFT, J. Den, «*Martyres sunt, sed homines fuerunt*». MAYER, C., «*Attende Stephanum conservum tuum*», pp. 221-224. SAXER, V., *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, p. 124. STRAW, C., *Martyrdom*.

<sup>15</sup> *Contra Faustum Manicheum* XX, 4; XX, 21 (CSEL 25/1, p. 538; pp. 561-564).

Augustine had no personal need to deal with the subject of martyrdom. Three external factors led him into considering the subject with due attention, namely the popular veneration of the martyrs, his reaction against Faustus regarding the cult of martyrs and the pride of the donatists of their martyrs. BOEFT, J. Den, «*Martyres sunt, sed homines fuerunt*», p. 117. STRAW, C., *Martyrdom*.



by defying the pagan authorities or by jumping from a rock. Augustine reacts strongly against such an interpretation of martyrdom. Not the suffering *in se* makes the martyr, but the suffering for the just cause: truth and justice. Augustine emphasizes that martyrs cannot exist outside the love community of the Church. Schismatics, that threaten the unity, are certainly not martyrs. When Catholics, driven by love, have to punish donatists, this does not cause martyrdom for the donatists. That punishment is only an attempt to correct the donatists. Augustine rejects in the same period every form of suicide (e.g. out of honour). Martyrs did not commit suicide because of earthly motives (like the ancient examples of suicide because of the attempt to save honour as in the case of Lucretia), but let themselves kill because of the eternal life and out of a patient acceptance of all earthly misfortune. The pelagian controversy resulted in an emphasis of the grace in martyrdom.

- 3) Augustine can be seen as a fervent supporter of the martyrs cult from 415 (the discovery and spreading out of the relics of Stephen) until the end of his life. Tars Van Bavel points out that Augustine, despite this change in attitude, never exchanged his role as a critical theologian for a mere acceptance of the popular habits of the masses. The discovery of the Stephen relics did not imply a substantial change in Augustine's theology of martyrdom. The concern to aim the attention of the faithful to God and Christ remains the same. The scepticism of Augustine about the contemporary miracles by intercession of martyrs made place for an acceptance of those martyr miracles. Nevertheless, Augustine's fundamental view on miracles stayed the same. The only change that took place was that Augustine for the first time accepted that miracles also happened in Africa.<sup>16</sup> Augustine was originally convinced that no miracles took place anymore after the era of the New Testament. He changes that opinion after 415 but his interpretation of the content of miracles remains unchanged: Christ is central.

The question whether and in which degree Augustine's ideas concerning martyrdom and the cult of martyrs underwent an evolution,

<sup>16</sup> BAVEL, T. Van, *The Cult of the Martyrs in St. Augustine*, pp. 360-361.

Cf. LANCEL, S., *La Tardive Acceptation du Miracle*, in IBID., *Saint Augustin*, Fayard, Paris 1999, pp. 648-658.

Cf. VOOGT, P. De, *La notion philosophique du miracle chez saint Augustin*, *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 10 (1938) 317-343. VOOGT, P. De, *La théologie du miracle selon saint Augustin*, *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 11 (1939) 197-222.



does not have to be asked in a study of his *sermones* of Stephen. Those sermons are chronologically situated in the last period. One has to admit that the dating of Augustine's sermons is not without problems and doubts.<sup>17</sup> Possible uncertainties about the chronological place of the sermons on Stephen are resolved by watching the content more carefully. These sermons, regarding the content, as we will see, clearly belong to the third period.

The remains of Stephen were discovered by the priest Lucianus in December 415. The location of the body of Stephen was revealed to him in a dream. Bishop John of Jerusalem brought the body to Jerusalem. Relics of Stephen immediately spread out through whole the Roman world. The Spanish priest Orosius, a friend of Augustine, brought some relics of Stephen to North Africa. The major part of those relics went to Evodius, a friend and a pupil of Augustine and bishop of Uzalis. Augustine got some relics of Stephen for his church in Hippo Regius. Eraclius, the oldest priest of Augustine's *clerus* and his successor, raised a shrine (*memoria*) in honour of Stephen in 424.<sup>18</sup>

## I. Style and rhetoric

Which style does Augustine use in his *sermones* of Stephen?<sup>19</sup> A first striking characteristic is the brevity and concision of these

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 2. See also: VERBRAKEN, P.-P., *Etudes critiques sur les sermons authentiques de Saint Augustin*, (Instrumenta Patristica, 12), St-Pieters-Abdij Steenbrugge, Steenbrugge 1976.

<sup>18</sup> *Sermo* 318, 1.

Cf. HILL, E., in ROTELLE, J. E., *Sermons III/9 (306-340A), On the Saints*, (The Works of Saint Augustine, A translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, III/9), New City Press, New York 1990, p. 125. MEER, F. Van Der, *Augustinus de Zielzorger*, deel II, pp. 183-184.

On the place of the relic shrine of Stephen (*memoria sancti Stephani*) in Hippo, see: MAREC, E., *Monuments chrétiens d'Hippone, Ville épiscopale de saint Augustin*, Paris 1958, pp. 163-168; p. 232. SAXER, V., *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, pp. 179-181.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine tried also to be understandable in his sermons for the ordinary people out of pastoral concern. He used rhetorical tools to obtain that. PELLEGRINO, M., *General Introduction*, pp. 111-137.

"[...] saint Augustin a consciemment créé un style homilétique qui devait répondre aux besoins de la prédication populaire. Dans ce style il recherche trois choses: en premier lieu et avant tout la clarté, puis l'expressivité, et en troisième lieu la gravité, l'onction." Augustine got clarity by using a form of Latin, spoken in a cultivated milieu, but by its simplicity easily understandable for the common people. By using stylefigures (especially parallelism and antithesis) he gives his sermons an expressive character. The input of biblical elements (citations or allusions) guarantee the



sermons. The first reason for this is to be found in the fact that the, generally very long, acts of the passions of the martyrs are read on their feast days. Some of the Stephen sermons preached on December 26 (and/or on the arrival of the relics) followed after the reading of the long chapter out of Acts 6-7.<sup>20</sup> Augustine says: "The most blessed and glorious martyr in Christ, Stephen, has now given us our fill with his sermon [namely Stephen's speech in Acts 7, 2-52], but after that satisfying meal, I am setting before you, with the sermon my ministry requires of me, a kind of dessert."<sup>21</sup> Augustine begins his sermon on another occasion as follows: "Not many words are required from me, because you have heard a great many already."<sup>22</sup> Augustine observes at the end of the same sermon that he proceeded faster than otherwise. He postpones the reading of the booklet (*libellus*) about the favours received by God through Stephen that should have been read that day to the coming Sunday because a long lecture was already read and because of the heat.<sup>23</sup> The second collection of sermons – *Sermo* 320, 321, 322, 323 – took place in the week after Easter. Augustine was apparently tired because of the easter liturgy and the long fast. He himself apologizes in *Sermo* 320 for the shortness of his sermon because of these reasons.

A second characteristic of the *sermones* of Stephen is their dynamism and vividness. That vividness has an external component, namely towards the public. There is an interaction between preacher and audience. Augustine addresses his community as: *charissimi*<sup>24</sup>, *charitas vestra*<sup>25</sup>, *charitati vestrae*<sup>26</sup>, *vestra sanctitas*<sup>27</sup>, *fratres mei*<sup>28</sup>. He constantly approaches his audience very directly in his sermons

sincerity of his sermons. MOHRMANN, Ch., *Etudes sur le Latin des Chrétiens*, (Vol. I), Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 1958, pp. 396-400.

<sup>20</sup> V. Saxer reconstructed the scriptural readings of the liturgy of Stephen in Hippo:

- Acts 6-7: *Sermo* 314, 1-2; 315, 1; 315, 7; 316, 1-3; 317, 5; 318, 1.
- John 12, 26: *Sermo* 319, 3.
- Ps. 138, 17: *Sermo* 316, 1.

SAXER, V., *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, pp. 210-212. Cf. PELLEGRINO, M., *General Introduction*, pp. 26-37.

<sup>21</sup> *Sermo* 316, I, 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Sermo* 319, I, 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Sermo* 319, VIII, 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Sermo* 317, I, 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Sermo* 321; 323, II, 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Sermo* 315, VI, 9; 318, 1; 322; 324.

<sup>27</sup> *Sermo* 318, 1; 382, I, 1; 382, V, 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Sermo* 315, VI, 9; 382, IV, 4.



about Stephen. He certainly does not take distance. He says for example in *Sermo* 315: "I see you are all very attentive, I know you have taken the point well."<sup>29</sup> This remark implies that his audience apparently had the custom of making it known to their preacher when they did not understand or like something.<sup>30</sup>

Augustine also creates internally a dynamic force within his Stephen predication. He frequently uses the technique of imaginary dialogues. Augustine lets Stephen talk to Christ.<sup>31</sup> Stephen says for example to Christ: "Lord, if you kill these enemies now, whom will you later on make into your friends?"<sup>32</sup> Christ speaks to saint Paul.<sup>33</sup> Augustine addresses Paul.<sup>34</sup> Augustine lets Christ speak to the congregation.<sup>35</sup> Augustine lets a mother of a dead child express her grief at the Stephen shrine of Uzalis.<sup>36</sup> Imaginary opponents appear. These opponents claim that Christ was able to forgive His enemies because He is God but that such a task is impossible for humans.<sup>37</sup>

Augustine uses all kind of rhetorical tools and stylefigures. C. Mayer gives an overview of all the stylefigures used in the Stephen predication.<sup>38</sup> I give here the most striking examples. Augustine constantly asks rhetorical questions.<sup>39</sup> He combines three times, in a play of words, the figurative hardness of the stoners and the literal hardness of the stones. The hardness of the stoners refers to 'dura cervice' out of Acts 7, 51. Stephen taught the law, the law that the Jews received

<sup>29</sup> *Sermo* 315, VII, 10.

<sup>30</sup> PELLEGRINO, M., *General Introduction*, pp. 84-96. REBILLARD, E., *Interaction between the Preacher and his Audience: The Case-study of Augustine's Preaching on Death*, in LIVINGSTONE, E. A. (ed.), *Studia Patristica*, (vol. XXXI), Peeters, Leuven 1997, pp. 86-96.

<sup>31</sup> *Sermo* 316, III, 3; 319, II, 2 – III, 3; 382, III, 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Sermo* 382, III, 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Sermo* 316, IV, 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Sermo* 316, V, 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Sermo* 382, V, 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Sermo* 324.

<sup>37</sup> *Sermo* 315, VI, 8; 317, II, 3.

<sup>38</sup> "Alliteration: 82, Anapher: 53, Antithese: 68, Asyndeton: 30, Chiasmus: 14, Comparation: 2, Epiher: 10, Etymologie: 3, Geminatio: 2, Hendiadyoin: 3, Homoioteleuton: 1, Klimax: 3, Metapher: 11, Nominalstil: 14, Oxymoron: 9, Paronomasie: 7, Personifikation: 3, Randstellung: 56, rhetorische Frage: 26, Ringkomposition: 2, Sermocinatio: 13, Similitudo: 7, Sperrung: 21, Wortspiel: 2." MAYER, C., «Attende Stephanum conservum tuum», p. 225, footnote 37. Cf. PELLEGRINO, M., *General Introduction*, pp. 111-137.

See also: OROZ RETA, J., *La retorica en los Sermones de S. Agustín*, (Colección «Augustinus», 7), Librería Editorial Augustinus, Madrid 1963.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. *Sermo* 319, II, 2.



on stone tables. Rightly changed into stones, they stoned now the friend of Christ.<sup>40</sup> Stephen had to bear with hard people under their hard stones. They threw what they were themselves.<sup>41</sup> Augustine constructs the twofold likeness between the passion of Christ and of Stephen in a parallelism.<sup>42</sup>

## II. Thematical analysis

### 1. Reference to Christmas

Augustine states in the beginning of *Sermo* 314 that the birthday of the Lord was celebrated the day before.<sup>43</sup> This allusion shows that the sermon was held on December 26, the feast of Stephen. Augustine compares the birthday of Christ (*natalis domini*) on December 25 with the birthday of Stephen (*natalis servi*) on December 26. Christ was born December 25, He received the vestment of our flesh (*indumentum carnis*), and was made equal to us. Stephen was crowned on December 26. He threw away the vestment of our flesh and was made close to Christ (*proximus Christo*). Like Christ, by being born, was joined to Stephen, Stephen was joined (*conjunctus*) to Christ by dying.<sup>44</sup> The martyrdom of Stephen gets a christological and eschatological meaning: after the martyr death follows a life in community with Christ. A similar indication to December 26 is to be found in *Sermo* 317.<sup>45</sup> Augustine compares Christmas with the feast of Stephen.

<sup>40</sup> *Sermo* 317, IV, 5: "Nam cum ad lapides cucurrissent, duri ad duos, jactabant in illum pares suos. Petris lapidabatur, qui pro Petra moriebatur; dicente Apostolo, «Petra autem erat Christus (1Cor. 10, 4).»"

<sup>41</sup> *Sermo* 316, II, 2: "Miro modo inter lapides patiebatur duos, mittentes, quid, nisi quod erant? Ut sciatis quia duos patiebatur; hoc illis dixit: «dura ceruice, [...].» PL 38, p. 1437.

<sup>42</sup> *Sermo* 319, V, 5. See footnote 120.

<sup>43</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Sermo* 317, 6. The reference to the anniversary of Stephen and the anniversary of the Lord the day before, is to be found in the sixth paragraph of *Sermo* 317, added by the edition of Dom Wilmart. WILMART, A., *Le morceau final du sermon 317 de saint Augustin pour la fête de S. Etienne*, Revue Bénédictine 44 (1932) 201-206. The previous part of the sermon seems to indicate that *Sermo* 317 was preached just after the arrival of the relics of Stephen in 424. This could imply that *Sermo* 317, 6 (ed. A. Wilmart) is an extract from another homily. It is also possible that it was arranged that the relics of Stephen arrived on his feast day. Cf. HILL, E., in ROTELLE, J. E., *Sermons III/9 (306-340A), On the Saints*, (The Works of Saint Augustine, A translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, III/9), New City Press, New York 1990, p. 146, n. 1.



The virgin Mary gave birth to our Lord. Our Holy Mother the Church granted to the glorious Stephen the palm of martyrdom.<sup>46</sup>

## 2. Crown

The day of the death of Stephen, December 26, was celebrated by Augustine as the anniversary of his coronation.<sup>47</sup> Στέφανος means in Greek the crown of leafs granted to the winners of the ancient games. Augustine constantly alludes in his sermons to the crown (*corona, coronatus*) acquired by Stephen through his martyrdom.<sup>48</sup> Augustine explicitly explains that play of words. He makes once an allusion to the meaning of Stephen's name: "[...] sui nominis gloria Stephanus perductus est ad coronam."<sup>49</sup> This could suggest that the congregation addressed by Augustine possessed a high level of education. It also could indicate that these sermons were preached in the time that the veneration of Stephen reached its peak (after the discovery of the grave of Stephen and after the arrival of the relics in Hippo), by which most believers knew already the Greek meaning of στέφανος.<sup>50</sup> That crown of martyrdom does not only belong to Stephen, although he was the first to reach that crown. When Stephen spilled his blood as the first martyr, a crown came out of heaven. That crown, that reward, is placed upon the innumerable martyrs that followed that first example of martyrdom of Stephen. The different generations of martyrs kept that crown intact. That crown is now available for everybody who longs for it.<sup>51</sup> Even before Stephen the Old Testament Susanna and Josef would have received the crown of martyrdom if they were killed in their struggle against sin.<sup>52</sup> The *Leitmotif* of the crown is connected with other themes within Augustine's predication

<sup>46</sup> *Sermo* 317, 6 (Wilmart, A. (ed.), Rev. Bén. 44, pp. 204-205).

<sup>47</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1; 314, 2; 315, I, 1; 315, IV, 6; 315, V, 7; 315, VI, 9; 316, I, 1; 316, II, 2; 316, V, 5; 317, I, 1; 317, IV, 5; 318, 2; 318, 3; 319, VI, 6; 324.

<sup>49</sup> *Sermo* 314, 2. PL 38, p. 1426.

<sup>50</sup> HILL, E., in ROTELLE, J. E., *Sermons III/9 (306-340A), On the Saints*, (The Works of Saint Augustine, A translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, III/9), New City Press, New York 1990, p. 128.

<sup>51</sup> *Sermo* 314, 2: "Quando ergo beatus Stephanus pro Christo primus sanguinem fudit, quasi corona processit de caelo; ut eam sumerent sequentes in praemio, qui praecedentis uirtutem imitarentur in praelio. Impleuerunt postmodum terram crebra martyria. Quicumque postea sanguinem pro Christi confessione fuderunt, imposuerunt coronam illam capiti suo, et eam secuturis integram seruauerunt. Et modo, fratres, de caelo pendet: quisquis eam concupierit, ad eam uelociter uolabit." PL 38, p. 1426.

<sup>52</sup> *Sermo* 318, 2.



on Stephen. Firstly, it expresses the agonal aspect of martyrdom in Augustine's thinking. It is the prize (*palma*<sup>53</sup>) of the winner of a *certamen*<sup>54</sup>. It is a triumph (*triumphare*).<sup>55</sup> The coronation of Stephen shows the exceptional importance of that martyr. Ordained by the apostles he was crowned before them.<sup>56</sup> Thirdly, the crown theme is connected with Augustine's call to imitate Stephen. We will be crowned when we follow Stephen by praying and by forgiving our enemies. All who desires that crown has to step into Stephen's footsteps.<sup>57</sup> Augustine wanted to show the right orientation of the veneration of Stephen by emphasizing that Christ crowned Stephen. "Let the martyr Stephen be honoured here, but in his honour let the one who crowned Stephen be worshiped."<sup>58</sup> Finally, the theme of the crown suggests the question in which degree according to Augustine Stephen earned the crown as a reward, the question about the relation between grace and merit.<sup>59</sup>

### 3. The exceptional character of Stephen's martyrdom

Augustine emphasizes the exceptional character of the martyrdom of Stephen. The first martyr has got the privilege that his acts are written in a canonical book, the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>60</sup> Stephen was among the seven deacons ordained by the apostles.<sup>61</sup> Stephen was the

<sup>53</sup> *Sermo* 318, 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1; 317, IV, 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Sermo* 319, VI, 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Sermo* 316, I, 1: "Ergo cum esset ab apostolis ordinatus, in breui ad passionem praecessit ordinatores suos: ab eis est ordinatus, sed prior est coronatus." PL 38, p. 1432.

Cf. *Sermo* 317, I, 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Sermo* 314, 2: "Sequatur Stephanum, quicumque desiderat coronam." PL 38, p. 1426. Cf. *Sermo* 314, 2 in footnote 51.

<sup>58</sup> *Sermo* 318, 3: "Martyr Stephanus hic honoretur: sed in eius honore coronator Stephani adoretur." PL 38, p. 1440.

<sup>59</sup> *Sermo* 315, VI, 9.

<sup>60</sup> *Sermo* 315, I, 1: with the following play of words: "hoc primum primi Martyris meritum." PL 38, p. 1426.

Augustine makes the remark that the reading of the Acts of the Apostles according to the custom of the Church begins on Easter Sunday. (This remark could place *Sermo* 315 possibly, but not necessary, in the period of Easter.)

The reading of the martyr acts (that, with the exception of the case of Stephen, were no canonical writings) was allowed in the liturgy by the councils of Hippo (October 8 393) and of Carthago (August 397). LAPOINTE, G., *La célébration des martyrs*, pp. 104-112.

<sup>61</sup> *Sermo* 315, I, 1.



most important of these seven deacons. He was called the first among the deacons, like Peter was the first among the apostles.<sup>62</sup> Stephen underwent martyrdom before his ordainers. Ordained by them, but crowned before them.<sup>63</sup> The deacons produced a martyr before the apostles. The lambs brought a sacrifice before the rams.<sup>64</sup> Stephen was the first martyr.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4. *Martyrdom: in general*

Augustine gives Stephen the following titles: *beatus Stephanus*<sup>66</sup>, *beatissimus martyr*<sup>67</sup>, *beatissimus et in Christo gloriosissimus martyr Stephanus*<sup>68</sup>, *beatissimus Stephanus*<sup>69</sup>, *sanctus Stephanus*<sup>70</sup>, *martyr martyrum caput*<sup>71</sup>, *primus et beatissimus martyr Stephanus*<sup>72</sup>. These titles show that within Augustine's veneration of Stephen the martyrdom of Stephen takes a central place. The sermons on Stephen give the opportunity to give an overview of the meaning of martyrdom for Augustine.

Augustine once explains that the Greek term *μάρτυς* (*martyr*) means *testis* in Latin.<sup>73</sup> Augustine makes an allusion to this meaning in *Sermo* 314, 2 when Augustine tells that Stephen was firm in his testimony of the truth.<sup>74</sup> Stephen was a witness of Christ (*testis Christi*).<sup>75</sup> Augustine describes martyrs as people that shed their blood for Christ in that same sermon.<sup>76</sup> Augustine however does not explain explicitly that this is the meaning of the Greek *μάρτυς*. Those who shed their

<sup>62</sup> *Sermo* 316, I, 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Sermo* 316, I, 1; 317, I, 1. See footnote 56.

<sup>64</sup> *Sermo* 315, I, 1.

<sup>65</sup> *Sermo* 314, 2; 318, 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1; 317, I, 1; 324.

<sup>67</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1; 320.

<sup>68</sup> *Sermo* 316, I, 1.

<sup>69</sup> *Sermo* 315, I, 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Sermo* 315, I, 1; 315, II, 3; 316, V, 5; 319, I, 1; 320; 324; 382, IV, 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Sermo* 316, II, 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Sermo* 318, 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Sermo* 319, III, 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Sermo* 314, 2: "persistens ergo beatissimus martyr in testimonio ueritatis [...]." PL 38, p. 1426.

"Augustin ist der erste Kirchenvater, der das Bluteugnis der Märtyrer grundsätzlich wieder vor allem als Zeugnis, d. h. als lebendige Anrede versteht, die die Welt für den wahren Glauben erobern soll." CAMPENHAUSEN, H. von, *Die Idee des Martyriums*, p. 162.

<sup>75</sup> *Sermo* 319, I, 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Sermo* 319, I, 1. See also *Sermo* 314, 2 in footnote 51.



blood for the Redeemer, are redeemed by His blood. He shed His blood as a ransom for their salvation. They shed their blood as a means to spread out the gospel.<sup>77</sup>

The theme of the martyr crown showed already Augustine's agonal interpretation of martyrdom and revealed that he frequently expressed martyrdom in a military terminology. We find this confirmed in descriptions of Stephen as an athlete (*athleta*)<sup>78</sup> involved in a game and struggle (*agon*<sup>79</sup>, *certamen*<sup>80</sup>) in a *stadium* with a *palma* as reward.<sup>81</sup> Augustine formulates martyrdom also in military terms. Stephen is a soldier (*miles*)<sup>82</sup> who battles in a *praelium*<sup>83</sup>. The result of that battle was a victory and a triumph for Stephen.<sup>84</sup> On the one side, this was a battle against worldly temptations.<sup>85</sup> Stephen has been a good soldier, did not surrender to the enemy, did not give into his fears, disdained the flesh and conquered the world and the devil.<sup>86</sup> Martyrs did not only deride worldly pleasures, but they also conquered the worldly threats.<sup>87</sup> They were not affright of death threats. They stayed fighting against sin, even with the danger of spilling their own blood, like in the case of the oldtestamentical Susanna and Josef.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Sermo* 318, 1: "Redempti sunt sanguine, qui sanguinem pro redemptore fuderunt. Ille fudit, ut eorum salus redimeretur: illi fuderunt, ut euangelium eius diffamaretur." PL 38, p. 1438.

The ontological difference between the passion of Christ and the passion of the martyrs has to be taken into account. Only the death of Christ is redemptive. Martyrs shed their blood out of love for Christ and their neighbours but not to the liberation out of sins. Cf. STRAW, C., *Martyrdom*, p. 541.

<sup>78</sup> *Sermo* 315, II, 5; 315, III, 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Sermo* 315, VII, 10.

<sup>80</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1; 317, IV, 5.

<sup>81</sup> *Sermo* 318, 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1; 317, IV, 5.

<sup>83</sup> *Sermo* 314, 2.

<sup>84</sup> *Sermo* 318, 2; 319, II, 2; 319, VI, 6.

<sup>85</sup> *Sermo* 319A is a short fragment of a sermon. The preserved part does not deal with Stephen. *Sermo* 319A is probably inserted in the collection of sermons on Stephen because it was added to sermon 319 in some manuscripts. One sentence goes into the subject of martyrs: martyrs disdain the temporal prosperity because of the eternal salvation. Augustine, referring to Phil. 4, 1, calls everybody who makes progress in Christ as the result of his work his joy and his crown.

<sup>86</sup> *Sermo* 315, III, 6: "Stans secum ad fiduciam, quia bene militauerat, bene certauerat, hosti non cesserat, timorem calcauerat, carnem spreuerat, mundum et diabolum uicerat [...]." PL 38, p. 1429.

Cf. *Sermo* 315, II, 3: "Quomodo sanctus Stephanus super tectum praedicauit? Quia domum luteam carnem calcauit." PL 38, p. 1427.

<sup>87</sup> *Sermo* 318, 2. Cf. *Sermo* 318, 1: "Factum est, passi sunt, calcaverant mundi." PL 38, p. 1438.

<sup>88</sup> *Sermo* 318, 2.



This is the difference between martyrs and Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve sinned with death as consequence. Martyrs died to avoid sin. God threatened Adam and Eve with death in order that they would not sin. The persecutors threatened the martyrs with death in order that they would sin, namely by denying Christ. What was done to Adam and Eve as a punishment, was a victory and a restitution of glory for the martyrs.<sup>89</sup> On the other side, it was a battle for Christ. Stephen was a soldier of Christ<sup>90</sup> and as a athlete he was encouraged by Christ<sup>91</sup>. Christ is the head of the martyrs.<sup>92</sup>

Besides christology, there is also a moral component, namely the call to imitate the martyrs, interwoven in Augustine's agonal-military interpretation of martyrdom. The martyrdom of Stephen, as a game (*agon*) and as winning of that game (*vincere*), is an example of the struggle we have to fight in our heart.<sup>93</sup> The persecutions of the past and the daily temptations in the human life nowadays (especially to a superstitious praxis of using amulets, curses and sacrifices) come down to the same *pugna*, *stadium*, *luctari* (and *palma*). Both of them try to seduce to a denial of Christ.<sup>94</sup> Christ calls according to Augustine every believer to become His martyr. "Hanging on the cross I said, Father forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing. I have taught this to my soldiers, taught it to my martyrs. You too first be my

<sup>89</sup> *Sermo* 318, 2: "Quod illa accepit in poena, hoc contemnunt martyres pro uictoria. Mortem illis comminatus est deus, ne peccarent: mortem martyribus inimicus comminatus est, ut peccarent. Illi ut morerentur, peccauerunt: martyres mortui sunt, ne peccarent. Unde illis poena inflictata, inde istis gloria suscitata." PL 38, p. 1439.

<sup>90</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1.

<sup>91</sup> *Sermo* 315, II, 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Sermo* 316, 2: "[...] uidit martyr martyrum caput; uidit Iesum stantem ad dexteram patris [...]." PL 38, p. 1432.

<sup>93</sup> *Sermo* 315, VII, 10: "Video uos attentos, scio quam bene accepistis. Deus adsit certaminibus uestris, ut prosit uobis quod tanti martyris agonem spectastis; ut quomodo uincentem uidistis et uincenti fauistis, sic et uos in corde uestro uincatis." PL 38, p. 1431.

<sup>94</sup> *Sermo* 318, 3: "Certauerunt ergo, et uicerunt. Priores uicerunt: sed non pontem quo transiere praeciderunt, et nostrum accessum prohibuerunt. Patet cui placet: nec qualem illi passi sunt, optanda est persecutio; sed quotidiana est humanae uitae tentatio. Aliquando aegrotat fidelis, et ibi est tentator. Promittitur illi pro salute illicitum sacrificium, noxia et sacrilega ligatura, nefanda incantatio, magica consecratio promittitur, eique dicitur: ille et ille peius te periclitati sunt, et sic euaserunt; fac, si uis uiuere; morieris, si non feceris. Vide si non est, morieris, si Christum non negaueris. Quod dicebat aperte martyri persecutor, hoc tibi ex obliquo dicit occultus tentator. Fac tibi hoc remedium, et uiues: nonne hoc est, sacrificia, et uiues? Si non feceris, morieris: nonne hoc est, si non sacrificaueris, morieris? Inuenisti parem pugnam, quaere parem palmam. In lecto es, et in stadio es; iaces, et luctaris. Permane in fide; et dum fatigatus es, uincis." PL 38, pp. 1439-1440.



martyr witness, my recruit (*tiro*) against the devil. Otherwise you will in no way fight and win, unless you pray for your enemies.”<sup>95</sup> Augustine’s call to a contemporary martyrdom, in imitation of Christ and Stephen, has not got an individual heroic and bloody action as purpose, but instead a moral Christian life.

Augustine constantly describes Stephen as a servant (*servus*)<sup>96</sup> and as a friend (*amicus*)<sup>97</sup> of Christ, as a servant that became a friend<sup>98</sup>. The central place of Christ in the martyrdom of Stephen becomes clear in several domains. Stephen bore the suffering of the martyrdom because of his desire to live with Christ. Stephen did not fear torture thanks to his faith in the living Christ.<sup>99</sup> Jesus saw the struggling of His soldier from above and He gave him an invincible power in order that he would not fall.<sup>100</sup> Stephen commended his spirit to Christ during His execution.<sup>101</sup> Stephen, while commending his spirit to God, asked to be with Christ.<sup>102</sup> Stephen’s martyrdom is completely focused on his belief in Christ. Christ is as well the driving force as the motivation and goal of the martyrdom. We will also see that the fundament of this christological meaning of Augustine’s martyrology lays in his interpretation of the martyrdom as an imitation of Christ.

##### 5. Christological explanation of the veneration of martyrs

That emphasis on christology in Augustine’s martyrology is caused by his concern to give the veneration of martyrs the good orientation.<sup>103</sup> Augustine emphasizes in *Sermo* 316 that Stephen

<sup>95</sup> *Sermo* 382, V, 5

<sup>96</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1; 314, 2; 319, I, 1; 319, VII, 7; *Sermo* 317, 6 (Wilmart, A. (ed.), Rev. Bén. 44, pp. 204-205).

<sup>97</sup> *Sermo* 315, II, 3; 315, II, 5; 315, III, 5; 316, III, 3; 317, II, 2.

<sup>98</sup> *Sermo* 316, I, 1.

<sup>99</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1: “Sed illius praeceptum gestabat in animo, cuius praesentiam cernebat in caelo; et ad eum flagrantissimo amore suspensus, carnem quantocius relinquere, et ad ipsum cupiebat aduolare: nec mortem iam timebat, quia Christum, quem pro se occisum sciebat, uiuentem uidebat; ac per hoc festinabat etiam ipse mori pro illo, ut uiueret cum illo.” PL 38, p. 1425.

<sup>100</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1.

<sup>101</sup> *Sermo* 319, II, 2.

<sup>102</sup> *Sermo* 319, III, 3.

<sup>103</sup> For the christological content of Augustine’s *sermones*, see PELLEGRINO, M., *General Introduction*, p. 60.

For Augustine’s christocentric martyrology, see: BAVEL, T. Van, *The Cult of the Martyrs in St. Augustine*, pp. 360-361. BOEFT, J. Den, «*Martyres sunt, sed homines fuerunt*», p. 117. MAYER, C., «*Attende Stephanum conservum tuum*», p. 219; p. 234; p. 236.



performed the miracles during his life in and by the name of Christ. Everything that nowadays is done in the memory of Stephen (*per memoriam Stephani*), is also done in the name of Christ in order that Christ comes in the attention of the world, in order that He is venerated and expected.<sup>104</sup> The people that know how Stephen ought to be loved, love him in Christ. Augustine probably preached these sermons at a shrine for Stephen. Augustine tries to avoid that popular devotions degrade in a crypto-paganism by emphasizing that the miracles performed by Stephen, during his life or at his shrines, happen in the name of Christ.<sup>105</sup>

Augustine explains that he did not build an altar for Stephen in Hippo, but an altar of the relics of Stephen for God.<sup>106</sup> Augustine asks that at that altar Stephen is venerated, but in his honour Him is worshipped who crowned him.<sup>107</sup> It is God/Christ who performs miracles through (*per*) the prayers of Stephen.<sup>108</sup> That is the reason why Augustine asks to receive the favours obtained by Stephen, but to render the glory and the honour to the Lord.<sup>109</sup> Augustine bases this christological

<sup>104</sup> *Sermo* 316, I, 1: "Numquid enim legimus, aut in doctrina sana alicubi legere possumus, quia faciebat aut facit signa Iesus per nomen Stephani? Fecit Stephanus, sed per nomen Christi. Hoc facit et modo: quidquid uidetis quia fit per memoriam Stephani, in nomine Christi fit; ut Christus commendetur, Christus adoretur, Christus expectetur iudex uiuorum et mortuorum, et ab eis qui illum diligunt ad dexteram stetur." PL 38, p. 1432.

<sup>105</sup> HILL, E., in ROTELLE, J. E., *Sermons III/9 (306-340A), On the Saints*, (The Works of Saint Augustine, A translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, III/9), New City Press, New York 1990, p. 141, n. 1.

See the reaction against Faustus in footnotes 15 and 106.

<sup>106</sup> *Sermo* 318, 1: "Nos enim in isto loco non aram fecimus Stephano, sed de reliquiis Stephani aram deo." PL 38, p. 1438.

The manichean Faustus accused the Christians of exchanging pagan idols in bringing sacrifices to martyrs. Augustine answers that Christians do not sacrifice to martyrs, but to God in memory of the martyrs. Not the martyrs are worshipped, but God is. *Contra Faustum Manicheum* XX, 4; XX, 21 (CSEL 25/1, pp. 538; pp. 561-564). See also footnote 15.

<sup>107</sup> *Sermo* 318, 3. (See footnote 58.)

Augustine says the following in the context of the christological explanation of the veneration of Stephen: "Legite quatuor uersus quos in cella scripsimus, legite, tenete, in corde habete. Propterea enim eos ibi scribere uoluimus, ut qui uult legat, quando uult legat. Ut omnes teneant, ideo pauci sunt: ut omnes legant, ideo publice scripti sunt. Non opus est ut quaeratur codex: camera illa codex uester sit." Augustine however does not mention these four verses. *Sermo* 319, VIII, 7. PL 38, p. 1442. Cf. SANDERS, G., *Augustin et le message épigraphique: le tétrastique en l'honneur de saint Etienne*, *Augustiniana* 40, (1990) 1-4, (*Mélanges T. J. Van Bavel*, I), 95-124.

<sup>108</sup> *Sermo* 319, VII, 6; 320.

<sup>109</sup> *Sermo* 319, VIII, 7: "Per conseruum beneficia sumamus, honorem et gloriam Domino demus." PL 38, p. 1442.



orientation of the martyrs veneration on Stephen himself. Stephen sought the honour of Christ. He was a witness of Christ. He performed miracles in the name of Christ. Christ did not perform any miracle in the name of Stephen. It is according to Augustine salutary to know this in order to distinguish between the servant and the Lord, the worshipper and the person that is worshipped. Stephen did not shed his blood for his own sake but for Christ.<sup>110</sup> Stephen prays as a servant. Just as the angel that did not want to be venerated instead of God because he is a servant and a brother<sup>111</sup>, the humble martyr neither wants this.<sup>112</sup>

#### 6. *Similarities and differences between the passions of Stephen and Christ*

Augustine describes the similarities between the passion of Christ and the passion of Stephen. The same false witness about the same thing was brought against the both of them. The false witness, that resulted in the death of Christ, namely that he would destroy the temple and build a new one within three days<sup>113</sup>, resembles the accusation brought against Stephen.<sup>114</sup> Stephen was blamed of having said that Jesus would destroy the temple and change the commandments of Moses.<sup>115</sup>

There is according to Augustine a difference between the passion of Christ and the passion of Stephen. When Jesus was under questioning, He chose to remain silent.<sup>116</sup> Jesus kept silence, because He was foretold: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb without a voice before his shearer, so he did not open his

<sup>110</sup> *Sermo* 319, I, 1: "Hoc tantum exhortor ad caritatem uestram aedificandam, ut sciatis sanctum Stephanum honorem Christi quaesisse, ut sciatis sanctum martyrem testem Christi fuisse, ut sciatis eum tanta tunc miracula in nomine Christi fecisse. Hoc enim salubriter scitis, Stephanum sanctum fecisse miracula in nomine Christi, nullum autem miraculum fecisse Dominum Christum in nomine Stephani: ut discernatis seruum a Domino, cultorem a deo, adoretorem ab adorando. Quando enim discernitis, tunc uos amat. Non enim pro se ille sanguinem fudit, sed pro Christo fudit." PL 38, p. 1440.

<sup>111</sup> Rev. 19, 10; 22, 8-9.

<sup>112</sup> *Sermo* 319, VII, 7.

<sup>113</sup> Mc. 14, 58.

<sup>114</sup> Acts 6, 14.

<sup>115</sup> *Sermo* 315, I, 2.

<sup>116</sup> This is the distance between the martyr who has to confess Christ and Christ who, as God in His *excellencia maiestatis* can refuse that confession and also does this. The martyr is different (*impar*) from Christ. *Sermo* 315, II, 3. See also footnote 77 in connection with the difference between Christ and the martyr.



mouth.<sup>117</sup> Stephen however was not silent, because the Lord had told: "What I tell you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear in the ear, proclaim on the rooftops."<sup>118</sup> Augustine adds that Stephen proclaimed from the rooftops by treading on the muddy house of the flesh.<sup>119</sup>

Augustine elaborates the twofold similarity between the passion of Christ and the passion of Stephen.<sup>120</sup> (1) Christ commended His spirit to the Father on the cross.<sup>121</sup> Stephen commended his spirit to Christ during the stoning.<sup>122</sup> (2) Christ asked the Father forgiveness for His murderers on the cross.<sup>123</sup> Stephen asked forgiveness for his murderers during the stoning.<sup>124</sup>

It is actually quite logical that there are similarities between the passion of Christ and the passion of Stephen. Stephen imitated Christ in his dying. Stephen followed in the footsteps of the Lord.<sup>125</sup> Stephen followed the footsteps of his Shepherd like a good sheep. The good lamb followed the Lamb whose blood took away the sins of the world. Stephen fulfilled the assignment of the apostle Peter by doing so. "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, so that we might follow in His footsteps."<sup>126</sup> Stephen imitated Christ in his death in two ways: (1) Jesus commended His spirit to the Father while Stephen asked Christ to receive his spirit. (2) Both of them asked forgiveness for their killers.<sup>127</sup> Stephen was a real imitator of the passion of the Lord and a perfect pupil of Christ in his prayer for the forgiving of his stoners. The first martyr of Christ followed the teaching of his Master. The pupil became a master by doing so.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Is. 53, 7.

<sup>118</sup> Mt. 10, 27.

<sup>119</sup> *Sermo* 315, II, 3. See footnote 86.

<sup>120</sup> *Sermo* 319, V, 5:

"Christus in cruce, *Pater*, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum:

Stephanus sub lapidis, *Domine Jesu*, suscipe spiritum meum.

Christus in cruce, *Pater*, ignosce illis, quia nesciunt quid faciunt:

Stephanus sub lapidibus, *Domine Jesu*, ne statuas illis hoc delictum." PL 38, p. 1441.

<sup>121</sup> Lk. 23, 46.

<sup>122</sup> Acts 7, 59.

<sup>123</sup> Lk. 23, 34.

<sup>124</sup> Acts 7, 60.

<sup>125</sup> *Sermo* 319, V, 5: "Vide hominem sequentem vestigia Domini sui." PL 38, p. 1441.

<sup>126</sup> 1Pt. 2, 21. *Sermo* 319, IV, 4.

<sup>127</sup> *Sermo* 316, III, 3.

<sup>128</sup> *Sermo* 317, 6 (Wilmart, A. (ed.), Rev. Bén. 44, pp. 204-205): "Verus imitator dominicae passionis et perfectus est Christi discipulus adprobatus, qui quod a magistro



### 7. Prayer for forgiveness

Especially the prayer for the forgiveness of the enemy seems for Augustine to be crucial in Stephen's imitation of Christ.<sup>129</sup> Augustine frequently quotes the last words of Stephen: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."<sup>130</sup> Despite of the rough stoning, Stephen remained calm and asked the Lord not the revenge of his death but he even asked to not hold this sin against his killers.<sup>131</sup> Augustine's call to follow the example of Stephen mainly is a call to imitate Stephen's love for the enemy.

### 8. Savage with his tongue, gentle with his heart

Stephen was savage against the Jews with his tongue, gentle with them in his heart. This is a theme that sometimes comes back in the sermons of Augustine. Stephen began friendly, mild, polite and reconciling with the address "men, brothers and fathers"<sup>132</sup> and this in order to recommend his interrogators to the Redeemer, with the purpose to be heard longer.<sup>133</sup> Stephen was with his tongue hard against the Jews at the end of his speech: "Stiff-necked and uncircumcised of heart and ears! Which of the prophets did your fathers not kill?"<sup>134</sup> He was shouting outwardly and he wanted to destroy them. He was praying inwardly and wanted to save them. Stephen had a

audierat in sua passione compebat. Dominus enim, cum penderet in cruce, ait: *Pater ignosce illis quia nesciunt quid faciunt*; et beatus Stephanus, cum iam pene lapidibus obrueretur, sic ait: *Domine Iesu ne statuas illis hoc peccatum*. O apostolicum uirum, iam ex discipulo magistrum."

Cf. *Sermo* 315, V, 8: "Sedebat in cathedra crucis, et docebat Stephanum regulam pietatis. O magister bone, bene pronuntiasti, bene docuisti. Ecce discipulus tuus orat pro inimicis suis, orat pro lapidatoribus suis." PL 38, p. 1430.

<sup>129</sup> Augustine already speaks about the prayer of Stephen for the forgiveness of his persecutors (in the context of the beatitude of the persecuted people). *De sermone Domini in monte* I, 22, 76-77, CCSL 35, pp. 85-87.

<sup>130</sup> Acts 7, 60. *Sermo* 315, IV, 7; 316, III, 3; 317, 6.

<sup>131</sup> *Sermo* 314, 2: "Maxime autem sequendus et imitandus est nobis in dilectione inimicorum. Nostis enim quia frequentium inimicorum congregatione circumdatus, cum crebris hinc et illinc saxorum ictibus tunderetur, placidus et intrepidus, mitis et lenis inter lapides a quibus occidebatur, intuens illum pro quo occidebatur, non ait, Domine iudica obitum meum; sed, «accipe spiritum meum». Non ait, Domine Iesu, uindica seruum tuum, quem uides isto supplicio mortis addictum; sed, «ne statuas illis hoc peccatum»." PL 38, p. 1426.

<sup>132</sup> Acts 7, 1.

<sup>133</sup> *Sermo* 319, I, 1.

<sup>134</sup> Acts 7, 51-52.



savage tongue and a gentle heart (*lingua ferox, cor lene*).<sup>135</sup> *Sermo* 317 makes clear that this aspect of Stephen's martyrdom is an *imitatio Christi*. The Lord had hard accusations against the Jews.<sup>136</sup> Stephen also reprimanded the Jews.<sup>137</sup> Both of them however did this out of love for the Jews and at the end they both prayed that the Jews would be forgiven.<sup>138</sup>

### 9. Standing up, kneeling down

Stephen's love for his enemies went very far. He did not only pray for the forgiveness of his enemies, but he did so on his knees. A recurring theme throughout the Stephen sermons is the contradiction between the fact that Stephen prayed for himself standing up, but for his killers on his knees.<sup>139</sup> "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."<sup>140</sup> Stephen entrusted himself (full of confidence) to the Lord because he recommended a just man, because he asked what was coming to him, what was promised to the martyrs. "Lord do not hold this against them."<sup>141</sup> When Stephen prayed for his enemies, he knelt down because he prayed for bad people. He prayed kneeling down for the Jews who stoned him because he knew that the worse of spirit they were, the more difficult it was for them to be heard. He stood straight up and

<sup>135</sup> *Sermo* 315, II, 5: "«Et non circumcisi corde et auribus. Quem prophetarum non occiderunt patres uestri?» Saeuere uidetur: lingua ferox, cor lene. Clamabat, et amabat. Saeuebat, et saluos fieri uolebat. [...] Foris clamabas, et intus orabas." PL 38, p. 1428.

<sup>136</sup> Christ called the Jews "hypocrites" in Mt. 23, 13.

<sup>137</sup> Stephen called the Jews "stiff-necked and uncircumcised of heart and ears" in Acts 7, 51.

<sup>138</sup> *Sermo* 317, IV, 5. Augustine writes about Stephen: "Lingua clamat, cor amat." PL 38, p. 1437.

<sup>139</sup> *Sermo* 315, IV, 7: "Attendit eos, et misertus est eis, et fixit pro eis genu. Pro se stabat, pro eis genua flegebat. Discreuit iustum a peccatoribus: pro iusto stans petebat, quia mercedem exagebat; pro peccatoribus genua fixit, quia sciebat quam difficile pro tam sceleratis posset exaudiri. Quamuis iustus, quamuis sub ipsa corona constitutus, non praesumpsit, sed genu fixit: non attendens quid ipse dignus esset petendo accipere, sed quid ipsi digni essent, a quibus uolebat horrenda supplicia remouere. «Domine», inquit, «ne statuas illis hoc peccatum»." PL 38, p. 1429.

*Sermo* 316, III, 3: "[...] «Domine, ne statuas illis hoc peccatum». Sed quomodo dixit? Posito genu in terra. Se stans commendauit: quando orauit pro inimicis, genu fixit. Quare se stans commendauit? Quia iustum commendabat. Quare pro illis genua fixit? Quia pro sceleratis orabat. «Domine, ne statuas illis hoc peccatum.»" PL 38, pp. 1433-1434.

Cf. *Sermo* 315, III, 6.

<sup>140</sup> Acts 7, 59.

<sup>141</sup> Acts 7, 60.



high (*celsus*) when he was asking for himself. He knelt and bowed down (*humilis*) for them.<sup>142</sup> Augustine compares the prayer for the forgiveness of Christ and Stephen of their enemies: What Stephen did *humilis*, Christ did *sublimis*. What Stephen did by bowing down to the ground (*ad terram inclinatus*), is what Christ did hanging high on the cross (*in ligno suspensus*). Both of them forgave their enemies.<sup>143</sup>

Stephen's prayer that the sin of his murderers was not hold against them, was according to Augustine certainly heard because many of them came to belief. Saul is an example of that.<sup>144</sup> Augustine refers to Saul as to point out the value of the prayer of Stephen. Stephen's prayer was heard for Saul.<sup>145</sup> The reason why Paul stood up from the ground (after his fall during his conversion in Acts 26, 14) was that Stephen was heard when he bent down to the ground. Augustine lets Christ say to Saul: "Against all the evils you are committing against me, for which indeed I ought to have destroyed you long ago, my servant Stephen has prayed for you." If Stephen had not prayed in that way, the Church would never have had Paul.<sup>146</sup> Christ prayed: "Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing."<sup>147</sup> Augustine adds that Stephen during the time of the crucifixion was perhaps amongst them who did not know what they were doing. Many of them came to belief only later on. Augustine is not certain of the group to which Stephen belonged. If Stephen really belonged to the group that did not accept Christ, the prayer of Christ on the cross also affected Stephen.<sup>148</sup> Augustine aims at a parallelism with Saul. Augustine tells that when the lamb Stephen was stoned, Saul was still a bloodthirsty wolf.<sup>149</sup> Stephen did not accept Christ and Christ prayed for him. Saul did not accept Stephen and Stephen prayed for him. Like Christ, rejected by the Jews, became their Redeemer<sup>150</sup>, Stephen became the saviour of Saul. Paul now reigns with Christ together with the by him stoned Stephen. Persecutor and persecuted are now together lamb.<sup>151</sup> Stephen's love for the enemy made the conversion of Saul possible. Christ changed his furious enemies into believers and friends by His love.<sup>152</sup>

<sup>142</sup> *Sermo* 317, IV, 5.

<sup>143</sup> *Sermo* 315, V, 8.

<sup>144</sup> *Sermo* 317, 6 (Wilmart, A. (ed.), Rev. Bén. 44, pp. 204-205).

<sup>145</sup> *Sermo* 317, 6 (Wilmart, A. (ed.), Rev. Bén. 44, pp. 204-205).

<sup>146</sup> *Sermo* 382, IV, 4.

<sup>147</sup> Lk. 23, 34.

<sup>148</sup> *Sermo* 316, III, 3.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. *Sermo* 316, IV, 4.

<sup>150</sup> *Sermo* 315, II, 3-4.

<sup>151</sup> *Sermo* 316, V, 5.

<sup>152</sup> *Sermo* 382, II, 2.



10. *Saul*

Despite the fact that Saul only watched the stoning according to the Acts, Augustine seems to suggest that Saul/Paul joined the stoning. The false witnesses laid down their coats at the feet of Saul.<sup>153</sup> Saul kept the coats of the men who were doing the stoning, so (that it seems) that Saul could throw stones with the hands of them all.<sup>154</sup>

The conversion from Saul to Paul is according to Augustine a testimony of the force of Stephen's prayer for forgiveness.<sup>155</sup> The figure of Saul consequently reappears frequently in the Stephen sermons. The conversion of Saul to Paul is a transgression from wolf to lamb, from robber of the lambs to a shepherd of the lambs.<sup>156</sup> Augustine explains the names of Saul and Paul. Saul refers to the oldtestamentical king Saul. Saul was to David what Saul was to Stephen. Saul called himself after his conversion Paul because *paulus* means small and short (*modicus, parvus*). Paul regarded himself as the least of the apostles (1Cor. 15, 9).<sup>157</sup> Paul is also crowned at the end, grace to Stephen.<sup>158</sup>

11. *Martyrdom: merit and grace*

Stephen did not fear torture because he was convinced of the coming reward (*futuræ beatitudinis præmia*).<sup>159</sup> He stayed standing up full of confidence when he recommended himself to the Lord.

<sup>153</sup> *Sermo* 315, IV, 7.

For the relation between Stephen and Paul, see also: BASTIAENSEN, A. A. R., *Augustin on the Deacon-Preacher-Martyr Stephen*, pp. 115-118.

<sup>154</sup> *Sermo* 315, V, 7: "Vestimenta lapidantium seruabat, ut omnium manibus lapidaret." PL 38, p. 1429.

Cf. *Sermo* 316, V, 5; 317, III, 4; 317, 6 (Wilmart, A. (ed.), Rev. Bén. 44, pp. 204-205); 382, IV, 4.

<sup>155</sup> *Sermo* 317, 6 (Wilmart, A. (ed.), Rev. Bén. 44, pp. 204-205). Cf. footnotes 87-94.

<sup>156</sup> *Sermo* 317, III, 4. Cf. *Sermo* 316, III, 3 – IV, 4.

<sup>157</sup> *Sermo* 315, V, 7.

<sup>158</sup> *Sermo* 316, V, 5.

<sup>159</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1.

For *praemium*, see: *Sermo* 314, 1; 314, 2; 315, IV, 6; 315, VI, 9; 317, I, 1; 317, II, 3.

R. Dodaro observes that Augustine from 411 on (around the time of the pelagian controversy) emphasizes that martyrs are also human, that they are affright of death. That emphasis is not to be found in the Stephen sermons. Augustine actually shows that Stephen was fearless. This statement evidently has got the same meaning as the writings that speak about the fear of the martyrs, namely that the martyrs did it in the end out of love for Christ and by divine grace. Augustine nevertheless depicts Stephen very confident. Stephen was apparently sure that he earned a heavenly reward. DODARO, R., 'Christus Iustus' and Fear of Death in Augustine's Dispute with Pelagius,



He was asking what was his due, what was promised to the martyrs, the reward of the crown of justice from the Lord. Paul wrote about that crown: "I, for my part, am already being prepared for sacrifice, and the time of my casting off is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith; for the rest there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord will award me on that day, just judge that He is."<sup>160</sup> Stephen did his request because he was claiming a reward.<sup>161</sup> Stephen claimed (*exigebat*) his *debitum*, his *praemium* and his *merces*.<sup>162</sup> The *palma* follows after the *pugna*.<sup>163</sup> The *corona* belongs to the expected *debita*.<sup>164</sup> Augustine frequently calls Stephen's martyrdom and crown a reward.<sup>165</sup> A *praemium* also awaits us: a *merces* if we perform the *praeceptum* and *opus* of the love for the enemy.<sup>166</sup> Does Augustine grant here a degree of merit that he would not want to admit in his anti-pelagian writings? No, the inherent aspect of grace within martyrdom is always present in Augustine's preaching on Stephen. Augustine permanently points to the active role of Christ in the martyrdom. Moreover, Augustine explains that Stephen received the martyrdom as a *beneficium* from God.<sup>167</sup> Martyrs did not achieve martyrdom on their own powers. Their ability to endure martyrdom is a gift from God. God gave them the

in ZUMKELLER, A. (ed.), *Signum Pietatis. Festgabe für Cornelius Mayer o.s.a. zum 60. Geburtstag*, Augustinus-Verlag, Würzburg 1989, pp. 341-361, p. 356.

<sup>160</sup> 2 Tim. 4, 6-8.

*Sermo* 315, III, 6: "«Domine Iesu, accipe spiritum meum»: hoc stans. Exigebat enim debitum, quando dicebat, «Domine Iesu, accipe spiritum meum». Exigebat debitum, quod martyribus promissum erat: debitum, de quo dicit apostolus, «ego enim iam immolor, et tempus resolutionis meae instat. Bonum certamen certavi, cursum consummaui, fidem seruavi: de cetero reposita est mihi corona iustitiae, quam reddet mihi Dominus in illa die iustus iudex»." PL 38, p. 1428.

For *promissio*, *promissus*, see: *Sermo* 315, IV, 6; 319, III, 3.

<sup>161</sup> *Sermo* 315, IV, 7.

<sup>162</sup> *Sermo* 315, V, 7: "[...] pro iusto stans petebat, quia mercedem exigebat [...]." PL 38, p. 1429.

Cf. *Sermo* 317, I, 1.

<sup>163</sup> *Sermo* 318, 3.

<sup>164</sup> *Sermo* 315, IV, 6. See footnote 160.

For *debitum*, see also: *Sermo* 315, IV, 7; 315, V, 7.

<sup>165</sup> *Sermo* 315, III, 6: *praemium*; *Sermo* 315, IV, 7: *thesaurus*.

<sup>166</sup> *Sermo* 317, I, 1: "Dominus noster inter praecepta magna et salubria, diuina et altissima quae dedit discipulis suis, hoc uidetur hominibus graue, quod iussit ut diligant inimicos suos. Graue praeceptum, sed grande praemium. Denique cum hoc moneret, uidete quid dixerit: «diligite inimicos uestros, benefacite his qui uos oderunt, et orate pro persequentibus uos». Audisti opus, exspecta mercedem [...]." PL 38, p. 1435.

<sup>167</sup> *Sermo* 317, III, 4.



opportunity for martyrdom.<sup>168</sup> When Augustine notices that Saul's conversion was not only the result of his own will but also of the will of God, it becomes clear that Augustine does not lose sight of his concept of grace.<sup>169</sup>

## 12. *Imitation of Stephen*

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven, who makes his sun rise on the good and the bad, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust."<sup>170</sup> Augustine says two things about these pericope out of Matthew. The Lord did Himself what he ordered by praying for His crucifiers.<sup>171</sup> Christ was the first to show what His instructions were. The observation that God also gives sun and rain to bad people is according to Augustine an example of God's love for his enemies.<sup>172</sup> Besides these examples of the Father and the Son, there is also the example of the martyr that teaches us to love our enemy.<sup>173</sup>

Stephen imitated Christ. Stephen was the student and Christ the teacher.<sup>174</sup> Stephen showed himself as the perfect pupil of the Lord in his imitation of the passion of the Lord. The first martyr of Christ followed the teaching of the Master. The pupil became master by doing so.<sup>175</sup> It was more specifically in his prayer for forgiveness of his stoners that Stephen imitated Christ.<sup>176</sup> Both of them forgave their enemies. Stephen is in that love a student of the teacher Christ. Stephen

<sup>168</sup> *Sermo* 318, 1: "Reddiderunt vicem, sed non de suo: ut enim hoc possent, ille donavit; et ut fieret quod ab ipsis fieri potuit, ille donavit. Exhibendo dignationem, dedit occasionem." PL 38, p. 1438. Cf. *Sermo* 319, I, 1: "Donet mihi Dominus pauca dicere salubriter, qui donavit sancto Stephano tanta dicere fortiter." PL 38, p. 1440.

«Reddiderunt vicem» out of *Sermo* 318, 1 confirms the mutual character perceived by C. Straw in Augustine's thinking about martyrdom. The martyrdom is a second movement, an answer to and a giving back of Christ's sacrifice from the martyrs to Christ Who Himself gave away His life. STRAW, C., *Martyrdom*, p. 538.

<sup>169</sup> *Sermo* 316, V, 5.

<sup>170</sup> Mt. 5, 44-45. *Sermo* 317, I, 1; 382, I, 1.

<sup>171</sup> *Sermo* 382, II, 2.

<sup>172</sup> *Sermo* 317, I, 1 – II, 2.

<sup>173</sup> *Sermo* 317, II, 2.

<sup>174</sup> *Sermo* 315, VII, 10. Cf. *Sermo* 315, V, 8: "Sedebat in cathedra crucis, et docebat Stephanum regulam pietatis." PL 38, p. 1430.

<sup>175</sup> *Sermo* 317, 6 (Wilmart, A. (ed.), Rev. Bén. 44, pp. 204-205). See footnote 128. Cf. *Sermo* 315, V, 8.

<sup>176</sup> *Sermo* 317, 6 (Wilmart, A. (ed.), Rev. Bén. 44, pp. 204-205). See footnote 128.



showed how the humble one must imitate the higher, the creature the Creator, the victim the Mediator, humans the One that is God and human.<sup>177</sup>

Augustine states that the authentic way to celebrate a feast of a martyr consists in looking to what the martyr placed in his passion as an example to imitate, to believe and fulfil that.<sup>178</sup> The most recurring point throughout the *sermones* of Stephen is Augustine's call to follow (*sequi, imitari*) the example of the martyr Stephen.<sup>179</sup> We too have to imitate Stephen. Stephen gave an example of the struggle we too have to fight in our heart<sup>180</sup>, against the same temptation to deny Christ<sup>181</sup>. The crown reached by Stephen and several martyrs after him, is still hanging intact for everybody who desires it.<sup>182</sup> Everybody who longs for that crown, has to step into Stephen's footsteps. It is especially in the love for the enemy that Stephen has to be imitated.<sup>183</sup> Augustine lets Christ call the faithful to become His martyrs. That martyrdom exists in the following of Christ Who prayed for forgiveness of His enemies on the cross.<sup>184</sup>

An imaginary opponent claims that Christ was able to pray for his enemies, because He is God, but for humans it is too difficult to do this. No, Augustine answers. Stephen too did this.<sup>185</sup> Augustine answers that that opponent has to look to Stephen. "Attende Stephanum conseruum tuum." Stephen was not God, as Christ, but

<sup>177</sup> *Sermo* 315, V, 8: "Ostendit quomodo te debuerit imitari sublimen humilis, creatorem creatura, mediatorem uictima, Deum et hominem homo [...]." PL 38, p. 1430.

<sup>178</sup> *Sermo* 317, I, 1.

<sup>179</sup> The secondary literature on Augustine's *sermones* shows the (graceful) working of the Holy Spirit and of Christ (as the inner teacher) in the *sermones*. Augustine's sermon, placed in the service of the word – equal to the service of the bread – is already the beginning of the imitation of Stephen and of Christ, the beginning of the salvation of the faithful.

<sup>180</sup> *Sermo* 315, VII, 10. See footnote 93.

<sup>181</sup> *Sermo* 318, 3. See footnote 94.

<sup>182</sup> *Sermo* 314, 2: "Et modo, fratres, de caelo pendet: quisquis eam concupierit, ad eam uelociter uolabit. Et ut sanctitatem uestram breuiter atque euidenter hortemur, multis non opus est uerbis: sequatur Stephanum, quicumque desiderat coronam." PL 38, p. 1426.

See footnote 51 for the previous part of this paragraph.

<sup>183</sup> *Sermo* 314, 2: "Eia, fratres, sequamur eum; si enim sequimur Stephanum, coronabimur. Maxime autem sequendus et imitandus est nobis in dilectione inimicorum." PL 38, p. 1426.

<sup>184</sup> *Sermo* 382, V, 5. See footnote 95.

<sup>185</sup> *Sermo* 315, VI, 8: "Si multum est ad te Dominus tuus, nescis quia Stephanus est conseruus tuus? Docuit Deus per Stephanum non exinanitum. Si ista in euangelio praecessisse uidetis, fratres mei, nemo dicat in corde suo, quis illud facit?" PL 38, p. 1430. Cf. *Sermo* 317, II, 3.



human as we are.<sup>186</sup> Nobody is allowed to say: "it is too much for me." Stephen was human and you are human.<sup>187</sup> If you think that the imitation of the Lord (in the commandment to love the enemy) demands too much of you, watch Stephen, your *conservus*, human just as you.<sup>188</sup> This is the reason why Augustine constantly emphasizes that Stephen is (only) a servant of the Lord, just as we are.<sup>189</sup> Moreover, one may not forget that Stephen did not perform his martyrdom out of his own. What he did was a gift from God. That grace is still available.<sup>190</sup>

Stephen, a human as we are, was able to do it. Moreover, it was actually God that did it. Besides these two reasons given by Augustine to show that martyrdom and the forgiving of the enemies are not impossible, he implicitly gives a third reason. Augustine declares that Christ was crucified as a human being (*homo*).<sup>191</sup> That human determination of the passion of Christ has got an important consequence. When Jesus prayed for forgiveness of his enemies on the cross, He was human.<sup>192</sup> Augustine probably wants to indicate that it is possible for humans to pray for their enemies by connecting the human nature of Christ and His prayer for His killers.

<sup>186</sup> *Sermo* 317, II, 3: "Si multum ad te putas imitari Dominum tuum, attende Stephanum conseruum tuum. Dominus Christus, unicus Dei Filius: numquid hoc Stephanus? Dominus Christus, de incorrupta uirgine natus: numquid hoc Stephanus? Dominus Christus uenit, non in carne peccati, sed in similitudine carnis peccati: 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 ualet, quanti uales." PL 38, p. 1436.

Cf. *Sermo* 317, II, 3: "Ipsam attende, conseruum attende." PL 38, p. 1436.

<sup>187</sup> *Sermo* 317, III, 4: "Nemo dicat, multum est ad me: homo erat, homo es." PL 38, p. 1436.

<sup>188</sup> *Sermo* 382, III, 3. Cf. *Sermo* 317, II, 3.

<sup>189</sup> See footnotes 96 & 98.

<sup>190</sup> *Sermo* 315, VI, 8: "Ecce Stephanus fecit: de se? De suo fecit? Si autem de dono dei fecit; numquid intrauit, et contra te clausit? Numquid pontem transiuit, et praecidit? Multum est ad te? Pete et tu. Fons manat, non siccauit." PL 38, p. 1430.

*Sermo* 317, III, 4: "Fons communis est: bibe unde bibit. Beneficio Dei accipit: abundat qui dedit; et tu pete, et accipe." PL 38, p. 1437.

See footnotes 167-169.

<sup>191</sup> *Sermo* 316, III, 3: "Dominus Iesus Christus, cum penderet in cruce, dixit: «Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum». Hoc sicut homo, sicut crucifixus, sicut natus ex femina, sicut carne indutus; sicut pro nobis moriturus, sicut in sepulcro futurus, sicut tertio die resurrecturus, sicut in caelos ascensurus. Omnia enim ista in homine. Homo ergo: «Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum»." PL 38, p. 1433.

<sup>192</sup> *Sermo* 315, V, 8: "Deum, sed tamen in cruce hominem; Deum Christum, sed in cruce hominem, quando dicebat clara uoce, «Pater, ignosce illis, quia nesciunt quid faciunt»." PL 38, p. 1430.



The emphasis on the imitation of Stephen clearly shows the moralising and pastoral intentions of Augustine's sermons on Stephen.<sup>193</sup> Forgiveness of the enemy seems to be very important.<sup>194</sup> Augustine explains this importance. He advises to be lenient towards our enemies. The worst an enemy can do is kill us. But this is not really bad. We would die anyway, for example by fever. And when we die while loving our murderer, that murderer actually adds something to our heavenly reward. Our real enemy is anger (*ira*). Anger creates a contradiction in our heart every time we pray "as we too forgive our debtors."<sup>195</sup> Augustine especially aims at rest and peace in his plea for forgiveness of the enemies. He asks to Stephen and Paul to recommend us to Christ in their prayers in order to have a quiet life (*quieta et tranquilla vita*) in the Church.<sup>196</sup>

### 13. Other theological subjects

The theme of the original sin has got a role in the background of the sermons on Stephen. Augustine summarizes his thinking about original sin (*peccatum originale*) in *Sermo* 314. Heaven was closed for humanity after the first sin of Adam. The thief (hanging on the cross next to Christ) was the first to enter into heaven. That is why Stephen could say he saw the heavens opened up.<sup>197</sup> Augustine points out the difference between the martyrs and Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve died because they sinned. The martyrs died in order to not sin. Death was a punishment for Adam and Eve, a victory for the martyrs.<sup>198</sup> Death also is for the martyrs the result of original sin, like for all humans. Nevertheless, martyrs can change this punishment into something good, namely as an instrument to reach the real life.

<sup>193</sup> Pellegrino shows the important place of Christian life in the *sermones* of Augustine. A life is Christian when action concurs with faith, namely a life of humility, love and an inner orientation. PELLEGRINO, M., *General Introduction*, pp. 74-83.

<sup>194</sup> LAFITTE, J., *Pardon des offenses et amour des ennemis dans "Les Sermones" de Saint Augustin*, *Anthropotes* 16 (2000) 69-103.

<sup>195</sup> Mt. 6, 12. *Sermo* 315, VI, 9 – VII, 10.

<sup>196</sup> *Sermo* 316, V, 5.

<sup>197</sup> *Sermo* 314, 1.

<sup>198</sup> *Sermo* 318, 2: "Quod illa accepit in poena, hoc contemnunt martyres pro uictoria. Mortem illis comminatus est deus, ne peccarent: mortem martyribus inimicus comminatus est, ut peccarent. Illi ut morerentur, peccauerunt: martyres mortui sunt, ne peccarent. Unde illis poena inflicta, inde istis gloria suscitata." PL 38, p. 1439.



### III. The healing of Paul and Palladia

*Sermo* 320, 321, 322, 323 constitute a unity and tell the healing of a certain Paul and Palladia in Hippo.<sup>199</sup> These sermons were preached successively on the Sunday of Easter and the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in the week after Easter.<sup>200</sup> The *libellus* of the healing of Paul is being read in *Sermo* 322. Paul found his healing on Easter. The healing of Palladia happens while Augustine is preaching *Sermo* 323, on the Wednesday after Easter.

#### *Sermo* 320

In *Sermo* 320, held on Easter Sunday, Augustine tells it is the custom to listen to the tractates (*libelli*) that describe the miracles performed through God by the prayers of Stephen.<sup>201</sup> The healing of Paul was not yet written down in a *libellus*. Augustine says that seeing this man is as reading his *libellus*. It is knowledge from the first hand instead of a writing. Seeing Paul is as a document. The congregation previously watched him with grief and sorrow. Augustine calls his community to watch Paul now with joy. Augustine himself apologizes at the end of his sermon for not holding a longer sermon. "Please

<sup>199</sup> Augustine also gives an extensive report of the healing of Paul and his sister Palladia in *De Civitate Dei* XXII, 8 (CCL 48, pp. 825-827). That healing comes as the last miracle in an overview of 25 miracles. In *De Civitate Dei* XXII, 9 (CCL 48, pp. 827-828) Augustine explicitly poses that all those miracles testify of the physical resurrection of Christ. The martyrs died for their belief in Christ's resurrection in the flesh.

Cf. MEER, F. Van Der, *Augustinus de Zielzorger*, pp. 549-553.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. HILL, E., in ROTELLE, J. E., *Sermons III/9 (306-340A), On the Saints*, (The Works of Saint Augustine, A translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, III/9), New City Press, New York 1990, p. 157, n. 1.

This probably happened in the year 425 or 426 (between the building of the shrine of Stephen in 424 and Augustine's description of the same healing in *De Civitate Dei* XXII, 8 (CCL 48, pp. 825-827) late 426). LAPOINTE, G., *La célébration des martyrs*, p. 52. PELLEGRINO, M., *General Introduction*, p. 159. REBILLARD, E., *Sermones*, pp. 774-789; p. 786.

<sup>201</sup> Augustine mentions in *De civitate Dei* XXII, 8 (CCL 48, pp. 815-816; pp. 823-824) (and in the *sermones* 286, 319, 322) that he introduced the custom to read the *libelli miraculorum* in the liturgy. The *libelli miraculorum*, witness reports of miracles performed by the intercession of saints and martyrs, have as purpose to commemorate the more recent (and because of that the less known) miracles, to give them the same fame as the older miracles and to give them a proof of authenticity (*De civitate Dei* XXII, 8, CCL 48, pp. 823-824). *Sermo* 322 is the only preserved *libellus*. There existed 62 *libelli* concerning Stephen (*De civitate Dei* XXII, 8, CCL 48, p. 824). LAPOINTE, G., *La célébration des martyrs*, pp. 112-116.



excuse me for not giving a long sermon; you know, after all, how tired I am. That I could do so much yesterday, while fasting, and not collapse, and that I could also speak to you today, is something the prayers of Saint Stephen have obtained for me."<sup>202</sup>

### *Sermo 321*

*Sermo 321*, on Easter Monday, repeats that the *libellus* of Paul consists in the mere fact of seeing him. Paul however told many things to Augustine that were still unknown to the community, namely about the shrines of the saints of the Lord. Getting to know these facts will lead to a greater veneration of the Lord. That is why Augustine will compose a *libellus* that contains everything he heard from Paul. That *libellus* will be written that same day and will be read the following day.

### *Sermo 322*

*Sermo 322* contains the *libellus* promised the previous day. He asks at the beginning of his sermon that brother and sister would stand up so that the community could see them, the one to whom grace was given and the other for who grace has to be prayed for.

The *libellus* tells the story of a mother (in Caesarea of Capadocia) attacked by her oldest son while her other children did nothing to prevent this. The mother cursed all her children because of this and asked God to ban her children out of their homeland to wander in other countries. As a consequence of this curse, all the ten children got a disease by which their limbs trembled. Shocked by this and feeling herself guilty of the result of her curses, the mother committed suicide. The children were ashamed about all this, left their home and were scattered throughout different regions. A son, the second oldest child, received healing at the shrine of Laurentius in Ravenna. Paul visited many places where martyrs were venerated, even the Stephen shrines in the Italian Ancona and the African Uzalis, but he was not healed. Paul and Palladia (the sixth and seventh child) got a vision in which Augustine appeared.<sup>203</sup> That is why they travelled to Hippo Regius.

<sup>202</sup> *Sermo 320*.

<sup>203</sup> *Sermo 322*: "Verumtamen ante hos tres menses, id est, Calendarum Ianuariarum die, tam ego quam soror mea, quae hic mecum est, eadem adhuc passione detenta, euidenti sumus uisione commoniti. Ait enim mihi quidam aspectu clarus, et candido crine uenerabilis, quod intra tertium mensem desiderata esset mihi sanitas adfutura. Sorori autem meae in uisione sanctitas tua in ea effigie, in qua te praesentes uidemus, apparuit: per quod nobis significatum est, ad istum locum nos uenire debuisse." PL 38, p. 1444.



Paul was healed there on Easter Sunday. He offers this *libellus* out of gratitude. He also does this in order that the community would pray for his sister who was not healed yet.

### *Sermo 323*

Augustine preached *Sermo 323* the day after the reading of the *libellus* on Stephen's miracle.

Augustine starts his homily with a warning: children have to respect their parents, parents may not give cause to anger.<sup>204</sup> God answered the prayer of the mother because He is just. Her son had beaten her and the other children allowed that injustice. The mother was actually also punished by being heard. Augustine warns to only request those things of which we do not have to be affright that they are granted to us.<sup>205</sup>

Despite the fact that Paul could have been healed in Ancona, he is healed in Hippo because of the faithful congregation in Hippo. Augustine tells the story of the shrine of Ancona where a stone of the stoning of Stephen is kept.<sup>206</sup> He also begins to preach about a miracle in Uzalis, where a young child, still a catechumen, died.<sup>207</sup> While Augustine attempts to do this, the people around the shrine (*memoria*) of Stephen began to shout and praise the Lord. The young woman (Palladia), who was just been miraculously healed, was brought in.<sup>208</sup>

*Sermo 323*, II, 2: "Quid enim sumus, quia ego apparui istis nesciens? Illi enim me uidebant, et ego nesciebam: et admonebantur ut ad istam ciuitatem uenirent. Quis sum ego? Homo sum unus de multis, non de magnis." PL 38, p. 1445.

The *libellus* tells that Augustine appeared to Palladia in a vision. Augustine comes back to that point in *Sermo 323*, II, 2. He does not deny the possibility of visions. It only puzzles him that he – only an ordinary man and not a great man – appeared in that vision. That acceptance of visions is also to be read in *Sermo 318*, 1. Augustine preaches about the discovery of the body of Stephen. He says in this context that the bodies of martyrs are frequently discovered thanks to a revelation of God. M. Dulaey makes clear that Augustine perhaps abandoned his original scepticism concerning revelations in dreams and visions (after the coming of the Stephen relics in North Africa), but has not changed fundamentally his ideas about dreams because he always remained critical about that topic. DULAHEY, M., *Le rêve dans la vie et la pensée de saint Augustin*, (Etudes augustinienes. Série antiquité), Etudes augustinienes, Paris 1973.

<sup>204</sup> *Sermo 323*, I, 1.

<sup>205</sup> *Sermo 323*, I, 1.

<sup>206</sup> *Sermo 323*, II, 2.

<sup>207</sup> *Sermo 323*, III, 3.

<sup>208</sup> The healings of Paul and Palladia suggest that the Stephen chapel was connected with the main basilica of Hippo. MAREC, E., *Monuments chrétiens d'Hippone, ville épiscopale de saint Augustin*, Paris 1958, pp. 163-168; p. 232.



When the people calmed down again, Augustine declared with Ps. 32, 5 that he sins of the woman were forgiven.

### *Sermo 324*

*Sermo 324* continues the story of the miracle of Uzalís interrupted the previous day. The dead child was brought back to life by the prayer of the mother at the *memoria* of Stephen. The child, still a catechumen, was alive again long enough to receive the baptism<sup>209</sup> and died again immediately after. The faith of the mother stands central. She did not want her son back for herself, but she only wanted that he could die as a baptised Christian. God could also have healed Paul and Palladia in Uzalís where he performed already such a powerful miracle. They were nevertheless led to Hippo.

## IV. Conclusion

An analysis of Augustine's *sermones* of Stephen mainly confirms the different elements of Augustine's martyrlogy in general. Stephen is a humble witness of the Truth who directs himself away from earth to heaven. Augustine's approach of the martyrs is christo-centric on the one side. Stephen is a friend of Christ who imitates Him out of love in the passion and the forgiving of the enemies, and this out of the eschatological desire to live with Christ. That imitation of the love for enemies shows the moral intention of the Stephen sermons on the other side. Christ is the point that connects the christological and moral aspect of these sermons. Grace is of substantial importance in that point of connection. Just as God and Christ made martyrdom possible in the past, They now make the (moral) martyrdom of today possible.

One element of Augustine's martyrlogy seems to be absent in the sermons on Stephen, namely that Christ also suffers and dies again in the passion of the martyr. This element however echoes in the explicit christological meaning of martyrdom in these sermons. Also absent is the anti-donatist emphasis that there are no martyrs outside the Church. Donatists apparently disappeared out of Augustine's scope. Augustine however remains praying for peace and rest within the Church.

<sup>209</sup> "[...] baptizatus est, sanctificatus est, unctus est, imposita ei manus [...]." *Sermo 324*. PL 38, p. 1447.



Meanwhile it is clear that the *sermones* of Stephen have to be situated in the third period of the evolution of Augustine's martyrology. Augustine accepts healings in Hippo, preaches on miracles that happened at the *memoriae Stephani* of Ancona and Uzalis. He seems to have no problems with revelations in dreams and visions. Augustine however will never neglect the christocentric focus.

A concerned pastor emerges out of the sermons on Stephen. Augustine was in the first place concerned regarding the cult and the theology. He wanted to prevent that the veneration of martyrs replaced the veneration of Christ. The veneration of martyrs always has to be directed to Christ. Christology is at the core of Augustine's martyrology. Augustine's second concern is moral and pastoral from nature. Martyrdom is not something of the past. The inner struggle against temptations is a martyrdom for every believer nowadays. Augustine emphasizes that martyrs were ordinary people. That is why it is possible to imitate them. That is also why we are able to forgive our enemies. Stephen did this, and we also are able to do it. Moreover, Christ also did this in His human form. Augustine probably envisages the harmony in the Church. Because of that, Augustine constantly repeats that Stephen prayed for his enemies.

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