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**Purification after Death in Saint Augustine's 21st Book
of the Work Entitled De civitate Dei**

Thesis of the Doctoral Dissertation

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Saint Augustine's conception created about the purification after death with its immaturity does not only nicely fit into the stratum of history of theology, which – based on *J. Le Goff's* widely accepted thesis – by the 12th century became a mature teaching, and which arch runs into the encyclical starting with *Spe salvi* in 2007, but the system of the bishop of Hippo also represents a local zenith, a significant station in the history of dogma, therefore several theologians refer to it till this day, in relation to the purgatory. At the same time, the teachings of the bishop of Hippo about the purification after death has lost some of its reference position by the second part of the 20th century, which it received until the modern history, since some correlations and conclusions previously regarded as evident were questioned in his works and found it to be theologically unfounded that he was teaching about purgatory at all. In this critical but highly pro-development process it was primarily *J. Ntedika*¹ and *J. Le Goff*² that played an instrumental role.

In harmony with this, we would like to get closer to the real evaluation of Saint Augustine, therefore, we set it to be the objective of our thesis to show the essential features of the study of post-mortem purification which was later incorporated into a system in *Saint Augustine's De civitate Dei 21* to examine its internal correlations and by this reconstruct the way of thinking of the bishop of Hippo compared to our opportunities, in the horizon of his *eschatology and theology of grace* approach.

We do not necessarily try to find any causal relationships in the ancient philosophical and the religious concepts outside of the Old Testament Before Christ, but we do find parallelisms, therefore in these particular ideologies some kind of purification, and punishing justice is articulated in after life as well.

Subsequently, we examined how Augustine reads the Holy Scripture, then we studied 2 Maccabees 12:40-46, which is essential from the aspect of our theme, as well as the most important passage, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 – from the aspect of the bishop of Hippo – of which the current researchers' opinions are divided on whether it refers to the purification after death. Besides, as a general biblical perspective, we emphasize that total purity is required before God, and within that personal participation is essential, furthermore, a tendency can be revealed that judgment and purification constitute an increasingly tighter unit.

¹ The author's main work published on the topic: NTEDIKA, Joseph, *L'évolution de la doctrine du Purgatoire chez saint Augustin*, Paris, Études Augustiniennes, 1966.

² Le Goff's significant work: LE GOFF, Jacques, *La naissance du Purgatoire*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1981 (in Italian: LE GOFF, Jacques, *La nascita del Purgatorio*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi editore, 1982 (2010); in English: LE GOFF, Jacques, *The Birth of Purgatory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Examining the further theological antecedents of Augustine, we can see that in the *East* the prayer performed for the dead had become a more and more generalised conviction by the 4th century.³ The basis of the pleading for the dead was discovered by the Eastern Fathers in the community of saints, similarly to *St. John Chrysostom*, which transcends death. This way, the saints pray for the living, and on the other hand the living, by pleading for the dead, by Eucharistic sacrifice, fasting, alms can also help the souls residing in Hades, who can increase the pre-take of its joy, or may lessen the sufferings of those heading for hell.⁴ However following *Origen*, in connection with the "cleansing sufferings" combination of words they associated to the false teaching of *apocatastasis*. While *in the West* in the 4th century amongst the Latin fathers,⁵ the theory was already wide spread, that some kind of purification or punishment preceded salvation, which is unavoidable even for non-martyrs, and this *purification in the fire* was usually connected to the 1 Cor 3:11-15. The concept of *Saint Augustine* on the purifying fire after life in the interim period was spread by *St. Gregory the Great*, then this joined in the Council of Florence.⁶ An essential element of purification after death is the formation of *penitence*, the separation of sin and punishment, and the realization of that forgiveness erases sins; so the consequences of the sin, the evil, and the bad tendencies, without the special grace of God they remain. Penitence is required for the repentant to atone the negative consequences remaining after heavy sins, and by this, the whole unity with God and the Church can be restored. This punishment could be shortened, and atonement could be completed after death, too. *St. Cyprian* is an early, but highlighted witness of this question.⁷

We can determine about Augustine eschatological basic line, that on one hand it is really pessimistic, he believes that more will be condemned than saved, furthermore he directly speaks of condemned masses (*massa damnata*). On the other hand, using his own experiences of grace he drafts a picture of the chosen ones, in the case of whom hope is determining, as those who are awaiting the coming fulfilment.⁸ The bishop of Hippo already writes about some kind of interim period before physical resurrection and the final judgement, in which the soul is yet

³ SOLANO, Giovanni Ludovico, *Una rilettura della dottrina sul purgatorio* in: *Sacra Doctrina* 50 (2005/6), 7-29; 16.

⁴ PUSKÁS, Attila, *XVI. Benedek pápa tanítása a halál utáni tisztulásról a „Spe salvi” enciklikában* in: *Teológia* 42 (2008), 185-214, 188-191.

⁵ ENO, Robert B., SS., *The Fathers and the Cleansing Fire* in: *Irish Theological Quarterly* (53) 1987, 184-202, 194.

⁶ CONGAR, Yves *Le Purgatoire, Le mystère de la mort et sa célébration* in: *Lex orandi* 12, Paris, 1956, 199-308. (NTEDIKA 45 quotes it.)

⁷ MÜLLER, Gerhard Ludwig, *Katolikus dogmatika*, Budapest, Kairosz, 2007, 530; PUSKÁS 189-191.

⁸ SCANLON, Michael J., O.S.A., *Escatologia* in: FITZGERALD, Allan [ed.], *Agostino (Dizionario Enciclopedico)*, Roma, Città Nuova Editrice, 2007, 661-662.

present without a body.⁹ In the case of some of the souls heading towards salvation Augustine writes about the reality and process taking place after death, which the previous fathers also outlined, and what the bishop of Hippo – amongst others – relates to the pictures of *punishment, atonement, penitence, cleansing* and the one of *fire*.

After the research history of the purification after death in the interpretation of Augustine, the Father of the Church presents which elements can be found in his works prior to the *De civitate Dei*. Among his early works, we can highlight the *Confessiones*¹⁰ and the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*,¹¹ in the first one we can witness the pleading for the dead, while in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, the bishop of Hippo refers to the correcting, purifying fire in several cases. From the aspect of his works, the year 413 is a watershed, from there on, he gets more and more decisive in getting engaged in polemic against the so-called merciful (*miseriordes*),¹² and as a result of this the theology of Augustine also modifies, it will be less permissive regarding the conditions of salvation. His works, the *De fide et operibus* and the *Enchiridion* are outstanding from this period, in many aspects they mediate a similar way of thinking to the *De civitate Dei 21*, though the former are less rich in details.

The *De civitate Dei* is the most matured work of Augustine from the aspect of our topic, and he discusses, writes about eternal damnation in its 21st book. In this, he pronouncedly takes up a spiritual fight with the so-called merciful, who claim, that even those can achieve salvation following the afterlife purification, who were baptized, but became heretic; those who remained in the true faith, but did not live a Christian life; those who practice charity, while living a sinful life, or were reborn in the Church, but became schismatic, etc. Therefore, the objective of the *De civitate Dei 21* is to set forth the Catholic teaching against the so-called merciful, and to deny, in response to the ideas of this groups, that those who only accept the Credo, but do not live the life of Christ, or got baptized in the Church, but do not live accordingly etc., that they have not built their lives on the basis of Christ, therefore they cannot find salvation even by fire. The bishop of Hippo covers the question of purification by fire after in conjunction with these, the afterlife temporary punishments, or the intercession of saints, as the essential elements of the later formulated purgatory.

⁹ Augustine no longer uses the expression *corpus animale* but *corpus spirituale* (cf. *De civitate Dei* 20, 16). (CHISANGA, Jude Mulenga, *Eschatology and the Spiritual Life in St. Augustine's "City of God"* [diss.] Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma, 2006, 13-14.)

¹⁰ *Confessiones* 9, 11-13.

¹¹ *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 6, 3; 37, 3; 103, 4; 80, 20; 29,2; 36,1.

¹² The “merciful” are groups who stand close to the Origenist heresy, who saw some sinners or heretics in salvation, following the purification by fire.

This is how we deal with the question of purification by fire in conjunction with the 1Cor 3:10-15, which he earlier connected to the fire of judgment, but in the *De civitate Dei* 21, 26, 4 he already places in the period between death and resurrection (interim time). In this chapter, the fire of judgment and the purifying fire are clearly separated. Those souls are purified here, who built on Christ, but are not free from some particular minor sins, but following this they can reach salvation; therefore, it applies to a narrow stratum. The nature and extent of pain is similar to the sin, from which the soul must be purged. In this phase, there is a particular uncertainty factor, for which we need to consider this phase as a hypothesis.¹³ At the same time, we examined its nature, and in our view, the uncertainty does not refer to the existence of the fire.

The bishop of Hippo discusses about the temporary punishment/penance, out of which, our most important places are the *De civitate Dei* 21, 24 and the 21, 27. From this aspect, Augustine divides the dead into three categories: besides the righteous and the ungodly it distinguishes the group of *the not too good* [to achieve salvation without the prayer of the living] *and not too bad either* [that they would not be able to be saved as a result of the intercession of saints]. These souls are suffering a temporary punishment after their death, which can still be two-ways: they can be saved or damned. Some of them might be saved as a result of the mediation of the Church or of the righteous, others, who also belong to this group will be damned, but as a result of the prayer they will receive a milder judgment. At last, some of them are freed by the Lord as a result of His mercy, between the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment, and though this they avoid damnation.

We must make mention of the *De civitate Dei* 21, 13, in which the bishop of Hippo tightens purification and punishment. Against the “Platonists”, Augustine emphasises on that besides the *purifying punishments, sufferings (poenae purgatoriae)* the *temporary punishments (poenae temporariae)* also exist after death, and these two are interwoven in this chapter, furthermore, it overlaps the atoning punishment (*expiatoriae poenae*). It makes the connecting of the two basic elements more difficult, that while Augustine connects the purifying sufferings to the fire of the last judgment in the reading of Ntedika,¹⁴ he places the temporary atonement to the interim time.

We had to examine some further aspects in our thesis, to reach our final conclusions; out of which the most important ones are: Augustine thinks about purification and the

¹³ *De civitate Dei* 21, 26, 4. Cf. *De fide et operibus* 16, 29, *Enchiridion* 69 and *De octo Dulcitii quaestionibus* 1, 33.

¹⁴ NTEDIKA 36-38.

punishment/penitence in units as well, namely it already starts in this word and continues in the afterlife. In penance, a key element is the separation of the punishment and the sins, which basics are perceptible at Augustine. In order to be able to better examine the nature of purification and atonement, we must see where the smaller sins and the bigger sins split from each other. At last, which is in our opinion is the most important, is how the purification and atonement after death and the prayer of the righteous can be fitted together. But connecting the elements of purification and punishment are made more complicated by several other elements apart from the one mentioned above, for example while during purification the believer can only get to Paradise, on the other hand in the case of the temporary punishment, it is uncertain whether the soul will be saved or damned. Furthermore, the outcome of this latter group depends on the intercession of saints as well. In addition, we are not fully able to correlate with the moral background of the atonement of the purification theology of grace, in regard of separating the smaller and bigger sins.

Regardless of the above, we found several points of contact between the two elements.¹⁵ So, based on the *De civitate Dei* 21, 16 and furthermore the previously mentioned *De civitate Dei* 21, 13 we do see pervasion between the two traditions. We connected the context of the Mt 12:32 based on the *Enchiridion* 69-70, the *De civitate Dei* 21, 24, 2 and the background related to the 1 Cor 3:10-15, the *De civitate Dei* 21, 26, 4, with which the afterlife atonement and purification overlaps. While examining the nature of fire, punishment, penance, atonement and purification are also overlapping, which, even if it is not final in the matter, but does testify the connection of the two elements. Besides, we found several comparisons between the two traditions, which highlight their unity. And if we are able to connect purification and atonement, then the purification following death and the pleading exercised for the dead come into correlation with each other, as a result of the direct relationship between the atonement of the souls of the dead and the prayers done for them.¹⁶

Therefore, out of all our results we deem it most important, that we lined up a number of arguments in respect of how purification and atonement can be brought closer to each other, and through this the teaching of the prayer for the deceased. So in relation to its theology of grace background, as well as its eschatological consequences, or simply by the awareness of the correlations, among others, we highlighted on the junctures, connections, analogies,

¹⁵ See also KOTILA, Heikki, *Memoria mortuorum, Commemoration of the Departed in Augustine* [diss. dott.], Roma, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1992, 124-125.

¹⁶ Cf. *De civitate Dei* 21, 24, 1-2 and *De civitate Dei* 21, 27, 5-6.

parallelisms in the sub-chapters dealing with the topic. At last, we provided a reconstruction option for the model of Augustine from the examined elements and correlations.

Besides, we discussed the many of the aspects of the purification after death, which is innovative either in regard of its approach, or topic; in this thesis, these can mainly be found in the chapter, in which we *described the aspects of Augustine in details*, or in which we *systematically summarised* our results. Therefore, we strived to elaborate the topic contained in the title in such combinations, which is unprecedented according to our studies so far, for example we examined the after-life purification based on the aspects of time and space, even if we were not always able to show new results by doing so, but as smaller increments, we sew some threads, or followed a possible chain of thoughts to the end. Furthermore, we tried to hold up the penitence dimension of Augustine's after-life concept by the separation of sin and punishment. We also dealt with the analysis of the hypothesis, and by this, we tried to get closer to exactly in relation to what Augustine articulated his uncertainty, which is one of the keys to the solutions of many other problems. Besides, we raised several less significant questions, and we tried to give well-grounded answers based on the teachings of the bishop of Hippo, for instance regarding that how those who measure the "end" of times are purified, and though this they do not die, but they are in need of being freed from their smaller sins.

In our view, the concept of Augustine marks an era: besides the inherited elements, it introduces new aspects, and all the significant fundamentals were not only present in his Theology, but the bishop of Hippo sees correlations between them, he also connected them on a basic level, embedded them in the theology of grace and a moral background, and set them going on the road of articulated systematisation. At the same time, besides the above, as a deficiency we can ascertain, that the bishop of Hippo did not put enough emphasize on the question of hope in the case of purification after death.¹⁷ Furthermore, though the bishop of Hippo did not expressively connect the purification after death and the punishment, in our view, the greatest yield of Augustine' teachings, is that the two themes have several contact points, therefore purging and expiation somehow belong together, even if some fitting problems arise related to this.

¹⁷ Cf. *De civitate Dei* 21, 12.