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**AUGUSTINE. ON FREEDOM
ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS**

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
1.Research topic: Augustine. On Freedom	5
2. Research progress	7
3.Research objectives and methods	9
4. Thesis outline. Short overview of chapters	12
CHAPTER I	
AUGUSTINE BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND SECULARITY	15
1.1 The Necessity and the importance of this chapter in the context of the research.....	15
1.2 Roman juridic culture during the Dominate. Short synopsis	16
2.Timeline of Roman Law	18
3. Judicial procedure during the Dominate	21
4. Christianity and Roman Law during Augustine’s episcopate	21
5.Augustine’s relationship with the Imperial Power. Augustine did have a political theology	26
6.Augustine and Rome	28
7. Augustine’s political theology	30
a) Short description of Roman juridic and political system	30
b) Augustine’s political theology	31
8. Conclusion	33
CHAPTER II	
THE ORIGIN AND THE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF FREEDOM IN AUGUSTINE’S THINKING	35
1.The beginning	35
2.The free will and freedom	38
3.Heterotopy. Distant causes	48
4.The calling	49
a) The opening	51
b)The tragedy and its consequences, The betrayal	53
c)Salvation	54

CHAPTER III

FREEDOM WITHOUT FREEDOM 58

1.Mapping. Two assumptions 58

2.Analysis of the two assumptions 59

 a)The world becomes un-worldly! 59

 b)Its causa finalis is, at the same time, causa efficiens, its primum movens..... 64

3.Freedom. Landmarks, texts, reiterations..... 67

4.Freedom, eon, sin 68

CHAPTER IV

FREEDOM TRANSPOSED. THE NEW PARADIGM 81

1.The substitution of freedom 81

2.The dimension of the juridic 88

CHAPTER V

FREEDOM IN THE NON SUBSISTENT IMAGE OF MUNDANITY 96

1.A contingent effect 96

2.Grace and charisma 99

 a) Freedom as vocation 115

 b) Freedom 138

CHAPTER VI

ON THE ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

AN ANALYSIS OF PARAGRAPH 25, THE LAST THESIS OF BOOK XIV FROM THE TREATY ON THE HOLY TRINITY 162

Introduction 162

2.Objectives and integration of the chapter in the research topic 163

3.Roman juridic culture 164

4.Punishment and the heterogony of purposes 167

5.The iconology of profane and religious power 172

6.Resurrection, judgement and punishment (redemption) 180

7.Conclusions (in the place of an answer) 187

CONCLUSIONS 191

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES 195

I.Collections, catalogues and works of reference	195
II. Editions and manuscripts for the quoted sources	195
III. Editions for the quoted sources or consulted in Romanian	198
IV. Exegesis	200
V. Other Romanian translations	206
VI. Juridic studies	207
VII. Dictionaries, lexicons, enciclopaedias	207
Site of the Encyclopaedia	208

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THESIS SUMMARY

1. The topic under scrutiny Augustine. On freedom.

The study aims to outline, along St. Augustine's theological body of works, the embodiment of freedom, that is its significance (or pre-significance) at the threshold between Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The questions we try to answer through this study are: how and in which manner freedom reveals itself to Augustine's understanding? Are there to be found in Augustine's works a relevant range of meanings or twists of points of view expressed through time?

Augustine lived during Antiquity's¹ last hour, a spiritual turning point when the Antiquity's values were being rejected² and Christianity was slowly filling the gaps. By merging the Greek and Christian tradition, Augustine created a new thematic horizon. His aporias on time, person, charity form an unit (indiscernible at times), its framework leaving a strong impression on the whole medieval philosophy and theology. From St. Anselm of Canterbury to Hildegard of Bingen, from Petrus Lombardus to Bernard of Clairvaux until the apparition of thomism and even after that, Augustine planted the seeds, in a unique manner, of thinking on divine revelation, his ideas congregating themselves in a body of assumptions, both explicit and implicit, becoming a source for the framework of medieval scholastics, Renaissance and then Modernity.

The analysis of freedom will put into perspective a series of aspects that have been slightly overlooked, such as, for example, the interplay between Christianity and secular power in the period immediately following the spiritual renewal realised by emperor Constantine the Great. Through the intermediary of a case study we will try to assess the historical judiciary climate and Augustine's behaviour as a Roman judge. By probing the marginal aspects we may aim to obtain a complex and clear horizon, from a theological and philosophical perspective.

This is why a short evaluation of the Roman judiciary culture, even if done in a summary manner within an exploratory analysis of the nature of civil law-suits, may bring an increment of clarity.

¹ Marrou Henri-Irenée, *Saint Augustine and the End of Ancient Culture*, trans. Drăgan Stoianovici and Lucia Wald, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997

² Giovanni Filoramo, *The Cross and the Power. Christians from martyrs to persecutors*, trans. Dionisie Constantin Pîrvuloiu, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2022

2. Research progress

Several volumes have been written on Augustine, during almost 1600 years. And several others will be written. Given the large number of exegeses, courses, articles, or, more recently, conferences, compiling them in a single register is an undertaking as difficult as it is time-consuming. It is certain anyway that, in its large majority, the research dedicated to Augustine outlines and extracts ideas, either from the doctrines he authored, reunited, according to some scholars, under a single entry, *augustinism*³, or from the aporias (that serve to build his doctrines), such as, the aporia of time, or that regarding the relationship of co-substantiality and co-eternity among the members of the Holy Trinity, as well as that of the relationship between the two citadels.

The founding of the finite liberty, through the intermediary of the judiciary norm and apparatus, represented a turning point that produced and continues to produce (even today) remains that both Christian philosophy and theology try to present to us under the form of some „initial finalities”.

Gathering exegetical material in order to obtain answers regarding the way Augustine understood and presented to his contemporaries his concept of freedom (his thematic answer, qualify it as a gift of grace/) demands an attempt, from our part, to overcome its „static” and determining sense.

The new image of freedom, even if different from what it meant in its beginnings⁴, bears with it the firmly rooted depths of human nature (taken into temptation) in such a way that the two images become, paradoxically, combined in the same multiple essence of the human nature.

Most of the research focused primarily on Augustine’s „thematic programme” (of freedom as well as gift of grace) having, partly, left uncovered the evidence of the new horizon where man continued to exist. And by this we mean the horizon that is presented to us. Each stage in humanity’s history is part of all the others, in such a manner that our endeavour will follow a circular route, back and forth, trying to illustrate each stage, in the instances of the hermeneutical circle that includes them. In order to do that we saw as useful for the research to probe the less-explored territories, to be able to analyse and place, eventually, in the domain of the apparent freedom in a gradual form, one of a complete humanity (The beginnings⁵) and another, in which this, within the

³ Anton Adămuț

⁴ J. Danielou, *At the beginning*, trans. Pr. M. Percă, E. Sapientia, 2006

⁵ *ibid*

new horizon given to its beings, is trapped between the equivoques of the ethical and judiciary categories, after Christianity, or between the judiciary and theological categories (the new theodicy) the judiciary norm and system, the entanglement they display, leaving no place for the discovery of the purity lost in the mist of time.

The exegeses, regardless of the age of their conception, were concerned with either teological aspects of Augustine s works or the philosophical ones, while others gave special attention to their combination of theology and phiplosophy, but it s difficult to discern a special attention (in a separate considerration) given to the issue of freedom, by assessing them also against the judiciary framework of the ages that preceded Augustine s century. We encounter at the most a distribution or, as the case may be, a redistribution of the accents and the occurences in Augustine s works, but, without assuming any historical expositions, summary as they might have been, meant to give an answer regarding the way freedom is balanced between theology and philosophy, or between those and the political system of the age, or wheter between the first two and the third position there may exist a syncretism (truly) and if so, what it consists of for good. The questions become legitimate in the context in which Augustine s thinking will transcend as a torrent, the entire Latin Middle Age, whose reverberations will leave their mark on the whole political, theological and philosophical thinking of the Modern Age.

The history of ideas and culture especially places us in the position of heirs and scholars at the same time, which compells us to pass on that legacy. The experience of freedom, limited through the intermediary of judiciary systems, taught us, inter-generationally, a culture of the meaning, making abstraction of the fact that the word which entered Humanity s history gathered around it, as a lover might have done, all that the mundane considered as lacking sense, ignoring the trust that it has given us, the capacity to obtain the absolute freedom thar can free us from ourselves. In order to underline that, our research is, as we have shown, above, a circulary one, as our climb up and down history s course helps us see things into perspectice and in detail in places where the data and information are, (at least until proven otherwise) unequivocal, certain aspects (regarding the judiciary order) focusing more on a certain work or on a certain aspect of it.

3. Scope of the research and methods

The research subjected to your attention – *St. Augustin. On freedom (The Concept of Freedom in St. Augustine's Works)*, will try to bring into attention the fact that he has given humanity a work that is far beyond exclusively dogmatic, but also provided man with a synthesis for navigating reality, in order to facilitate the attainment of the ultimate understanding. Confessing his inner self and researching, at the same time, the rebarbative perplexities of the evil that has a technique of its spreading, Augustine proved that the free man is not a confessor of the truth, but merely a person trying to attain it. Augustin was not a sceptical or a paroxysmic/dogmatic in the poor and limited sense of the term. Taught in a ciceronian, vergilian, varonian and neoplatonical culture, Augustine utilised ratio to a large extent.

What is it that we would like to research? The issue of freedom, the way Augustine understood and presented it; while at the same time trying to reveal the mnemonics and the recurrence of his doctrine along the ages, the way his doctrine marked a true (r)evolution of the Christian church by projecting a new perspective on sin, redemption, and redeeming sins respectively.

The research starts from the following general assumption: the matter of the freedom and autonomy of will, that embodies under the eye of the profound and systematic lecture the applicative field of his work, is being presented regardless of the matter considered.

His entire work stems, as text and subtext, from this general assumption.

The research methodology comprises four methodological steps, as follows:

I will firstly give a presentation of the Roman judiciary culture, starting with the old age, when the Roman judiciary system became crystallised, followed by the classical and post-classical periods, (when St. Augustine lived). The journey through the three periods, even though divagatory in nature, represents a necessity for understanding the judiciary mechanisms (the three periods created institutions that are still in service today), the typology of the cases, the procedures and consecrated formulas that governed⁶ the civilian cases. In order to get to really know the world of Roman judiciary ideas from the time when St. Augustine lived and served as a civil cases judge you have to have a close knowledge of it.

⁶ The pagan sacramental formula of the oath has been handed down to the present day, the continental and Anglo-Saxon legal system using it, contrary to N.T. - Mr 12:17 and Lu 20:25, under penalty of invalidity of the procedure.

Secondly, we will try to place side by side the organic Roman judiciary culture and the Christian dogma, the way the normative tradition accepted early Christian elements and/or the other way around, that is the way the Christianity from the Empire accepted the fantasmagoric world of the Roman judiciary ideas.

Thirdly, we shall try to emphasise, by starting from the type and the nature of civil cases given to the competent judgement of the Bishop of Hipona, the way in which he places himself in relation to the pro auctoritas thesis, taking into account the fact that the solutions bore the seal of the personal authority of the emperor.

In his position as a bishop, Augustine certainly had a real problem the moment when, according to the civil codes, he had to follow the formulaic procedure imposed by jus humanorum. In fact, the research tries to clear the contradictions generated by the diad pro auctoritas- contra auctoritas, with a possible conclusion in the place of a synthesis. The idea of St. Augustine welcoming and accepting the profane laws, even if those seemed unjust to him is true and easy to accept (for those willing to accept a comfortable stand).

By shortly probing and analysing the nature of the civil cases we will be able to bring into the light a series of aspects that have definitely challenged St. Augustine.

In a fourth part we shall be speaking of freedom, emphasising the meanings that Augustine bestows upon it, trying thus to reveal hidden or less valorised meanings, overlooked by its exegesis.

Our methods will be centered on three types of analysis: 1) that of Augustine's spirit, by this referring to the message conveyed by Augustine in his work, starting from the preexistence of some ancient schemes of thought of the language used and of the mentality of his age; 2) the way the message is conveyed, that is it is being used by Augustine in conveying the message. In this context it is important to emphasise that it is not only Augustine's vocabulary that is a point of interest, but all that can come up along its enterprise, that incites, enlarges and helps his process of thought, (for example that which derives from a school of thought) and 3) the mentality of his age and of the age before that, by this understanding the way Augustine's thought is rooted in the sum of the ideas and assumptions generated by these periods. The comparatist, systemic and historical methods play an important role, as they generate an indivisible triad in the course of our analysis. We will thus not limit ourselves to identifying some resemblances and differences that may vary according to

the period or historical context, but we shall try to isolate Augustine's thought by probing some similarities and differences in relationship to the matter being investigated.

4. Short overview of the chapters.

The work will comprise six chapters, each of them structured under several subtitles. The methodological and research framework will take into consideration the fact that such an endeavour lies at the crossroad of Philosophy, History and Religion as well as the necessity of probing fields that may, at a certain point, represent the interplay of the research topic in order to give it scientific objectivity. The main source of documentation and analysis is the corpus of writings of St. Augustine, from his longer works to his sermons, epistles and homilies as well as significant contributions of researchers, (the exegeses) of his works. The latter part will follow an analytical route, without overlooking its connection with the judiciary, political and theological climate of the period.

Probing some marginal aspects, such as, for example, the status of civil judges of bishops, at the same time with being a bishop may lead to gaining some information on Augustine's life horizon, his visiting of the Roman judiciary culture, and thus is a useful and necessary endeavour altogether. Because of this, our study, immediately following the introduction, will start by the chapter „Augustine Between Christianity and Secularism. A Case Study: St. Augustine as a Roman Judge”

The thesis under scrutiny would be incomplete had we not taken into consideration the way Augustine acted and related himself to his position of judge of secular cases. The reminders related to the Roman judiciary culture from before and during his time period represent a page from the history of Roman law, that, if missing, would make our journey through the ideas impossible. The book of verified knowledge demands researching this page in the life of the Hipona bishop. Apart from the theologian, philosopher and the bishop Augustine there was also the judge Augustine. We shall try to address, even if partially, the manner he acted in rapport to the organic world of Roman laws and judiciary principles, and especially whether his coming into direct contact with these altered, to some extent, his thought and doctrine.

The next chapter, „The Origin and Theological Framework of Freedom in St. Augustine’s Thought” will illustrate the meaning given to freedom by Augustine, as well as the way he considers the topic of freedom and of free will, by making them face their history.

Chapters III, IV and V represent the core of the work. They will try to show the way that man became the owner of a juridical status, unyieldingly contained his behaviour open to areas of egotism, fact that made freedom to be inscribed in this pattern also.

The chapters „Liberty without freedom”, „Liberty transposed. The new paradigm” and „Liberty in the non subsistent image of mundanity” will reveal the ontic status of freedom, as well as the way Augustine fully rejects and emancipates the notion of freedom. For example through the subtitles „Freedom. Landmarks, texts, reiterations” and „Freedom, eon, sin” in chapter three we shall show how Augustine managed to bring back at the front of every day life the appeal to the self consciousness, trying to determine his fellows to admit that (which was lost through sin) their relationship with themselves doesn’t stem from themselves, but from God. We shall also emphasize the way Augustin subtly removes from the topic of analysis all the political and judiciary devices by placing them in a parenthesis of de-materialisation, replacing them by the „gift of everything and nothing” that signifies the non-being sense of the outer form represented by the death of the Savior for the sins of the world, and the phenomenological embodiment of God in the image of a presence (resurrection, transfiguration, ascension) respectively that give man the freedom to re create himself according to the original significant.

The last chapter, „On the eternal Punishment, An Analysis of Book XIV from the *Treaty on the Holy Trinity* aims to investigate the meaning of the concept of „punishment” present in paragraph 25, the last thesis of Book XIV of the *Treaty on the Holy Trinity* by making references to the work *The Kingdom and the Glory* of G. Agamben and St. Paul’s *Epistles*.

The final part of the research will comprise, under the form of a summary, the main conclusions that have been drawn.

The choice of this thematic range came as a must. St. Augustine’s texts may come under close scrutiny, offering critical thinking the emergence of a past not at all void of vitality, that can serve as a foundation for the present to connect to.

The first and last chapters, relatively independent from the main topic of the research itself, will hitherto play the role of putting into perspective the judiciary, political and theological climate

of the centuries IV and V, such a point of view making itself useful in order to clarify St. Augustine's discourse on freedom in a polyvalent register.

5. Short Conclusions on the Study

The present study has as a main topic the analysis of the concept of freedom in St. Augustine's works, by exploring various contexts, such as the complexity of the meanings coming from a past when man was different, as well as the new form of freedom that comes into being as a consequence of the original sin, which consists of the distance created by the interval of the separation from God. The way in which freedom evolved with the passing of time interested us the most. This inexorably opens up the profound issue of the meaning of freedom. The people from inside the citadel looked for their own meaning within the framework of their isolation inside their inner-selves. In order to discern the evolution that freedom has undergone in time, the research tried to bring into the scope of reflection four perspectives (chapters II, III, IV and v) that come to outline, by making connections, a certain evolution of freedom. Even though each chapter represents a continuation and, why not, a fulfillment of the previous one (this being the reason that made us conclude them otherwise than with a short conclusion, as each one is seemingly present into the following one), none of them is meant to reflect the stages of a possible linear trajectory of freedom. This is not the aim of the present study. What really concerned us was the manner in which man has tried, in a conscious manner or not, to survive in his new state of being, and, at the same time, for as much as possible, to show if he has managed to overcome this tragedy.

The fact that once man freed himself from his savage state, he has begun to organize his existence by referring himself to rules that became customs and later on written laws that legislated freedom, referring it to an objective presence or absence, giving birth to a tension between the various instances of human existence, (as a dramatic instance) through which a man, sovereign or leading figure of the period, could entitle himself to the power to intrude the space of personal freedom, means no more to Augustine than a simple general framework helping humanity to maintain its place suspended in the universal. The truly important aspect is man's persistence, taken in its individuality, in sin, by this making his personal tragic condition absolute. This is the critical point, and, probably la clef de voute of his entire doctrine. What Augustine is concerned with in the first place is man's exiting the realm of tension of making his own tragic condition absolute,

thus changing the paradigm of existence from a general and myth making register into an individual one. With accessing the new (messianic) kletos, man can see himself in his own being, the intuition of his heart guiding him to the secluded place among the darkness and obscurantism of his tragic existence. In the 197 and 199 Epistles addressed to monk Heyschius Augustine's conception regarding redemption is consolidated, that is the fact that each man's destiny, that fills the image of his tragic existence, can be removed from its frame.

The quest to enter the structure of liberty (freed from himself man becomes another person) under the form of some perspectives meant to bring forward the meanings that Augustine gives the idea of freedom is based on the multiple references, under the form of quotes, to fragments from Augustine's work, that we considered facing the pericopes from the Gospels, as well as exegeses, especially those of J. Danielou, G. Agamben and C. Badilita. Those were important sources of our research, through the importance of the themes taken into study, even though they at times only partially overlap our themes and main scope of research.

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