

Bernard Jarosław Marciniak OFM<sup>1</sup>

## Medical metaphors in Augustine's letters

Amongst theological, disciplinary, philosophical, literary and many other issues Augustine takes up in his letters, the issue of health occupies a little space<sup>2</sup>. Sufficiently, though, one may form a picture of his rhetorical technique, that exploits health matters.

Augustine undertakes biblical doctrine on the Body of Christ, which is the Church<sup>3</sup> (cf. Col 1:18), and develops idea of healer (*medicus*)<sup>4</sup> and medicine (*medicina*) for his members<sup>5</sup>, which is Christ himself, and a widely spread metaphor of the health of this Body<sup>6</sup>, the bishop of Hippo is directly and indirectly referring to, into a quasi complete doctrine.

Medical metaphors used in Augustine's letters<sup>7</sup>, among others comparisons to blindness, cancer, lethargy, gangrene, mania, sluggishness, wounds,

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Bernard Jarosław Marciniak OFM, rektor Wyższej Szkoły Filologii Hebrajskiej w Toruniu, lektor na Wydziale Teologicznym Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, e-mail: bernardmarciniakofm@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-1602-6147.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S.M.E. Keenan, *The Life and Times of St. Augustine as Revealed in His Letters*, Washington 1935, 25-29. A summary list of phenomena referring to body, health and medicine, without the extended historical commentary.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 140, 18, CSEL 44, 168.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 266, 3, CSEL 57, 649: On the matter of teaching theology, Augustine writes after the year 395 to Fiorentina, invoking the words of Jesus (Mt 23:8-10), that the Saviour is the wonderful healer of this swelling (*tumoris huius admirabilis medicus*).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 140, 18, CSEL 44, 168; 167, 19-20, CSEL 44, 292-295. Augustine writes to Jerome before the year 415 about a cure for lesser sins (*quotidianis [...] levioribus [...] vulneribus medicina*), provided by Christ. It acts through forgiveness of other people's sins.

<sup>6</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 140, 18, CSEL 44, 168; 167, 19-20, CSEL 44, 292-295.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. M.I. Barry, *St. Augustine, the orator. A study of the rhetorical qualities of St. Augustine's sermons ad populum*, Washington 1924, 197-198. The set of favourite references to parts of the body: fauces, os, manus, pes, oculus, facies, lingua, venter; to illness

stubbornness and dullness, can be viewed from two different perspectives. First of all the Bishop of Hippo not only enumerates in his letters various diseases in order to present doctrinal, disciplinary and spiritual lack, broadly understood, but he also concentrates on symptoms and possible medical treatment or, in other words, he suggests some methods of elimination and correction of the enumerated weaknesses<sup>8</sup>.

The second possibility is to explore Augustine's correspondence from a socio-doctrinal perspective. This attitude presents various forms of doctrinal, disciplinary and spiritual weaknesses as a starting point for Augustine's reflection. Their harmfulness and commonness, as well as ecclesial measures adopted to combat them, are reflected in health metaphors used by the Bishop of Hippo.

For example, the pride and schism of circumcellions are metaphorically presented as blindness<sup>9</sup>. Manicheism<sup>10</sup> and Donatism<sup>11</sup> are often compared to cancer, one of the most serious diseases. However, as far as medical metaphors are concerned, Augustine is not wholly consistent across his correspondence. He wants to stress the gravity of the condition of a schismatic or a heretic, rather than to create a complete system of reference. The above-mentioned observation, as well as Augustine's formation and profession, seem to suggest that his texts should be analyzed from a socio-doctrinal perspective, not a medical one.

Augustine regards physical health as the accepted norm both for human beings and animals<sup>12</sup>, which can be applied to present certain spiritual aspects, generally referred to as spiritual well-being (*spiritualis salus*)<sup>13</sup>.

First of all Bishop of Hippo inherited and exploited the positive metaphorical value of the idea of the physician as one who succors the ill,

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ses, mentioned also in the letters: febris, vomere, caecitas, tumor, hydrops, morbus, and to death (mors). Cf. references to phenomena and medical procedures: medicus, vulnus, medicamentum, medicina, collyrium, venenum, theriacum, salus, vita, somnum, mortuus, senectus. Barry, *St. Augustine, the orator*, 207, 235, 240. Cf. References to body and its conditions: capillus, lingua, labia. Barry, *St. Augustine, the orator*, 239-240.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. W. Parsons, *A study of the vocabulary and rhetoric of the letters of Saint Augustine*, Washington 1923, 205. The table of metaphors. According to W. Parsons, 66 out of 730 in total refer to medical science. Only agriculture and light have more references – 102; fire, heat, light – 74.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 1, CSEL 34, 2, 448; cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 5, CSEL 34, 2, 449.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 79, 1, CSEL 34, 2, 345-346.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 86, 1, CSEL 34, 2, 396-397.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 140, 22, CSEL 44, 173.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 170, 1, CSEL 44, 622.

enduring unpleasant tasks in caring for the unhealthy, often administering necessarily painful means for effecting a cure, or helping people maintain health through regimen. The greatest debt that ancient philosophy had to medicine was the use of medical analogies, giving a prominent place to the analogy of body and soul, to the similarity between the training of the body and the discipline of the soul, to the consideration of medicine as a counterpart of ethics<sup>14</sup>.

It must be underlined that for ancient Greeks the concept of the nature of the universe and Man, developed by the Ionian school of philosophy, was the cornerstone of scientific thinking. As notices W. Jaeger, as early as the 7th century B.C. Solon presented a totally objective view about the regularity in the development of an illness, the inseparable link between the totality and its component, between the cause and the effect. This attitude constitutes an indispensable assumption, which enables him to treat political crises as pathological disorders in functioning of the social body<sup>15</sup>. It is not an accident that Plato, laying foundations for his ethics and politics, as it is described in his *Gorgias*, takes as an example the medical art<sup>16</sup>. Τέχνη is the knowledge about the substance of the subject matter, the aim of which is to serve the human being; that is why it reaches total perfection only after it has been used in practice. According to Plato, a doctor is somebody who knows the essence of health and is capable of returning it to the ill. Following this pattern, Plato formulated the concept of a philosopher, who knows the soul thoroughly and makes the soul healthy. In the *Phaedrus* he puts forward a proposal that it is medicine that should constitute the model for true rhetoric<sup>17</sup>, while in the *Philebus*<sup>18</sup> – on the basis of Aristotle's theory of the golden mean<sup>19</sup> – he expresses the belief that the appropriate ethical attitude should be formed like the proper diet is formed for good health. The philosophical continuation of this way of thinking is the thesis that the social function of justice corresponds to the function of medicine in the life of the human body, which Plato refers to as pedagogy attendant upon illness<sup>20</sup>. Augustine's letters shows the continuation of this way of thinking.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. L. Edelstein, *The Relation of Ancient Philosophy to Medicine*, in *Ancient medicine: Selected papers of Ludwig Edelstein*, red. O. Temkin – C.L. Temkin, Baltimore 1967, 360.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. W. Jaeger, *Paideia. The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. 3, Oxford 1986, 5-7.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 464b, 465a, 501a.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 270c-d.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Plato, *Philebus* 34e-35b; 35e-36a.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Aristoteles, *Ethica Nicomachea* II 5, 1106a, 26-32; b, 15; b 27.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Plato, *Respublica* 404e-405a.

The metaphors based on health and illness are used by Augustine twenty three times in all correspondence (chapters, passages, or only short fragments)<sup>21</sup>. Referring to medical procedures and upbringing methods, they may be regarded as an explanation of the Church's spirituality, legislation and practice<sup>22</sup>. Augustine writes about disciplinary and doctrinal problems of the Church such as Judaism<sup>23</sup>, Priscillianism<sup>24</sup>, Manicheism<sup>25</sup>, Donatism<sup>26</sup>, paganism<sup>27</sup>, pride<sup>28</sup> and other issues associated with Augustine's care of the unity of various ecclesial communities and the union between individual members<sup>29</sup>, as well as a monastic and evangelical life<sup>30</sup>. In his letters, Augustine also justifies some statements supporting the use of disciplinary measures. Comparing Christians to patients, he recommends medical treatment and tries to find effective medicine for all pathologies.

However, in order to appreciate Augustine's rhetoric, it is necessary to be familiar with his optics. He is a bishop of the Church, the Body of Christ, whose doctrine has to remain immaculate<sup>31</sup>. For Augustine Catholicism, both in the sense of the deposit of faith and the hope it proclaims in socio-

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<sup>21</sup> Augustine's medical terminology in most cases is used and developed for the metaphors needs. Cf. S.A. Reid, "*The first dispensation of Christ is medicinal*", *Augustine and Roman medical culture*, Vancouver 2008, 166-167. Authoress summarizes heresies and related to them by Augustine disease. To a large extent, however, she ignores Letters. Cf. Reid, "*The first dispensation of Christ is medicinal*", p. 212-213.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Parsons, *A study*, p. 200.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 138, 3, CSEL 44, 128-129.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 264, 3, CSEL 57, 637.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 79, 1, CSEL 34, 2, 346.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 86, 1, CSEL 34, 2, 396-397; 89, 6, CSEL 34, 2, 423-424; 93, 1-5, CSEL 34, 2, 445-450; 93, 8, CSEL 34, 2, 452-453; 185, 7, CSEL 57, 6-7.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 4, CSEL 34, 2, 584; 104, 7-8, CSEL 34, 2, 586-588.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 140, 6-7, CSEL 44, 159-160; 266, 3, CSEL 57, 649-650.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 73, 4, CSEL 34, 2, 267; 140, 18, CSEL 44, 168-169; 167, 19, CSEL 44, 606-607.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 211, 11, CSEL 57, 364-365.

<sup>31</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 181, 9, CSEL 44, 712-713: "Let the infected wound be removed from the healthy body, therefore, and after the effluvium of the raging disease is removed let the uninfected parts go on with a greater degree of caution, and let the purified flock be cleansed of this contagion of the sick animal. Let the integrity of the whole body be unimpaired, for we know you follow and maintain this integrity by this decree against them, and we preserve it along with you by our similar assent". Cf. H. Pope, *Saint Augustine of Hippo, Essays dealing with his Life and Times and some features of his work*, London 1937, 278-283.

-doctrinal field, turns out to be the highest value<sup>32</sup>. By contrast, sin<sup>33</sup> and eternal damnation<sup>34</sup> are regarded as supreme evil and – in medical terms – illness.

In his letters, Augustine clearly separates people from their vices, described by him as diseases that should be healed. This opinion is stated *expressis verbis* in a letter to the nuns of Hippo: “And what I said about making eyes at someone should also be observed with love for the persons and a hatred for their vices in discovering, prohibiting, reporting, proving, and punishing other sins”<sup>35</sup>.

Nebrydus calls Augustine his physician<sup>36</sup>. Just pagan philosophers called themselves “physicians of the soul<sup>37</sup>”. Also Fathers of the Church called themselves *medici animarum*, following the example of *Medicus Christ*<sup>38</sup>. Already in the third century, Origen had championed the idea that Christ was “the Great Physician”, along with the idea that bishops and other representatives of Christ were “physicians of souls”. The Cappadocian Fathers develop these ideas, first articulated by Origen. Gregory of Nyssa referred to Christ as “the true doctor of the soul’s suffering”<sup>39</sup>. Usually they use medical analogies in which medical theory, particularly rudimentary anatomy and physiology, theories of natural causality, and descriptions of specific medical or surgical techniques that

<sup>32</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 17-23, CSEL 34, 2, 461-469.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 7, CSEL 34, 2, 586-587: “For the more we love anyone, the less we ought to hand him the means by which he sins with great danger”. Numerous references of a figurative nature to physicians, diseases, and cures may be found in such Stoic works as Seneca’s *De Ira*. Cf. A.S. Pease, *Medical allusions in the works of St. Jerome*, “Harvard Studies in Classical Philology” 25 (1914) 74.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 185, 7, CSEL 57, 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 211, 11, CSEL 57, 365: “Et hoc quod dixi de oculo non figendo, etiam in [...] peccatis diligenter observetur, cum dilectione hominum et odio vitiorum”.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 12\*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. R. Arbesmann, *The concept of Christus Medicus in St. Augustine*, *Traditio* 10 (1954) 1-28. The critic of his paper: cf. Reid, *The first dispensation*, p. 202-203, Cf. A.S. Pease, *Medical allusions in the Works of St. Jerome*, “Harvard Studies in Classical Philology” 25 (1914) 73-86; Cf. also M. Stróżyński, *Filozofia jako terapia w pismach Marka Aureliusza, Plotyna i Augustyna*, Poznań 2014, 167-168.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 130, 7, CSEL 44, 48; cf. Augustinus, *Sermo*, 229, 6. Cf. Th F. Martin, *Paul the Patient. Christus Medicus and the „Stimulus Carnis” (2 Cor. 12: 7): A Consideration of Augustine’s Medical Christology*, “Augustinian Studies” 32 (2001) f. 2, 220.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. A. Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity*, Oxford 2005, 53.

were employed in the treatment of particular medical problems provide homiletically rich comparisons<sup>40</sup>.

Augustine also conducts an analysis of the behavior of the Church, which passes the law in order to effectively face current threats of faith<sup>41</sup>, mainly caused by misinterpretations of the Bible, often unintentional. In this way, giving an example of surgical instruments, Augustine warns against heretical and irresponsible interpretations of the sacred writings and emphasizes the fact that the Bible was composed for the salvation of believers. He also points out, not without irony, that although surgical instruments, not invented to wound but to heal, are normally very useful, they can inflict wounds when misused (*tamquam si quisquam se medicinalibus ferramentis graviter vexet, quae utique non ad vulnerandum, sed ad sanandum sunt instituta*)<sup>42</sup>.

The most general suggestions concerning the shape of the Church and containing medical metaphors can be found in Augustine's correspondence with Nectarius, a pagan and city official of Calama in Numidia<sup>43</sup>. Nectarius asks Augustine to influence civil authorities in order to obtain a decree soothing the punishment imposed on his pagan compatriots for on 10th June<sup>44</sup> disturbing Christians and for not respecting the imperial edict. That edict forbade to pay homage to pagan gods. In response to this letter, several months later, Augustine extols the behavior of the Church, not allowing wrongdoers to remain unpunished<sup>45</sup>. The Bishop of Hippo also refers to the concept of the earthly fatherland evoked by Nectarius, which is on the verge of losing its splendor and vigor due to impunity<sup>46</sup>. What is more, Augustine argues that the virtues preached in churches are a clear sign of the fatherland's greatness<sup>47</sup>. Punishment should therefore be inflicted, as it is a means of correction and conversion<sup>48</sup>. This statement refers not only to the Church, but also to the society. Still, Augustine warns against imposing extremely severe punishments<sup>49</sup>. He tries to convince Nectarius that puni-

<sup>40</sup> Cf. D.W. Amundsen, *Medicine and faith in early Christianity*, "Bulletin of the History of Medicine" 56 (1982) 331.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 185, 45: "For experience with many illnesses creates the need to find many medicines".

<sup>42</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 264, 3, CSEL 57, 638.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 90, CSEL 34, 426-427.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 91, 8, CSEL 34, 432-433.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* CSEL 34, 427-435.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 91, 2, CSEL 34, 428.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 91, 3, CSEL 34, 429.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 91, 6, CSEL 34, 431.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 91, 7, CSEL 34, 432.

ishment as such is necessary, arguing that Christians do not desire to feed their anger by avenging past actions, but they act with mercy in looking out for the future<sup>50</sup>.

Christians should punish offenders in various ways, not only gently, but also to their benefit and salvation. Augustine also proclaims that wrongdoers should have their life and bodily integrity (*habent [...] quod corpore incolumi vivunt*) and that they should have the means to live (*habent unde vivunt*). Using a medical metaphor, the Bishop of Hippo argues that depriving malefactors of means to live badly can be compared to cutting off something that is decayed and harmful (*tamquam putre noxiumque resecari, valde misericorditer puniet*)<sup>51</sup>.

In response to Augustine's letter<sup>52</sup>, Nectarius wrote on 27th March<sup>53</sup> that neither corporal punishment nor financial penalty should be imposed. Referring to the Stoic thesis according to which life in poverty is worse than death, Nectarius shows Christian determination in practicing *caritas*, above all by relieving the sick with cures and applying medicine to afflicted bodies (*morbidos curatione relevatis, medicinam afflictis corporibus adhibetis*)<sup>54</sup>. Making complimentary remarks on Christianity, Nectarius seeks Augustine's support.

In his letter to Nectarius written in November, Augustine explains that, in his opinion, offenders should not be punished severely and he briefly characterizes Christian penalties. Malefactors should be deprived only of those material goods that are most precious to them<sup>55</sup>, "but ought not to be corrected by that degree of want at which they lack what is necessary for nature and to which mercy comes to the aid"<sup>56</sup>.

Punishment should not give way to a punisher's anger<sup>57</sup>, but should be an expression of his genuine care of offenders' future, especially their

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 5, CSEL 34, 585; cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 91, 9, CSEL 34, 433-434 which Augustine quotes literally in *Letter 104*.

<sup>51</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 91, 9, CSEL 34, 433-434.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 103, CSEL 34, 578-581.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 1, CSEL 34, 582.

<sup>54</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 103, 3, CSEL 34, 580.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 3, CSEL 34, 583-584; cf. *Epistula* 104, 4, CSEL 34, 584.

<sup>56</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 583-584, CSEL 34, 584.

<sup>57</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 8, CSEL 34, 587-588: "It is inadmissible for the Christian to succumb to the madness of reprimending someone out of desire for revenge [Christian must correct] without hating a person, without returning evil for evil, without being inflamed with the desire to harm, and without vengeance seeking to feed on even what the law permits. He should not act so that he does not show concern, so that he does

salvation. Augustine strongly believes that the most important aspect of punishment is to discourage malefactors from committing sins<sup>58</sup>.

Augustine claims further that Christians do not want heretics to be reduced through punishment. He suggests a middle course between severity, which should not go to this extreme, and impunity, which should not rejoice and celebrate in excessive security, giving other unfortunate people an example to imitate that would lead to most grave and most hidden punishments<sup>59</sup>. As a sanction against an attack on Christian spiritual values, he proposes fear of losing some superfluous goods.

Augustine is also convinced that this kind of punishment is preventive in nature: it is not actual punishment, but rather a protection from suffering real punishment, that is eternal damnation. He adds that it should not be called the punishment for a sin, but the safeguard of foresight: its aim is not to impose punishment on pagans, but to protect them from receiving eternal punishment<sup>60</sup>. As has been shown, Augustine often combines medical metaphors with those related to upbringing. In order to reinforce his argumentation, He gives an example of a man who pulls the hair of a boy so that he does not tease snakes. This example may be regarded as a starting point for the formulation of a general rule: "We are not being kind when we do what we are asked to do, but when we do what does not harm those who ask us"<sup>61</sup>.

A person who loves wants to protect a beloved person from the danger of sin, as the moral wrongdoing for which punishment is necessarily given entails the suffering of the wrongdoer. Concluding, he once again resorts to one of his favorite medical metaphors: "For, when physicians see that gangrene must be cut or burned away, they often out of mercy turn a deaf ear to many tears"<sup>62</sup>. The vast majority of medical metaphors used in Augustine's correspondence describe Donatism<sup>63</sup>.

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not use foresight, so that he does not suppress evils. For it can be that, out of a strong hostility, someone neglects the correction of a person whom he hates very deeply and, by punishing with some penalty, improves another whom he loves very much".

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 5, CSEL 34, 585.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 6, CSEL 34, 586.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 6-7, CSEL 34, 586-587.

<sup>61</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 7, CSEL 34, 587. Augustine quotes Cicero: "Don't give a boy a sword". Tully says, "Don't give one even to your only son". Cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Pro Sexto* 24.

<sup>62</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 104, 7, CSEL 34, 587.

<sup>63</sup> Augustine's letters on this subject (41) comprise about one fifth of his entire correspondence. Letters extend over thirty years (388-417). Cf. Parsons, *A study of the vocabulary*, p. 135; cf. W.J. Sparrow-Simpson, *The letters of St. Augustine*, London – New York 1919, 120; cf. Pope, *Saint Augustine of Hippo, Essays*, p. 199.



In his letter written approximately in 417, Augustine writes to Boniface, the tribune of Africa, about the supporters of Donatism. Augustine once again conducts an analysis of the Church's behavior applying medical metaphors. He highlights that:

these laws, which seem to be against them, are rather in their favor since [many Donatists] have been corrected by them and are being corrected each day, and they give thanks that they have been corrected and set free from that mad destruction (*illa furiosa pernicie*) and those who hated the laws (*saluber-rimas leges*) now love them, and the more they hated the laws in their insanity (*insania*), the more they are thankful, once they have recovered their health, that the laws so very conducive to their salvation were harsh toward them<sup>64</sup>.

For Augustine a subjective experience of those converted from heresy is therefore a powerful argument.

In his letters written between 406 and 409, Augustine strongly encourages Caecilian, the governor of Africa, to issue some decrees against the Donatists, whose heresy is regarded by the Bishop as the tumor of sacrilegious vanity that may be healed by instilling fear of laws against Donatism, rather than cut away by taking vengeance (*tumor sacrilegae vanitatis ter-rendo sanetur potius quam ulciscendo resecetur*)<sup>65</sup>.

In his correspondence dated between 405 and 411, Augustine writes to Festus, a Roman official and Catholic layman in Africa, about the behavior of the Church, comparing it to a physician. Deeply moved by the suffering of all patients and full of motherly love<sup>66</sup>, the Church seeks the salvation of every human being. The Bishop is convinced that although the behavior of the Church towards the Donatists may seem unpleasant for them, the Church is not their enemy. On the contrary, they are treated with such care as if they were mentally ill patients. Augustine claims further that "the manic cases do not want to be restrained (*phrenetici nolunt ligari*) and the lethargic do not want to be stirred up (*lethargici nolunt excitari*)".

The Church, like a wise physician, ignores the patients' resistance and, out of love, "continues to chastise the manic and to stimulate the lethargic

<sup>64</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 185, 7, CSEL 57, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 86, 1, CSEL 34, 397.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *Epistula* 9, PG 77, 61; cf. Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *Epistula*, 62, PG 77, 327-328. Vigorously though Cyril of Alexandria fought against the heresy of Nestorius, and Cyril's determination in this fight has grown in the history of the Church to the rank of legend, yet such was the ardent charity which animated him that, as he openly declared, he yielded to none in his love for Nestorius himself.

(*perseverat diligentia charitatis, phreneticum castigare, lethargicum stimulare, ambos amare*)”.

Comparing the Donatists not only to the manic, but also to the lethargic, Augustine states that “both are offended, but both are loved; both are bothered. As long as they are ill, they are angry, but once healed, both are grateful (*Ambo offenduntur, sed ambo diliguntur; ambo molestati, quamdiu aegri sunt indignantur, sed ambo sanati gratulantur*)”<sup>67</sup>.

Writing in the same tone, Augustine informs Vincent, the bishop of Cartenna in Mauretania Caesariensis, that many former Donatists are now grateful for being liberated from their former error (*pristinus error*), which is metaphorically described by Augustine as former blindness (*pristina caecitas*)<sup>68</sup>.

In the same letter, the Bishop of Hippo states that probably everyone seeing his enemy out of his mind due to dangerous fevers run toward a cliff, would try to catch him and tie him up, especially if the mentally ill person would be a Christian. Augustine is convinced that everybody should be given help and that everybody will eventually be grateful. He writes about two groups of heretics, suffering from two different illnesses (*morbis*), who should undergo various medical treatment in order to regain sanity (*sanitas*). To the first group belong the madmen (*phrenetici*) stimulated by turbulent audacity (*turbulenta audacia*). They should be bound, like mentally disturbed people, by the chains of laws that they can find displeasing. According to Augustine, the leaders of Donatist dissenters fall into this category. To the second group probably belong the common people that are overwhelmed by a long-lasting apathy (*vetusta socordia*). The Bishop is convinced that they have to be “disturbed for their salvation by the penalty of temporal chastisement (*regula temporalium molestiarum*) in order that they might emerge from their sluggish sleepiness (*somnus lethargicus*) and wake up in the salvation of the Church’s unity”<sup>69</sup>. Augustine states once again that “many of them condemn their former life and wretched error, because of which they thought that they did for the Church of God whatever they did in their restless rashness”.

The words he puts in the mouth of former Donatists, may be regarded as a glorification of the Church’s behavior. Although some practices may seem displeasing (*molesti*), they are effective in rescuing from the disease of long-standing habit (*morbis veterinosae consuetudinis*) as if from a deadly sleep (*mortiferus somnus*)<sup>70</sup>. As the Bishop puts it: “How many

<sup>67</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 89, 6, CSEL 34, 423-424.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 1, CSEL 34, 445-446.

<sup>69</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 3, CSEL 34, 448.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 2, CSEL 34, 447. The methods of the surgeon are often rough but their apparent cruelty is regularly explained as due to kindness and neces-

of them are now rejoicing with us and blame the former burden of their destructive activity! How many of them admit that we ought to have been troublesome to them for fear that they would perish in that way"<sup>71</sup>.

In the same letter, Augustine rhetorically asks if the art of medicine should be neglected when "some have an incurable plague (*insanabilis pestilentia*)". He argues that the Donatists were reprimanded not out of hatred, but out of love. Instead of concentrating on the suffering caused by a reprimand, Augustine advises to look at numerous people, whose penitence fills others with joy. He also justifies his twofold method of curing the Donatists, that is resorting to fear and reprimand. He strongly believes that if they were frightened by the Church and did not learn anything, it would seem wicked tyranny. On the other hand, he is convinced that if the bishops only reprimanded the Donatists, without instilling fear, they "would be lazy about moving to take the path to salvation (*via salutis*)", since they would be afraid of sudden expressions of the dissenters' dissatisfaction<sup>72</sup>.

In Augustine's opinion, the doctrine of salvation should be combined with a beneficial fear "not only so that the light of the truth drives out the darkness of error, but also so that the force of fear breaks the chains of bad habit". The Church rejoice over the salvation (*salus*) of many who bless us and thank God [that] he has in this way cured the sick, in this way healed the weak (*curavit morbidos, sic sanavit infirmos*)<sup>73</sup>.

Augustine states in the same letter that being kind not necessarily means being a friend and being unkind not necessarily means being an enemy. Referring to the Book of Proverbs (27:6), he emphasizes that the wounds inflicted by a friend are much more beneficial than the kisses given by an enemy. Writing in the same tone, Augustine also stresses the fact that "someone who ties down a crazy person and who rouses a lazy person loves them both, though he is a bother to both (*qui phreneticum ligat, et qui lethargicum excitat, ambobus molestus, ambos amat*)"<sup>74</sup>.

Augustine takes yet another argument from the Bible. He points out that God, who loves humans perfectly, does not cease not only to teach them with gentleness, but also to frighten them for their salvation (*salubriter terrere non cessat*). In this way, very often after gentle salves (*fomentum lene*), with which He brings relief, He administers the most biting medicine of tribulation (*mordacissimum medicamentum tribulationis*). What is more,

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sary for a permanent cure. Cf. A.S. Pease, *Medical allusions in the works of St. Jerome*, "Harvard Studies in Classical Philology" 25 (1914) 74.

<sup>71</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 2, CSEL 34, 446.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 3, CSEL 34, 448.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 3, CSEL 34, 448.

<sup>74</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 4, CSEL 34, 449.

he trains the patriarchs with famine, he afflicts the rebellious people with more severe punishments (*poenis gravioribus*) and does not liberate the Apostle from the limitations of the body, although he asks God three times to do so, in order that he may make virtue perfect in weakness (*in infirmitate*). The Bishop of Hippo concludes in the following way: “But just as we praise his gifts, so let us bear in mind his scourges upon those whom he loves”<sup>75</sup>.

Fully aware of the fact that the Church’s behavior towards Donatists may be perceived as similar to the persecution of Christians by pagan imperial authorities, in the same letter Augustine himself uses this analogy in order to stress significant differences between the two, both in terms of form and inner motivation. He points out that “the evil have always persecuted the good and the good have always persecuted the evil: the former by harming them unjustly, the latter by showing concern for them through discipline; the former savagely, the latter in moderation; the former in the service of desire, the latter in that of love”<sup>76</sup>.

Augustine is not afraid of apparent identity. Applying yet another medical metaphor, he underlines that a torturer does not worry about how he slashes, but a surgeon considers how he cuts because surgeon aims at health, the torturer at infection<sup>77</sup>.

In the final of the passages devoted to Donatism, Augustine once again conducts an analysis of the Church’s behavior applying medical metaphors. He highlights that these laws, which seem to be against them, are rather in their favor since many Donatists are being corrected each day, and they give thanks that they have been corrected and set free from that mad destruction (*illa furiosa pernicie*) and those who hated the laws (*saluberimas leges*) now love them, and the more they hated the laws in their insanity (*insania*), the more they are thankful, once they have recovered their health, that the laws so very conducive to their salvation were harsh toward them. For Augustine a subjective experience of those converted from heresy is therefore a powerful argument<sup>78</sup>.

In the final part, Augustine justifies the Church’s behavior towards heretics, pointing out that they expose the members of the Church to physical suffering. The Bishop of Hippo compares them to a raging madman (*furienti phrenetico*), who urgently need a doctor’s (*medicus*) help. Acting out of love, he has no other option but to tie down the troublesome patient. The madman has to be tied down, even if such behavior may seem brutal. On

<sup>75</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 4, CSEL 34, 449.

<sup>76</sup> Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 8, CSEL 34, 452.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 93, 8, CSEL 34, 452.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 185, 7, CSEL 34, 451-452.

the contrary, it is motivated by love, as the doctor's passivity or his refusal to tie down the madman would not be an act of kindness, but would do harm to the patient<sup>79</sup>.

Augustine's further arguments evoke a Biblical image (Ps 32:9) of a vet (*homo a quo curanda vulnera contrectantur*), who risks his life, trying to help horses and mules. Unaware of the importance of painful and tormenting medical treatment (*dolores et molestias medicinales revocent ad salutem*)<sup>80</sup>, the animals may bite or kick the vet.

According to Augustine, no human being, above all a believer in Christ, should be exposed to the risk of eternal damnation, even if he or she strongly rejects the help offer. The awareness of the value of this help is a consequence of the awareness of the value of eternal salvation<sup>81</sup>.

If, however, the doctor neglected the patients and permitted them to perish, this false gentleness would in fact be cruel. After all, the horse and the mule, which lack intellect (Ps 32:9), resist with bites and kicks human beings who treat their wounds in order to heal them, and human beings are often put in danger from their teeth and hoofs and at times injured. But they still do not abandon them until they have brought them back to health by painful and tormenting medical interventions. How much more should one human being not abandon another, how much more should one brother not abandon another, lest he perish for eternity! For, once he has been corrected, he can understand what a great benefit he received when he was complaining about suffering persecution<sup>82</sup>.

Letters show Augustine as a man who is familiar with the medical phenomena and procedures, and as a bishop who cares about the purity of faith and the discipline of the Church, the condition and problems of which he describes through a variety of health metaphors. He uses the antique, biblical and patristic tradition, which he enriches with his positive attitude to the human body, heretics and schismatics. He recommends that heretics and schismatics be treated with determination and patience. As we know, the representatives of the medical school of Hippocrates were convinced that a healthy body can manage to recover on its own if it is provided appropriate resources facilitating its recovery. Nevertheless, if the body is thoroughly ill, the doctor ought to allow it to die, just like the judge gives

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 185, 7, CSEL 34, 451-452.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 185, 7, CSEL 34, 451-452.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 185, 7, CSEL 34, 451-452.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Augustinus, *Epistula* 185, 7, CSEL 34, 451-452. See Keenan, *Augustine and Medical Profession*, p. 173.

a death sentence to a man whose soul is terminally ill due to his sins. In this context, Augustine appears to be a shepherd patiently waiting for the spiritual recovery of the sick people.

### **Metaforyka zdrowia w listach Augustyna**

(streszczenie)

Augustyn w swojej korespondencji wielokrotnie posługuje się mocno osadzoną w tradycji biblijnej, patrystycznej i filozoficznej swoich czasów metaforyką opartą na medycynie i higienie. Wprost lub pośrednio odwołuje się przede wszystkim do dwóch idei: Chrystusa jako lekarza oraz Pawłowej doktryny o Kościele jako ciele Chrystusa. Chrześcijanie są członkami Kościoła. Ich osobiste grzechy, duchowe braki, jak również obce doktryny i herezje, którym ulegają, oraz schizmy, do których przystępują, takie jak: judaizm, pryscylianizm, manicheizm, donatyzm, pogaństwo, pycha i niezgoda pomiędzy wspólnotami, w tym kluczu metaforycznym są przedstawiane jako choroby. Augustyn najczęściej posługuje się obrazami ślepoty, nowotworu, gangreny, obłąkania, ospałości, ośpienia i porania. Nasz autor jako pasterz Kościoła w swoich wypowiedziach podaje również różne narzędzia i sposoby walki z nimi, które także opisuje w kategoriach medycznych, często powiązanych z motywami pedagogicznymi. W ten sposób medycyna staje się obrazem dyscypliny kościelnej, etyki i duchowości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** medyczne metafory; św. Augustyn z Hippony; zdrowie

### **Medical Metaphors in Augustine's Letters**

(summary)

Augustin in his correspondence many times uses the metaphor based on medicine and hygiene – deeply rooted in biblical, patristic and philosophical tradition of his times. Directly or indirectly he refers mainly to two ideas: Christ as Medical Doctor and St. Paul's doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ. Christians are members of the Church. Their personal sins, spiritual flaws, foreign doctrines and heresies they are attracted to, schisms they join such as Judaism, Priscilianism, Manicheism, Donatism, paganism, pride and discord among communities are all presented metaphorically as illnesses. Augustine uses the images of blindness, cancer, gangrene, madness, lethargy, dementia and injury. The Author as the Shepherd of the Church offers various devices and ways to fight the vices, using medical terms in a didactic context. In this way, medicine becomes the representation of the Church's discipline, ethics and spirituality.

**Keywords:** medical metaphors; Saint Augustine of Hippo; health

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