

The Language of Saint Augustine's Sermons and How He Became Familiar with Christian Latin

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Abstract: In this article, I would like to emphasize that the language of Saint Augustine's sermons was Christian Latin, given that in 4th century North Africa, bureaucratic practices, judicial discussions, school education and the spread of culture were conducted in Latin. However, alongside the "cult" of educated people, there was also the "sermo plebeius, vulgaris, cotidianus" of the common people, who often and lovingly embellished Latin grammar and words with Punic or Libyan reminiscences. However, there was also this third linguistic vein, that of "Libyan" or "barbarian", about which very little is known since only a few rare inscriptions have been preserved and not a single literary piece.

In the second part, I highlight the way in which Saint Augustine became familiar with Christian Latin. While in the works from Cassiciacum, Augustine's language and style are still dominated by ancient and profane tradition – according to his own testimony –, we find that, in the works of the following years, they slowly and little by little approach the Christian tradition. His syntax that was so traditional in the works from Cassiciacum, conforms little by little to the current language use of his era. In the years after his baptism, Augustine not only objectively familiarizes himself with the idiom of the Christians, but struggles to overcome the linguistic and stylistic habits that made the adoption of a specific term difficult for the former rhetorician.

Keywords: Christian Latin, langue, common, vulgar, everyday speech, semantics, classical terms, homilies

Latin, Punic, Berber and Sermo plebeius, vulgaris, cotidianus

Within the framework of the problem of language and religion in the 4th century AD, we must place the phenomenon of Christian Latinity as presented in a developed civilization. Therefore, we can immediately add that the Latin of Christians offers us an excellent opportunity to study the relations between language and religion. We are talking here about a secular,

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mature and fully developed civilization, which adopts a religion that has its origins in a foreign civilization. This new religion will spread – despite the protests and persecutions of the pagan state – in an extremely rapid manner. Thus, Latin was faced with the task of formulating a very new religious doctrine – which proclaimed itself as such –, a doctrine that clearly and fundamentally stood out from the religious ideas of the Greco-Latin world. At the same time, this new religion profoundly influences the lives of its followers, tends to modify the very style of life, to upset the very principles of ancient society. To fully understand what contact with Christianity meant for the Latin language, we must realize – from the very beginning – that it was not only about religious knowledge that was being tried to be formulated in Latin, but also – first and foremost – about a revolution in life itself, which was necessarily reflected in the language. This spiritual revolution manifested itself in a hitherto unknown attitude towards the data of traditional culture, an attitude inspired by a new conception of life. For life, dominated from now on by a symbolism unknown in the ancient world, became a *peregrinatio* towards another, eternal world.¹

The official language, as well as the most widespread in the coastal cities and in the cultural and commercial environments, was Latin. Bureaucratic practices, judicial discussions, education in schools and the spread of culture were carried out in Latin.

There was the “cultured” Latin of writers, rhetoricians, educated people and the “sermo plebeius, vulgaris, cotidianus” of the common people, who often and fondly embellished Latin grammar and words with Punic or Libyan reminiscences. In houses with a certain level of aristocracy, everyone, rich and servants, spoke Latin, some of high quality, others of a lower level. The popular (or common) Latin language “had a unified appearance but was spoken by all kinds of races and peoples”.²

Starting with the great rise of Christianity and its own literature, mainly since 180-200, Africa had become the most eminent centre of Christian Latinity in less than a century.

It had the chance to enjoy an authentic golden period, displaying reputed writers such as Apuleius, Tertullian, Saint Cyprian of Carthage, Arnobius, Lactantius and, above all, Saint Augustine. In contrast, in the more internal areas, especially in the rocky regions, isolated from the exchange of activities, people generally used the ancient Punic jargon, mixed with

¹ Mohrmann Christine, “La Latinité Chrétienne et le Problème des Relations entre Langue et Religion”, in “Études sur le Latin des Chrétiens”, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1958, p. 127.

² Mihăescu, H., *Puncte de vedere asupra Lingvisticii Latine / Views on Latin Linguistics*, Alexandru A. Țerek Publishing House, Iași, 1945, p. 94.

indefinite linguistic varieties of other ethnic strains and the normal developments of a spoken language.³

This dialectal idiom was quite widespread between the simple world of the sea and the countryside. It was used in small commercial activities and in everyday life. The fishermen and peasants who got together in the church of Hippo to listen to their bishop, Augustine, understood Latin well, but among themselves, in the port or in the fields, they spoke "Punic", mixed with "interpreted" Latin with grammatical approximations and typical local inflections.

If we can say so, Punic never disappeared completely, because with the arrival of the Arabs it mixed with the language of the invaders, preserving its own characteristics, facilitated by a single affinity due to the same Semitic origin.

However, there was a third linguistic vein, that of "Libyan" or "barbarian", about which very little is known; this is because no literary creation has come down to us, only a few rare inscriptions. These are the native languages of the Libyan, Moorish or Barbarian populations who, under the pressure of foreign invasions, had taken refuge in the most remote interior, towards the mountains of central or southern Numidia, on the border of the desert. Their language, which is usually indicated as "Libyan" or "barbarian", became incomprehensible in the more common circles, and especially in the most evolved ones. It was neither known to the civil authorities, nor to the clergy and bishops. In some necessary cases, an interpreter was required.

This indigenous language seems to have travelled slowly inland and then remained without major changes in various tribes of the Sahara or among the inhabitants of the mountains between Tunisia and Algeria. These naturally known distinctions were made by those who, dealing with the peoples of Africa, discussed them with foreigners, in broad outlines, with approximations, without noting the differences that appeared between a Barbarian, Punic or Latin stock: they immediately qualified them briefly as "Punic". Even Augustine was called "Punic" and "Afer", as reference to his Numidian race and African roots.⁴

At the time of Monica and Augustine, Tagaste had already existed for 300 years and the marbles of Roman glory seemed so ancient that they had already lost their enamel, worn away by the wear and tear of time.

However, Punic pride and Latin openness persisted.

Latin was spoken fluently in the city. Latin works were studied in schools; thus, even among the curials, Latin was the official language at their liturgical gatherings in the forum.

³ Saginario, Giulietta, *Monnica mia madre. Biografia critica della madre di Agostino*, Città Nuova, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, 2005, p. 23.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

The Greek language, on the other hand, was studied only in schools and represented the torment of Augustine's students, who needed it in order to be able to read and translate Greek works. Augustine recounts the odyssey of learning Latin and Greek in the beginning of his *Confessions*:

The difficulty, in truth, the difficulty of learning a foreign language mingled as it were with gall all the sweetness of those fabulous Grecian stories. For not a single word of it did I understand, and to make me do so, they vehemently urged me with cruel threatenings and punishments. There was a time also when (as an infant) I knew no Latin; but this I acquired without any fear or tormenting, by merely taking notice, amid the blandishments of my nurses, the jests of those who smiled on me, and the sportiveness of those who toyed with me. I learnt all this, indeed, without being urged by any pressure of punishment, for my own heart urged me to bring forth its own conceptions, which I could not do unless by learning words, not of those who taught me, but of those who talked to me; into whose ears, also, I brought forth whatever I discerned. From this it is sufficiently clear that a free curiosity hath more influence in our learning these things than a necessity full of fear. But this last restrains the overflowings of that freedom, through Thy laws, O God, —Thy laws, from the ferule of the schoolmaster to the trials of the martyr, being effective to mingle for us a salutary bitter, calling us back to Thyself from the pernicious delights which allure us from Thee.⁵

Few people now in Tagaste, as in other cities in Numidia, used Punic, while in the countryside the peasants spoke and understood nothing but this language. At Hippo, however, only a few among the clergy knew how to use it. Later, when he became bishop and had to be understood by certain peasants in his diocese who spoke nothing but Punic, Augustine used an interpreter like the Donatist bishop Macrobius.

Thus arose the separation between the wealthier people who traded, attended schools or travelled, and the poorer ones, who remained to tend their flocks in the mountains or to cultivate their lands with bent backs, without leaving their farms much.⁶

It is well known that Saint Augustine commented on the Holy Scripture either in homilies, which he addressed to the faithful, or in written treatises and commentaries. His commentaries are modelled after *Itala*, as he knew very little Greek and no Hebrew at all. In his written commentaries, Augustine mainly gives the literal meaning, while in his homilies he provides a more allegorical and mystical interpretation.⁷

⁵ St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, I, 14, 23, in Philips Schaff (ed.), *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin, with a Sketch of his Life and Work*, Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, New York, 1886, p. 55-56.

⁶ Saginario Giulietta, *Monnica mia madre ...*, p. 31.

⁷ Arhid. Prof. Dr. Voicu Constantin, *Patrologie/ Patrology*, vol. II, Ed. Basilica, București, 2009, p. 311.

How Augustine became familiar with Christian Latin

At the end of the *Prologue* of the *Retractationes*, after some general remarks on the reasons that led him to write these retractions or revisions, Augustine mentioned that he did not wish to set aside the works that he had written as a catechumen, at a time when he was still under the influence of the literary customs of the century:

I have decided, moreover, to write this work that I might put it into the hands of men from whom I cannot recall for correction the writings I have already published. Certainly, I will not pass over the things I wrote while still – a catechumen – although I have given up the early prospects which I used to cherish, but was still puffed up with the usage of secular literature – because these works, too, have become known to copyist and readers and many continue to be read with profit if some errors are overlooked, or if not overlooked, yet are not granted acceptance. Let those, therefore, who are going to read this book not imitate me when I err, but rather when I progress toward the better.⁸

Augustine did not insert this remark in the first chapters of the first volume of the *Retractationes*, where he analysed in detail the works from Cassiciacum, but introduced it in the *Prologus*; in this way, he brings it out in a special way. The works to which he alludes thus constitute a separate category, a kind of prelude to his literary works, and what distinguishes them from the others is not primarily their inspiration (already Christian, by the way), but especially their literary form, still inspired by the tradition of the pagan school. We find the same idea in *Confessions*, IX, 4,7, where Augustine says that God brought his tongue to light, after having brought his heart to light: *Et factum est, eruisti linguam meam, unde iam erueras cor meum*. And here he emphasizes the profane character of the literary form of the works from Cassiciacum, in which the pride of the didactic activity up to that time was still visible: *Ibi quid egerim in litteris iam quidem servientibus tibi, sed adhuc superbiae scholam tamquam in pauatione anhelantibus testantur libri disputati cum praesentibus et cum ipso me solo coram te.*⁹

After the general observation made in the *Prologus*, Augustine reviews in the first chapters of the first volume a series of passages from his works at Cassiciacum. He does not return to the general character of the language and style of these works, which are very much imbued with profane tradition, but he believes that he must criticize in detail certain turns and expressions that seem to him inspired by pagan ideas in one way or another.

⁸ Saint Augustine, *The Retractationes*, Prologue, translated by Sister Mary Inez Bogan, in coll. *The Fathers of The Church*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 1999, p. 5.

⁹ S. Aurelii Augustini, *Retractationum*, in *PL (Patrologia Latina)*, 32, col. 585-586.

In a very interesting way, he first criticizes the repeated use of the word *fortuna*¹⁰ used in a general, not a technical sense. He begins by regretting that he invoked *fortuna* so often, although, he adds, he did not want to designate by this noun a specific divinity, but the chance occurrence of things, whether in the good or bad things in our body, or in the good or bad things outside: *sed in eisdem tribus libris meis non mihi placet toties me appellare fortunam, quamvis non aliquam deam voluerim hoc nomine intelegi, sed fortuitum rerum eventum, vel in corporis nostri, vel in externis bonis aut malis* (1, 1, 2).

¹¹ From there also come those words that no religious scruple stops one from pronouncing, such as: “maybe”, “chance”, “at chance”, “at random”, “accidentally”, etc. However, he wants to exclude this use, because he considers it a bad habit of Christians to say instead of *ubi dici debet: hoc Deus voluit, dicere, Hoc voluit fortuna*. More precisely, it is about the use of the words *forte, forsan, etc.*: *unde et illa verba sunt quoe nulla religio dicere prohibet*:¹² *forte*,¹³ *forsan, forsitan, fortasse, fortuito, quod totum ad divinam revocandum est providentiam*.¹⁴ Therefore, in the noun *fortuna* there was still a concrete and religious nuance alive, while the adverbs had become pure grammatical signs.¹⁵

A similar observation is made in connection with *omen*.¹⁶ In chapters 1, 2 of the same book, *Retractationes*, he criticizes the use of this word, as if this

¹⁰ *Fortūna*, - ae - fate; luck; (rarely) misfortune; (pl.) fortunate or unfortunate circumstances, fortunate or unfortunate situation; (Guțu Gheorghe, *Dicționar Latin – Român / Latin – Romanian Dictionary*, 2nd revised edition, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2003, p. 540). *For-tuna* (> *fors*) – chance, luck (Charles S. Halsey, *An Etymology of Latin and Greek*, Published by Ginn and Company, Boston, 1889, p.129). *Fortuna* = luck, the one who brings good and bad; derives from the radical *for* - with the meaning of carrying, bringing. (Regnaud Paul, *Dictionnaire Etymologique du Latin et du Grec dans ses Raports avec le Latin d'après la Méthode Évolutionniste (Linguistique Indo-Européenne Appliquée)*, A Rey Éditeur, Lyon, 1908, p. 111).

¹¹ S. Aurelii Augustini, *Retractationum*, in *PL*, 32, col. 585.

¹² Christine Mohrmann argues that we should not translate with Bardy Chan. (*Oeuvres de saint Augustin, 12, XII, Les révisions*, Paris, 1950, p. 250): “These words whose use is not prohibited by any religion”. *Religio* has here a meaning of “religious scruple”. (Mohrmann Christine, *Comment Saint Augustin s’est familiarisé avec le Latin des Chrétiens*, in *Études sur le Latine des Chrétiens*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1958, p. 384). This interesting work was of real use to me in writing this subchapter. According to patristic teaching, *fate, luck* are exclusively related to the notion of chance; however, in Christianity, nothing is accidental, but everything is providential, since God ordains or permits some good or bad events, with a certain meaning, constructive, expiatory or pedagogical purpose.

¹³ *Forte* (adv.) > *fors, fortis* - chance, fate; *forsan* (adv.) = *for sit an* - it may be the case that..., perhaps...; *fortasse* (adv.) - maybe; *fortuito* (adv.) - by chance, randomly (Guțu Gheorghe, *Dicționar Latin – Român/ Latin – Romanian Dictionary...*, p. 539-540).

¹⁴ S. Aurelii Augustini, *Retractationum*, in *PL*, 32, col. 585.

¹⁵ Mohrmann Christine, *Comment Saint Augustin s’est familiarisé avec le Latin des Chrétiens*, in *Études sur le Latine des Chrétiens*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1958, p. 384.

¹⁶ *Ōmen, minis* - omen, auspicious sign; wish; ritual custom, ceremonial; Guțu Gheorghe, *op. cit.*, pp. 909-910); *omen, inis* - prediction, prognosis (Paul Regnaud, *Dictionnaire*

was said not seriously, but in jest, yet he would like not to use that word: *hoc licet non serio sed ioco dictum sit, nollem tamen eo verbo uti*. Continuing, he emphasizes the fact that he does not remember having read the word *omen* [prediction] either in the Holy Scripture or in the speech of any church polemicist, although the word *abominatio* [rejection of a bad omen]¹⁷ derives from *omen*, and the word *abominatio* is found in the Holy Scriptures. Here too, it is not a matter of pagan superstition, but simply of a joke inspired by current usage.¹⁸ This time, Augustine has given us a very concrete reason for the prohibition of this word in his opinion. He therefore applies a positive norm that seems conclusive to him: the word is not found either in the Holy Scripture or in Christian authors, so it does not belong to the Christian idiom. But on the other hand, he distinguishes between the simple word and the derivative *abominatio*, in which the meaning has lost its power and which he found in the Bible: *quamvis abominatio inde sit dicta, quae in divinis assidue reperitur* (1, 1, 2).¹⁹

Along with *fortuna* and *omen*, the muses are also forbidden: *displicet mihi...quod Musas quasi aliquas deas iocando nuncupavi* (1, 3, 2).

By excluding these words, Augustine remains faithful to a very old Latin tradition of Christians, which for a long time avoided technical terms from pagan religions, even when it came to words whose meaning had lost its power.²⁰

The “enrichment of the semantics of some classical terms” was noticed.

E. g.

salus – salvation; derivatives: *salvere* (in pagan Latin, to adore, to worship the deities); *salutare*, adj. *salutaris*; *salvator* (to avoid *servator* and *stator*, used by pagans with reference to Jupiter).

Tertullian proposes *salvificator/ salutificator*....

Lavacrum (bath, bathroom) and *tinctio* (soaking, dyeing) acquire the meaning of baptism, baptising (however, the Greek terms *baptisma*, *baptismus*, *baptisum* are imposed)....

Etymologique du Latin et du Grec dans ses Rapports avec le Latin d'après la Méthode Évolutionniste (Linguistique Indo-Européenne Appliquée), A Rey Éditeur, Lyon, 1908, p. 219).

¹⁷ *Abominor, ari, atus sum* - to ward off a bad sign, to reject a bad omen, to wish that something bad would not happen, to detest, to hate (see Regnaud Paul, *Dictionnaire Etymologique du Latin et du Grec ...*, p. 219 & Iordănescu Theodor, Diaconescu Mariana and Halichias Ana-Cristina, *Dicționar Latin – Română/ Romanian – Latin Dictionary*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 2003, p. 3). *Abominor, ari, atus sum* - to prevent a bad omen through prayer (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 8).

¹⁸ Saint Augustine, *Retractationes (Revisions)*, translation by Nicolae I. Barbu, Ed. Anastasia, București, 1997, p. 21.

¹⁹ S. Aurelii Augustini, *Retractationum*, in *PL*, 32, col. 586.

²⁰ Mohrmann Christine, *Comment Saint Augustin s'est familiarisé ...*, p. 384.

Mediator (legal meaning - intermediary in a process, in Apuleius, Met, IX, 36, 1) – mediator of Christ.

Mediator Dei et hominum (1 Timothy 2, 5)

Christus mediator et salvator (Aug., Civ., 17, 5)

Mediatio is also used.

Sermo – conversation, speech, language; in Christian Latin “sermon, homily”.²¹

Sometimes Augustine criticizes words or turns for more subtle reasons in his early works. For example, we find a very fine observation on the words *Contra Academicos*, 2, 99, 22: *securior rediturus in caelum* “he (i.e. the soul) will more certainly return to heaven”. In *Retractationes*, 1, 1, 3, Augustine points out that it would have been more prudent to say *iturus* instead of *rediturus*, because of the Platonic doctrine of metempsychosis: *iturus autem quam rediturus dixissem securius propter eos, qui putant animos humanos pro meritis peccatorum suorum de caelo lapsos sive deiectos in corpora ista detrude*.²² But, he continues, it is a question of a return of the soul to its Creator: *sed hoc ego propterea non dubitavi dicere, qui ita dixi in caelum, tamquam dicerem ad Deum, qui eius est auctor et conditor*.²³ Here Augustine alludes to a very widespread Christian usage, inspired by the idea that to reach God, the Creator and Source of all, is nothing more than to return to God. As an example, we could cite *Confessiones*, VIII, 3, 8: *Ei mihi, quam excelsus es in excelsis et quam profundus in profundis! Et nusquam recedis, et vix redimus ad te*.²⁴ (“Woe is me! How high art Thou in the highest, and how deep in the deepest! Thou withdrawest no whither, and scarcely do we return to Thee”).²⁵ And immediately, he adds these words: *nonne multi ex profundiore tartaro coecitatis quam Victorianus redeunt ad te?* (4, 9) (“Do not many men, out of a deeper hell of blindness than that of Victorinus, return unto Thee?”).²⁶ The words *rediturus in caelum* therefore corresponded to a very authentic Christian usage, but we are tempted to wonder whether, in this case, the bishop of Hippo does not give these words from his youth a meaning that they did not have at the time he wrote them.

While in the works from Cassiciacum, Augustine's language and style are – according to his own testimony – still dominated by ancient and profane tradition, we find that in the works of the following years they slowly and little by little approach the Christian tradition. His syntax, so traditional

²¹ Conf. Dr. Claudia Tărnăuceanu, *Curs de latină creștină/ Christian Latin Course*, ms, Iași, 2020, p. 129, 130, 131.

²² S. Aurelii Augustini, *Retractationum*, in *PL*, 32, col. 587.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ S. Augustini, *Confessiones*, VIII, 3, 8, in *PL*, 32, col. 752.

²⁵ St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, VIII, 4, 9, in Philips Schaff (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 161.

²⁶ St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, VIII, 4, 9, in Philips Schaff (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 161.

in the works from Cassiciacum, conforms little by little to the current language usage of his era.

The long hypotactic periods are relaxed, analytical constructions are no longer excluded. But we can especially observe the vocabulary in this process of adaptation: we see how Augustine becomes familiar with the technical terms of the language of Christians, how his vocabulary becomes richer and more popular at the same time. Thus, the idiom of Christians is a true special language that is distinguished from the common language by its own imprint, and with this language Augustine became familiar little by little. A «special language» or a group language is neither a new language, nor a separate language, but only a variant of the common language determined by the solidarity of a group of people who speak it.²⁷

We see very clearly how in the works written after his departure from Milan, Augustine appropriates the idiom of Christian circles. This does not mean that, immediately after baptism, the rhetorician Augustine disappeared to make way for the Christian eager to appropriate the language of Christian communities. We can observe for many years a certain hesitation, an uncertainty in the use of vocabulary, which we could not explain exclusively by a certain lack of experience and ignorance on the part of this new convert, but which are inspired largely by the literary scruples of the former rhetorician. The rhetorician of Milan, speaking of the Incarnation of the Son of God, in *De vera religione*, dating from the years 389-390, specifies: *illa hominis sacrosancta susceptio* ("to that holy helper for man"). In the fourth century, the noun *incarnātiō, ōnis*²⁸, which would later be very familiar, was still recent.²⁹ However, he probably heard it in Milan, from Saint Ambrose, and in Rome, in Christian circles. In the same treatise, *De vera religione*, he designates the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, thus emphasizing that he honors the One God, the only beginning of the whole creation and the Wisdom by which every wise soul is wise and the very gift by which those who are blessed are blessed: *Ecce unum deum colo, unum omnium Principium, et Sapientiam qua sapiens est, quaecumque anima sapiens est, et ipsum munus quo beata sunt, quaecumque beata sunt*.³⁰ What surprises us all the more is the fact that in *De ordine*, 2, 16, we can already read: *unum Deum omnipotentem unumque tripotentem Patrem, et Filium, et Spiritum sanctum...*³¹ ("One God, omnipotent, and that He is tripotent, Father and Son

²⁷ Mohrmann Christine, *Comment saint Augustin s'est familiarise ...*, p. 385-386.

²⁸ In the sense of incarnation (referring to the Incarnation of the Son of God). Blaise Albert, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français des Auteurs Chrétiens*, Revu spécialement pour le vocabulaire théologique par Henri Chirat, 1994, p. 421.

²⁹ See Mohrmann Chr., *Die altchristliche Sondersprache in den Sermones des hl. Augustin*, Nîmegue, 1932, p. 118.

³⁰ S. Augustini, *De vera religione*, liber unus, LV, 112, in *PL*, 34, col. 171.

³¹ Idem, *De ordine*, liber secundus, 2, 16, in *PL*, 32, col. 1002.

and Holy Spirit ..."). It seems, therefore, that in *De vera religione*, Augustine excluded the use of certain Christian technical terms for special reasons.

In the years after his baptism, Augustine not only objectively familiarizes himself with the idiom of Christians, but also tries with all his might to overcome the linguistic and stylistic habits that made the adoption of a specific term difficult for the former rhetorician. Nowhere is this "antipathy" towards neologism better seen than in the way in which Augustine opposes, for years, the use of the word *salvator*. As I have already noted, he uses it in *De civitate Dei*, 17, 5.

We know the story of this term:

Cicero had already sought a Latin equivalent of the Greek *σωτήρ*, which he renders first through a periphrasis: *qui salutem dedit*, then through *servator*. Later, in Tacitus and Pliny, we find the word *conservator*.³² The ancient translators of the Bible did not adopt the usual term *conservator*, which had a pagan religious meaning. They translated *σωτήρ*, which they found in Holy Scripture either with the noun *salutaris* or with the neologism *salvator*, derived from the verb *salvare*, formed in turn by Christians. Tertullian introduced the term *salutificator*, a term that was not successful. As for *salvator*, this word was adopted slowly, with difficulty, by Christian authors. It seems that certain psychological and stylistic difficulties had to be overcome before *salvator* became a truly common term at the end of the 4th century.³³

In *De vita beata*, 36, he uses the word *liberator*, a classical word sometimes applied to Jupiter. This typically pagan term is also found in *Contra Fortunatum*, 2, a polemic held in 392 with the Manichaean Fortunatus.

This long hesitation regarding an essential term of the Christian vocabulary shows Augustine to be very aware of the new character of the word, as also happens in many passages in which he will defend it later, against the objections of grammarians, as for example: *Christus inquit Jesus, id est Christus salvator. Hoc est enim latine Jesus. Nec quaerant grammatici quam sit latinum, sed christiani quam verum. Salus enim latinum nomen est. Salvare et salvator non fuerunt haec latina antequam veniret salvator: quando ad latinos venit, et haec latina fecit*.³⁴ In *De Trinitate*: *Qui est hebraice Jesus, graece σωτήρ*,³⁵ *nostra autem locutione salvator: quod verbum latina lingua antea non habebat, sed habere poterat, sicut potuit,*

³² Conservator - the one who keeps us, our protector (provider) (God); (Blaise Albert, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français des Auteurs Chrétiens ...*, p. 205.

³³ See Mohrmann Christine, *Comment saint Augustin s'est familiarise ...*, p. 387 et passim.

³⁴ S. Aurelii Augustini, *Sermo*, 299, 6, in *PL*, 38, col. 1311.

³⁵ Σωτηρία, ας, ή - salvation, rescue, deliverance, escape, liberation. (Laurențiu Gabriel Ionescu, *Dicționar grec-român/ Greek – Latin Dictionary*, Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu Lăpuș, 2011, p. 171).

quando voluit.³⁶ Augustine makes here a clear distinction between *locutio* "idiom" (of the Christians) and *lingua* (common) "language".

Augustine also tries to replace Greek expressions with Latin ones, or at least clarify them:

Mesias hebraice, Cristus graece est, latine unctus.³⁷

Angeli, latine nuntii sunt.³⁸

*Sicut graece angeli, latine nuntii vocantur, ita graece apostoli, latine missi appellantur*³⁹ etc.

In his early works, he sometimes gives the impression that he is speaking a foreign language when he adopts technical terms from the language of Christians. Sometimes he explains them immediately, either by a periphrasis or by a word of common language. For example, in *De vita beata*, 18, he already uses the verb *exorcise*, but he 'translates' it: *manum imponere vel exorcizare dicuntur, hoc est per divina eum adiurando expellere*.

We cannot be surprised that, following this process of adaptation, Augustine reflected more than most of his contemporaries on the phenomenon of language as a means of communication and expression. In *De quantitate animae*, 11, he already states that *res* are more important than *verba*, and he specifies to his interlocutor that he does well, and he not only approves, but even advises him to always delight in the care of things rather than words: *Bene facis, et non solum approbo, verum etiam moneo ut semper rerum curam magis quam verborum te habere delectet*.⁴⁰ This already announces a problem that Augustine will pose countless times,⁴¹ namely that of the relationship between the word, the linguistic sign and the thing named by this sign. We understand very well how Augustine, faced with the problems of Christian neologisms, came to formulate this idea, expressed so strongly.

Conclusion

The Bishop of Hippo dislikes abstractions. But he cannot avoid them in doctrinal clarification. He speaks in the language of the Hipponaeans, Christian craftsmen and sailors, always seeking to be clear in order to be well understood.

³⁶ S. Aurelii Augustini, *De Trinitate*, 13, 10, 14, in *PL*, 42, col. 1025.

³⁷ S. Aurelii Augustini, *In Joannis Evangelium*, in *PL*, 35, col. 1444. "Messiah in Hebrew, Christ in Greek, the anointed one in Latin".

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 24, 7. "Angels, in Latin, are messengers".

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 54, 3; "For example, they are called angels in Greek, messengers in Latin; apostles in Greek, envoys in Latin".

⁴⁰ Idem, *De Quantitate Animae*, bilingual edition, Latin-Romanian text, translation, introductory notes, notes and comments by Vasile Sav, Ed. Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 408.

⁴¹ Christine Mohrmann, *Comment saint Augustin s'est familiarise ...*, p. 389.

We also emphasize the fact that Saint Augustine made a significant contribution to the progress of education in Late Antiquity, both through the way he completed the tasks of the grammarian and filled the gap in expertise created by the inadequacy that was beginning to characterize professional language teachers, and through his sermons that have influenced and spiritually nourished multitudes of believers in the past and continue to do so today.

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