

DE AGONE CHRISTIANO
**A project of Christian life in contrast with
Manichaeism, II°**

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This study brings to light a facet of *De agone christiano* (St Augustine, 396), which was hardly treated in the previous studies: its anti-Manichean feature. The recent Manichean studies permit to understand better the *combat element* present in their cosmology and ethics; this, on the other hand, helps us to understand how Augustine makes capital of it to contradict the Manichean combat in order to offer an alternative *Christian combat of life* based on the Gospel essence of Charity, applicable to the Christian life even today.

Key words: Christian combat, Manichaeism, Charity, Augustine.

Este estudio descubre un aspecto del *De agone christiano* (San Agustín, 396), que fue poco tratado en los estudios anteriores: su característica anti-Maniquea. Los estudios maniqueos recientes permiten comprender mejor el *tema de combate* presente en su cosmología y su ética. Esto, por otra parte, nos ayuda a comprender cómo Agustín hace uso del mismo frente al combate maniqueo con el fin de ofrecer un *combate cristiano de vida*, alternativo, basado en la esencia evangélica de la Caridad, aplicable a la vida cristiana también hoy en día.

Palabras claves: Combate cristiano, Maniqueísmo, Caridad, Agustín.

CHAPTER THREE

DE AGONE CHRISTIANO: A TOTAL MANICHEAN CRITIQUE

0. INTRODUCTION

In this main part of our study we will divide our work in four sections, namely the Manichean combat or *agon*, Christian *agon*, Augustine's Manichean critique and finally as conclusion, the context and significance of the work. In this last section we will give a particular importance to the personal and pastoral life of Augustine, in an attempt to show the importance of our work among the other Augustinian works of that time, specially the anti-Manichean works.

1. THE MANICHEAN AGON IS NOT THE CHRISTIAN AGON!¹

1.1. Introductory Notes

Our study of the book first urged us to make a survey of the *agon* tradition as we have exposed in the first chapter. However, that is not enough to illuminate the full merit of *De agone christiano*. Besides the explicit mention in 4, 4, a simple reading of the first part of our work (*chapters 1-13*) would call our attention to the contrast that Augustine made in the exposition of the *agon* with respect to the Manichean religious system.² In

¹ In this section we have tried to stick to the information (regarding the Manichean *agon*) taken from previous Augustinian sources for not to be anachronistic with *De agone christiano*, and particularly from Augustinian anti-Manichean *dossier*. However, posterior anti-Manichean works like *Contra Faustum*, *De hearesibus*, etc. are also used when these anterior works had no such reference, taking for granted the fact that, by 396 Augustine came to the peak of his knowledge on Manichaeism cosmology, (Cf. K.W. Kaatz, *What Did Augustine Really Know about Manichaeism Cosmogony?*, in *Manichean Studies*, V Congresso internazionale di Studi sul Manicheismo "Atti", Brepolis, Turnhout, Belgio, 2005, 192; for more information see, *f. note, 277 below*); recourse to modern authors and thereby information, at times, from original Manichean sources are made only to the extent to clarify the *combat element* underlined in the Manichean cosmology.

² "Sic enim erraverunt Manichaei, qui dicunt ante mundi constitutionem fuisse gentem tenebrarum, quae contra Deum rebellavit", *agon. 4, 4 PL 40, 293*. A retrospective reading would show how they were in the mind of Augustine from the very beginning; this will be made clear as we progress our study.

fact, a more attentive reading will bring into light further interesting details. Nonetheless, we must remember, as we have stated in the second chapter that *De agone christiano* is primarily a catechetical work and not a direct or explicit polemical work³ against the Manicheans as were Augustine's other works like *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et De moribus Manichaeorum* (387/884), *De duabus animabus* (392/3), *Acta contra Fortunatum Manicheum* (392), *Contra Adimantum Manichaei discipulum* (394), *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti* (396) unto that time. Consequently, in this section of the present chapter we will try to bring out those *agon* and/or *agonistic* elements that are proper to Manichaeism and then later in the second section, with this former's help, we will go to the study of the true nature of *Christian agon* as Augustine conceived.⁵

1.2. Manichean *agon*

Manicheans believed that both the world (*macrocosm*) and the man in it (*microcosm*), are in a continuous state of conflict or combat against the adverse forces⁶ (*-against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places, as envisaged in Eph. 6, 12*).⁷ The attempt to explain this conflict is the fundamental theme of their cosmology.⁸ Thus, their system of faith is deeply characterized with this fight in every sphere of life.⁹ In general terms we can distinguish two instances of combat. The first or the original combat was the basis of the cosmogonic event.¹⁰ The reason

³ Cf. K.W. Kaatz, 198

⁴ Cf. A.D. Fitzgerald, xlili-il

⁵ We know that Augustine's idea of Christian combat is not confined to this book alone (Cf. L. Alici, 36). But for the sake of delimitation of our work, we will limit our study to this book. So when we say Augustine's opinion, unless otherwise stated would only pertain to this book and will not guarantee his views in other books particularly posterior! Still we have to keep in mind that Augustine had re-read this book in his *Retractationes* and agreed with it.

⁶ "*The universal macrocosm and the human microcosm both derive from a primordial mixture of antithetical substances, and both exist as battle grounds of opposing forces*", J.D. BeDuhn, *The Manichean Body, in discipline and ritual*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2000, 117

⁷ Cf. *agon*. 3, 3 PL 40, 292; Fortunatus, in *c. Fort.* 22, in *The Manichean Debate*, 159

⁸ Augustine briefly described this cosmology in *agon*. 4, 4 PL 40, 292-293

⁹ "*The ritual acts and the ascetic disciplines presuppose one another. In Manichean ritual processes the performers constantly reiterated their sanctity, their right- earned by disci-*

for this battle is explained by their profession of the existence of two co-eternal principles,¹¹ light and darkness completely opposed and independent,¹² who in a particular moment of their existence entered into a conflict.¹³ In this conflict the “Principle of Light” whom they call God was forced (*conditioned*)¹⁴ to enter into combat to save his own kingdom, by sending a part of him against the Princes of Darkness who tried to seize the light. But unfortunately or as a strategy this warrior of him, the “First Man”¹⁵ had to be let devoured by the demons.¹⁶ With this action the attack of the demons was prevented safely.¹⁷ This also checked their fury and at the same time weakened their strength.¹⁸

pline- to play the key role in a cosmic drama”, Cf. J.D. BeDuhn, The Manichean Body, 21-22; Cf. R. Teske, Introduction, in The Manichean Debate, 10

¹⁰ Cf. *c. ep. Man.*, 12, 15, in *The Manichean Debate*, 243; *mor. II* 9, 14, in *The Manichean Debate*, 75

¹¹ “I teach that there are two substances”, Fortunatus, in *c. Fort.* 18, in *The Manichean Debate*, 152

¹² Cf. *c. ep. Man.* 13, 16, in *The Manichean Debate*, 243 (*description of the land of Light*); *c. ep. Man.* 15, 19, in *The Manichean Debate*, 245 (*description of the land of Darkness*); these above descriptions attest their contrariety.

¹³ It happened that some animals of the region of Darkness had a vision of the Light. Attracted by the beauty of this Light and the consequent desire to appropriate it, the inhabitants of Darkness with their Prince organized an attack against the Kingdom of Light to seize that Light which they were deprived of, Cf. *mor. II* 9, 17; 9, 14 in *The Manichean Debate*, 77; 75. This is better explained in *Contra Faustum*, Cf. *c. Faust.* XXI 10 in *St. Augustine: The Writings against the Manicheans and Against the Donatists*, 269; *Ibid.* X 3, 177

¹⁴ “... *in quo bello credunt miseri omnipotentem Deum non sibi aliter potuisse succurrere, nisi partem suam contra eam gentem mitteret*”, *agon.* 4, 4 *PL* 40, 292. In fact, for Augustine this was a point of debate to challenge the Manicheans about their God’s omnipotence. We find it repeated in other places, Cf. *mor. II* 12, 25-26, in *The Manichean Debate*, 80; *duab. an.* 12, 16, in *The Manichean Debate*, 129; *c. Fort.* 1, in *The Manichean Debate*, 145, etc.

¹⁵ This sending of a *part of God* or soul is mentioned by Fortunatus, Cf. *c. Fort.*, in *The Manichean Debate*, 159. Later the name is specified only in *Contra Faustum* as the First Man or the Primordial Man, Cf. *c. Faust.* II 3, 157. This is also attested by the original Manichean texts, Cf. N.A. Pedersen, *Early Manichean Christology Primarily in Western Sources*, in *Manichean Studies*, Lund-Plus Ultra, 1988, 157

¹⁶ Cf. *agon.* 4, 4 *PL* 40, 292; *c. Fort.* 22, in *The Manichean Debate*, 159; *mor. II* 15, 36, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85

¹⁷ Cf. *mor. II* 15, 36, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85

¹⁸ Cf. *mor. II* 9, 16, in *The Manichean Debate*, 76

The period that followed this conflict is called the “*Middle Time*”, while the time before the conflict is named as “*Previous Time*”; and adding to it the “*End Time*”, the time after the conflict,¹⁹ the Manichean sect is called the religion of two principles and three times.²⁰ And in this first fight we are interested more –beyond the details– in its consequence: that is, the elements of light became slave to the matter, resulting in the mixing of two elements.²¹

This state of the particles of light –*Pars Dei*– condemned in the bondage of matter, without consciousness of their origin and immersed in suffering, prompts God to begin a project of liberation of His particles.²² This could be seen as the very history of salvation for the Manicheans, which is carried out in different moments. In other words, it is the counterattack (*counter-combat*) of God against the demons to liberate his lost parts.²³ This is the second instant of combat or *agon* which is being unfolded in the whole of the Middle Time.²⁴

In the first moment, God sent his “Mighty Spirit” to save the “Primordial Man”.²⁵ Thus, the liberation process began with the rescue of the First Man. He was the prototype of all liberated divine parts.²⁶ However, this action was successful only partly because, the First Man in his return to the kingdom of light, had to leave behind his five assistants in bondage and misery.²⁷ Again, in an attempt to liberate these lost divine particles in

¹⁹ It is the final restoration to the original state of equilibrium. Augustine makes a clear mention of it in *c. Adim.* 7, 1, in *The Manichean Debate*, 183

²⁰ This idea is multiply attested with different sources of various geographical and temporal origins, Cf. M. Scopello, *Agostino contro Mani: note sull’opera polemica del Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*, in *La Polemica con i Manichei di Agostino di Ippona*, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma, 2000, 8; F.B. Rubio, *Maniqueísmo, Estudio introductorio*, Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 2008, 74

²¹ “*Dicunt enim eam per ipsam commixtionem perdidisse intellectum et beatitudinem suam, et magnis erroribus et cladibus esse implicatam*”, *agon.* 4, 4 *PL* 40, 293; Cf. *mor.* II 12, 25, in *The Manichean Debate*, 80

²² Cf. *c. Fort.* 1, in *The Manichean Debate*, 145; P.de Luis Vizcaíno, 54

²³ “*The whole cosmos is designed as a machine of liberation, and the Manichean must conform him or herself to the role of an efficient cog in that machine in a way that will not damage the product as it passes through the system*”, J.D. BeDuhn, *The Manichean Body*, 76

²⁴ Cf. F. Decret, *Introduzione*, liii

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. lv

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁷ Cf. *mor.* II 11, 24, in *The Manichean Debate*, 79-80

the mixed stage, the Mighty Spirit at a second instant fabricated the universe serving on this mix of light and matter.²⁸

According to the Manichean cosmology, this universe is a complex system,²⁹ purposefully prepared that “*the divine part is daily being purified from every part of the world and taken back into its own kingdoms.*”³⁰ But this process of liberation has also its side effects, which results in the origin of plants and animals and the consequent danger of further enslaving the light particles into matter.³¹ Thus, roughly speaking, on the one side, God tries to liberate the enslaved elements of light, while the Princes of Darkness work to retain these elements as possible as they can.³² Nonetheless, in this battle after the initial loss, God had made concrete victories against these demons in the recuperation of the lost elements!³³ This is the most important eschatological aspect for the present time. Consequently, the whole system of Manichaeism is summarized in this conflict. The creation of the universe and the unwinding of time in the present are marked by this conflict. And it becomes clear that the universe is created as a part of the strategy against the devil who enslaved the light in its entrails.³⁴

However, from this moment yet another battle or struggle would begin. The demons knew that they might lose the possession of the light particles if they did not put hindrance to the plan of God. For this purpose of retaining the divine particles, they created Adam, the first parent of the mankind with a maximum concentration of the light particles in their possession.³⁵ They envisioned that in the continuous procreation of man, fur-

²⁸ It is, precisely not a creation *ex nihilo*, Cf. *agon*. 4, 4 *PL* 40, 292; *c. Fort.* 1, in *The Manichean Debate*, 145

²⁹ Cf. N.A. Pedersen, 159

³⁰ *mor.* II 15, 36, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85

³¹ “... *but this part (rescued divine element from matter), being breathed forth through the earth and making its way toward heaven, enters into plants because their roots are fixed in the earth, and in that way it makes fertile and vivifies all the plants and the trees. From these the animals take their nourishment, and if they have intercourse, they bind that divine member in the flesh and envelop it in errors and sufferings, after it has been turned aside and held back from its certain journey*”, *mor.* II 15, 36 in *The Manichean Debate*, 75

³² Cf. *epist. fund.*, in *nat. b.* 46, in *The Manichean Debate*, 342-343

³³ Cf. *mor.* II 15, 36, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85

³⁴ “*The whole history of the cosmos unfolds from this primordial mixture, as good and evil continue to struggle- good to liberate that portion of itself mixed with evil, and evil to retain control of it*”, J.D. BeDuhn, *The Manichean Body*, 75

³⁵ Cf. *epist. fund.*, in *nat. b.* 46, in *The Manichean Debate*, 342-343. There are other examples of the creation story of man, Cf. *mor.* II 19, 73, in *The Manichean Debate*, 101-102

ther enslavement of these *Pars Dei* in the mixed state would be guaranteed!³⁶ Hence, with the creation of man, the remaining fight till the *End Time* is translated in the realm of man;³⁷ and thereby now, God is again forced to intervene with a different strategy!

Unlike the previous moments of fight, where the direct intervention of God was present (*First man, Mighty Spirit*, etc.), here the role of God is relegated to a second place.³⁸ Now God or his envoys are in the role of awakeners. This role is, however, very important and contributes the first stage of liberation³⁹ as it helps man to understand his true identity or origin and enable and motivate him to strive for the return to the kingdom of light.⁴⁰ The first of these awakeners was the serpent of *Genesis* (3, 1-7) who helped Adam to awake from his leathery of ignorance. He is called the Jesus Splendour,⁴¹ who is the first of the long line of awakeners and saviours, being Jesus Christ, the illuminator *par excellence* among them.⁴² Mani is the last link of this long chain of awakeners⁴³ because in him

³⁶ Here we must remember the Manichean reinterpretation of the Genesis account of creation, that is, the creator of Adam is the Prince of Darkness! Cf. *haer.* 46, 15, in *Arianism and Other Heresies*, New City Press, New York, 1995, 45; P.de Luis Vizcaíno, 57. Consequently, the God of Old Testament, representing the Prince of Darkness commanded Adam and Eve to 'increase in number' (Cf. *Gen.* 1, 28). Again, the command of his 'prohibition to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' (Cf. *Gen.* 2, 17) will exclude them from illumination!

³⁷ "Neither the rituals nor the disciplines made any sense without the other in Manichaeism. Yet together they were not enough to stand alone. They needed a broader contextualizing web within which discipline plus ritual equalled salvation, as Mani and his successors claimed. Participants in the Manichean life needed an anthropology that made the human body the central arena of a salvational struggle", J.D. BeDuhn, *The Manichean Body*, 22

³⁸ "Simultaneously with the introduction of man in the myth, the macrocosmic work of salvation is stabilized as a permanent machine for the liberation of light so that the fight between Light and Darkness is now concentrated in man", N.A. Pedersen, 160

³⁹ For the Manicheans it is the illumination, Cf. P.de Luis Vizcaíno, 62

⁴⁰ Cf. *haer.* 46, 10-11, 44-45. Here, we must remember that the divine part is not exclusive in man; the plants and the animals also possess it. Some extra-Augustinian Manichean sources speak also of the presence of divine substance even in the mineral world, Cf. F.B. Rubio, 127

⁴¹ Cf. *haer.* 46, 15, 45; P.de Luis Vizcaíno, 57. Thus, he came to open the eyes of man to the knowledge of good and evil against the demon god, who denied Adam *the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil*' (Cf. *Gen.* 2, 17).

⁴² Cf. F. Decret, *Introduzione*, lxxv

⁴³ Cf. N.J. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism, an Ancient Faith Rediscovered*, T & T Clark, New York, 2011, 27

indwelled the Paraclete announced by Jesus.⁴⁴ According to the Manicheans only they have preserved this true revelation, and therefore are the true Christians.⁴⁵

Once understood their existence in this way, the Manicheans propose to carry out this last phase of battle by themselves. At a first instance, through the social organization of the *elects* and *hearers*,⁴⁶ and their observance of the three seals,⁴⁷ they place limit to the perpetuation of the mixing between light and darkness.⁴⁸ Moreover, the *living soul*, once awoken to the original knowledge,⁴⁹ understands the wickedness in which it lives and want to rectify this situation by the good works in order to reconcile with God. Our Saviour, Jesus Christ is the author of it, who teaches us to practise the good and avoid evil.⁵⁰ This function of Christ is completed in Manes, the Holy Spirit send by him.⁵¹ The Manicheans, in their turn, with their ascetical discipline and ritual alimentation, where these former groups of members participate fervently, each one according to his role –that is, *while the elect digests the fruits and cooked vegetables in their stomach laboratory, liberating the divine particles in them, it is the duty of the hearers to assure them the provision of food and other necessities*–⁵² actively contribute to the liberation of the light particles and carry

⁴⁴ Cf. *c. ep. Man.* 6, 7, in *The Manichean Debate*, 237-238; *haer.* 46, 16, 45

⁴⁵ Cf. *c. Fort.* 3, in *The Manichean Debate*, 146; L. Koenen, *Augustine and Manichaeism in the light of the Cologne Mani Codex*, in *Illinois Classical Studies III*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1978, 163

⁴⁶ Cf. *ep.* 236, 1-3, in *Letters IV (211-270, 1*-29*)*, New City Press, New York, 2005, 134-135

⁴⁷ In the realm of moral, Mani advocated his followers to observe the “three Seals”: the seal of the Mouth, the seal of the Hand and the seal of the Bosom. All his commandments were included in them. Under the seal of mouth came the prohibition of saying blasphemies and the alimentation of meat, egg, milk, wine, etc; under the seal of hand, all killings were avoided, be it animal or vegetal, likewise all kinds of agriculture and farming were prohibited; the seal of bosom consisted in abstaining from having off-spring, Cf. *mor.* II 15, 36-18, 66, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85-99

⁴⁸ Cf. Fortunatus, in *c. Fort.* 34, in *The Manichean Debate*, 162

⁴⁹ That is, the Manicheans!

⁵⁰ Cf. Fortunatus, in *c. Fort.* 20, in *The Manichean Debate*, 155. However, he is not the historical Jesus of the *Catholica*! Cf. see the **section 3.2.** below

⁵¹ Cf. *c. ep. Man.* 23, 25, in *The Manichean Debate*, 250

⁵² Cf. *mor.* II 17, 57; 17, 61, in *The Manichean Debate*, 94-96. In this provision of food supply the *hearers* were allowed to break the three seals (Cf. *f. note*, 47 above), for the practical purpose of earning the livelihood (for example agriculture, elaboration of food etc.) assuring the self sustenance and to help the *elect* to keep their asceticism perfectly without

on this combat.⁵³ For them, it is a combat with the devil in real time. The holy men, that is, the Manichean *elects* are called to carry out this fight through their chastity, prayers, and psalms.⁵⁴ This in turn becomes the struggle of every day which the Manichean community carries out with their ethical and ritual life.⁵⁵ Thus according to J. D. BeDuhn “*All of the testimony available to us –from the Manicheans themselves, from their observers, and from their enemies– is in full agreement that the Ruwānagān ritual,*⁵⁶ *the key activity of daily Manichean practice, was believed to function literally, exactly as presented, as a physiological resolution of an existential conflict.*”⁵⁷ Consequently “*this function of the body was an imperative of salvation, expected from the Manichean ascetic elect and performed daily in their ritual feeding...*”⁵⁸ Thus J. D. BeDuhn sums up that, “*Enrolment in the Manichaeian program of salvation is neither a Christian redemption nor a Gnostic liberation, but more on the order of a dietetic regimen.*”⁵⁹

But for Augustine, this fight or battle as envisaged by the Manicheans is absurd, all the more ridiculous is their fanciful cosmology, upon which this fight is based (4, 4). This, on the other hand would prompt him to present the true Christian *agon* demonstrating the emptiness of their fictitious battle!

defile in contact with the world. The sins of the *hearer* in these transgressions were pardoned by the prayers of the *elect* and their salvation also somehow related with their more or less perfection of this activity of food supply. Thus, Manichaeism formed a perfectly interdependent society in view of the liberation of divine particles, Cf. F. B. Rubio, 171-173

⁵³ Cf. J.D. BeDuhn, *The Manichean Body*, 207

⁵⁴ Cf. *mor.* II 15, 36, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85. With their provision of continuous food supply, the *hearers* also partake in an inferior level in this combat!

⁵⁵ This idea of the whole system of Manichean life as a battle or struggle is well conceived by J. D. BeDuhn in his book, particularly in those parts where he explains the disciplinary and alimentary rationale of the Manicheans, Cf. *The Manichean Body*, 69-125; 163-208. See also N.J. Baker-Brian, 116, 118

⁵⁶ This is the name of the alimentary ritual in middle Persian. For more information see *f. note.* 219. However, we have not seen Augustine naming it in such way.

⁵⁷ J.D. BeDuhn, *A Regimen for Salvation, medical models in Manichaeian asceticism*, in *Semeia* 58 (1992) 114

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 113

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 120

2. THE CHRISTIAN *AGON* IS NOT THE MANICHEAN *AGON*!

2.1. Introductory Notes

Adding to the Manichean ideological background of *agon* that was closely present in Hippo, there were other factors that might have influenced Augustine in considering the Christian *agon*. In the historical setting of the beginning of his ministry, Christianity already became the official religion of the Roman Empire.⁶⁰ To be Christian was no longer a threat rather a privilege and the entrance of the mass to the new religion created a lot of mere namesake believers. The many monastic initiatives were somehow a reaction to this situation.⁶¹ The definitive end of the persecutions and martyrdom also invited to look for new forms of radical life than the mere namesake Christian life. Besides, the various Christological and ecclesiological controversies created many different groups under the name of Christianity. Augustine's Africa was one of the best examples of this pluralism. These new groups -heretics and schismatics- and their proselytism also made urgent this rethinking or re-projection of the religion and the life.⁶² This could be considered as the immediate ambient in which Augustine envisaged his Christian *agon*.

2.2. Christian *agon*⁶³

In the face of the above perspectives, Augustine at the very beginning warns the neophytes that being baptised does not guarantee anything.⁶⁴ The life itself is a test and battle while we are in this world, against devil and his angels. This battle will continue till the end of our life, because we are in a pilgrimage in this human existence.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ In 380 AD, Emperor Theodosius adhered to the Nicene Creed of Christianity, making it the official religion of the State.

⁶¹ In fact, this was the target of criticism of opposing groups. Augustine tried to understand this reality and its inevitability, Cf. *mor.* I 34, 75-76, in *The Manichean Debate*, 65- 66

⁶² In the case of Manicheans, this proselytism was centred on criticising the Old Testament and on the boasting for themselves a better Christian life. This threat was intense in Africa, Cf. *mor.* I 1, 1-2, in *The Manichean Debate*, 31

⁶³ When we shall make some reference with the *agon tradition* we will cite only the essential, and will remit for details to the first chapter.

⁶⁴ L. Alici reminds us of it at the beginning of his article on Augustine's *De agone christiano*, Cf. L. Alici, 35

⁶⁵ "... *quamdiu sumus in hoc corpore, et peregrinamur a Domino*", *agon.* 9, 10 *PL* 40, 296; also Cf. A. Bussoni, *Il Combattimento Cristiano (traduzione e commento)*, Benedettina

The presence of the word *agon* in the title of the work (*it is the only place where it appears!*),⁶⁶ contributed to the great amount of attention it received in the history. However, L. Cilleruelo warns us against a possible disappointment for a fervent reader who might look for concrete methods of a Christian asceticism in the booklet!⁶⁷ But Augustine seems to have had a clear picture of this combat in mind which he wanted to draw. For, he marked directly the aim (*corona*), the method (*internal by subjugating our concupiscence*), arms (*humanity of Christ etc.*), and the necessary dispositions of this fight (*adhesion to Christ*) in the very first chapter (*I, I*). Besides, this non-use of the term *agon* in other parts of the work should not surprise us much as Augustine reminds us that “*Agon latine certamen est*”.⁶⁸ This latter is used in our work four times.⁶⁹ Again, there are other similar words, like *pugnare*, *contentio* (*and their derivatives*), used in this respect.⁷⁰

2.2.1. Basic Premises of *Christian agon*

The very choice of the term *agon* as title makes us think that Augustine had in mind a well stipulated or regulated fight, as it was the case of the term *agon* applied to the competitions of Olympic games. Besides this term is non-violent in character.⁷¹ All this contributes to assume a deliberate choice of the title to underline a conventional and well regu-

Editrice, Parma, 1990, 51, *f. note*. 1. This is also attested in Augustine's other works, Cf. s. 151,7, in *Sermons V*, New City Press, New York, 1992, 44-45; *ep.* 267, in *Letters IV*, 222

⁶⁶ Cf. *retr.* 2, 3 *PL* 32, 631

⁶⁷ For such a reader it may appear as a commentary of creed, followed by a list of heresies which were preceded by an introduction regarding the wickedness of devil, Cf. L. Cilleruelo, 476

⁶⁸ s. 64, 4 *PL* 38, 425

⁶⁹ See: “*Corona victoriae non promittitur nisi certantibus*”, *agon.* 1, 1 *PL* 40, 289-290; “... *ne putent stulti adversus aerem nos debere certare*”, *agon.* 5, 5 *PL* 40, 294; “... *quem sibi contentionibus et certaminibus quotidianis excitare non cessant*”, *agon.* 16, 18 *PL* 40, 300; “... *et post ista cum invisibili hoste certamina...*”, *agon.* 33, 35 *PL* 40, 310

⁷⁰ These above mentioned facts and other aspects like the presence of a long list of heresies had misguided many a bit, in such a way that the authors who have studied this work (for example, B. Rolan-Gosselin, *le combat chretien selon saint Augustin*; J.O. Reta, *El combate cristiano, Según San Agustín*, etc.) in their attempt of describing the nature of *Christian agon* have hardly cited our work and often looked for source in other works of Augustine!

⁷¹ According to L. Alici, Augustine did not use here the term *πόλεμος* which properly indicated a violent fight; besides during the period of Olympic games all the *πόλεμος* were precisely suspended, Cf. L. Alici, 40

lated competition, of existentially sensible in nature, excluding the recreational aspect of the combat, as asserted by L. Alici.⁷²

Describing this *Christian agon* Augustine, from the very beginning, is quite straight forward⁷³ to assert its various constituent elements: the fundamental *need* to engage in struggle in order to gain the *corona*,⁷⁴ its *foundation*, the agonist's *alliance with Christ*, the nature of the *enemy (the devil)*, the *means* and the *strategy* of the battle, the *battle field* and finally even the *role* of heretics and their deviation, and the *assurance of Christ* of winning this battle (*Jn.* 16,33). Thus the first paragraph (*I, 1*) concisely and summarily introduces the *agon* theme without any supporting or extra elements.

On the one side, Augustine affirms that this combat is a reward-oriented combat⁷⁵ and on the other, in proposing from and defining its principal and fundamental source as the Scripture, particularly St. Paul (2 *Tim.* 4, 7-8),⁷⁶ he is keeping a just distance from the mere self sufficient and self assertive idea of the *agon* in the Greek public games and that of the Stoics who practised it for the virtue itself (*I Chapter* 1.1.)

Augustine was neither alien to the Christian tradition of *agon*, particularly in Africa as we have seen in the first Chapter: *of Tertullian, followed by Cyprian, for whom the Christian life was a military service; they also applied the agon metaphor to the suffering and struggle of the Christians and martyrs in persecution (I Chapter 4.2.)*. But the important feature of Augustine's presentation is the change in approach. That is, with respect to his intention of catechising the *fratribus in eloquio latino ineruditis*, he reworks it in an affordable form to be applied to all the Christians⁷⁷ and

⁷² Cf. *Ibid.*

⁷³ This is very clear from the text itself as he does not make any background information of the theme.

⁷⁴ We understand it as the eschatological fin of every Christian, and for Augustine it is God himself, Cf. *mor.* I 8, 13, in *The Manichean Debate*, 37. It is also popularly conceived as "... *illa vita, quae nobis promittitur, ubi nullam de corpore molestiam sentiemus*", *agon.* 7, 8 *PL* 40, 295 or "*Sed dextera Patris est beatitudo perpetua, quae sanctis promittitur*", *agon.* 26, 28 *PL* 40, 304

⁷⁵ "*Corona victoriae non promittitur nisi certantibus*", *agon.* 1, 1 *PL* 40, 289-290

⁷⁶ "*In divinis autem Scripturis assidue invenimus promitti nobis coronam, si vicerimus. Sed ne longum sit multa commemorare, apud apostolum Paulum manifestissime legitur: "Opus perfeci, cursum consummavi, fidem servavi; iam superest mihi corona iustitiae"*", *agon.* 1, 1 *PL* 40, 290-291

⁷⁷ By then, however, the idea was mostly applied to the Martyrs and here Augustine somehow popularised it (*in the sense of applicable to all!*), Cf. L. Alici, 36, 40, 41

is handing it over to the newly baptised as a *traditio*, showing that life is essentially a combat for the Christian.⁷⁸ This combat is not something, the Christian does solitary⁷⁹ or helpless rather he is guided by a commander who had been the first to win this battle, who is the creator, immutable and omnipotent God, who therefore is, also the guarantor of the *corona*.⁸⁰

Finally, regarding the presentation of this *agon*, *Retractiones* reminds us that *De agone christiano* contains the *regula fidei* and *praecepta vivendi*. We will try to show in the following pages that this latter is none other than the combat in the individual dimension. In the first part (1, 1-13, 14) we will see how Augustine speaks mostly of this *praecepta vivendi*, when he refers to the different aspects of living this combat, but at the same time he does not forget to give sufficient doctrinal basis (*regula fidei*) for the fight. Of particular relevance in this regard is his mention of incarnation as basic premise for this combat (1, 1; 10, 11; 11, 12 etc.). The *regula fidei* is more explicit in the second part (14, 16-32, 34). In this negative way of exposition (*nec audimus...*) of the symbol we will discover (section 2.2.6. below) yet another combat, the history of combat of the Church, as a group (*ecclesial dimension*) against the heretics; it is also the combat of the pastor, Church's chief representative, the bishop, the very Augustine.⁸¹ Thus irrespective of the prominence of treatment in each section, of one or another *agon* dimension, both of them are somehow intermingled throughout the work.⁸²

2.2.2. The Adversary of the Combat, the Devil

Without any doubt, devil is the enemy against whom the Christian makes his combat. It was Christ himself, who first defeated this enemy (1,

⁷⁸ Cf. L. Manca, 54

⁷⁹ Augustine's usage of the *first person plural* is a good indication in this regard: *invenimus; debemus, ergo...*, *agon*. 1, 1 PL 40, 291; besides his mention of the Donatist and Luciferian schism, strengthens this community aspect of *agon*, Cf. *agon*. 29, 31-30, 32, PL 40, 30-308

⁸⁰ "*Ipse est enim quem Dominus noster prior vicit, ut etiam nos in illo permanentes vincamus. Et Dei quidem Virtus atque Sapientia, et Verbum per quod facta sunt omnia, qui Filius Dei unicus est, super omnem creaturam semper incommutabilis manet...*", *agon*. 1, 1 PL 40, 291

⁸¹ Cf. B. Rolan-Gosselin, 71

⁸² Here we remind the opinion of L. Alici that for Augustine the *regula fidei* and *praecepta vivendi* are two polar stars of his ministry, Cf. L. Alici, 37

1). This assertion is surely backed by the pages of New Testament: For example, the episode of the temptation in the desert (*Mt.* 4, 1-11)⁸³ and the different healing actions of Jesus on the demoniacs are proofs of this (*Lk.* 8, 26-39; *Mk.* 9, 14-27, etc.). Besides, this idea roughly coincides with the combat of the monks at least in the oppositor (*I Chapter* 4.4., *f. note*.188). Hence, from the first moment Augustine is equating the struggle of every Christian with that of the monks at least in an important element of *agon*, namely, the *antagonist*. Thus, Augustine is closer to the idea of his nearest contemporaries, like Basil and John Chrysostom who also qualified the ordinary Christians as *athletes of Christ*, differing from the ascetics only in degree and not of kind. Augustine somehow has made this idea explicit in the following affirmation: “Hence, both men and women and people of every age and worldly rank have already been aroused to the hope of life eternal. Some soar upwards in spirit to things divine, having no concern for temporal goods. Others fall short of the virtues belonging to those who so live, and approve what they do not presume to imitate”.⁸⁴

But this above idea regarding devil as the antagonist of Christian combat, must not cover our eyes from the fact that devil is not always visibly present in this combat! Augustine is aware of this reality when he remembers the usual query of some people: “*Quomodo possumus vincere diabolum quem non videmus?*” (2, 2). In fact, his presence is never absent throughout the Christian life in the avatar of sin. This affirmation is so true and real because Augustine remembers that it was the devil that deceived the *first man* in tempting to sin.⁸⁵ Besides, this presence of sin and therefore, the devil again remains in man in the form of concupiscence, the fruit of sin, which on its turn induce him to other sins.⁸⁶ Hence,

⁸³ This is particularly very important as the essence of these temptations is the attractions of the world; and for Augustine these constitute the root cause of all evil, “... *qui neglegunt aeternum Deum, et diligunt instabilia et mutabilia...*”, *agon*. 1, 1 *PL* 40, 291; see also, Cf. A. Bussoni, 14, *f. note*, 2

⁸⁴ *agon*. 12, 13 *PL* 40, 298

⁸⁵ “*Sed quia naturam nostram deceperat...*”, *agon*. 1, 1 *PL* 40, 291; see also, Cf. *Gen.* 3, 1-5, this idea is reflected in *agon*. 2, 2 *PL* 40, 291-292

⁸⁶ Describing this idea of Concupiscence in Augustine, G. Bonner brings interesting points: “*Concupiscentia, (c. Iul. imp. 6, 14) carnalis, is the wound and vice in fallen human nature that was lacking in Adam and Eve*”, G. Bonner, *cupiditas*, in *Augustinus-Lexikon* Vol. 2, Schwabe & Co. AG, Basel, 1996-2002, 169. In another place he continues: it could be mean a “*longing, both for what we do not possess and for what we have*” (p. 1113); And “*Augustine notes in fallen men a disposition to sin, which he calls concupiscentia peccati (De continentia, 8,) it is a weakness of the flesh which affects the soul,*” (p. 1116); and concludes

for Augustine the combat against devil is understood as fight against sin and concupiscence, his visible allies in man and the world! ⁸⁷ In other words, struggle against sin and concupiscence is equal to fight against the invisible enemy, the devil.

Moreover, this opposing activity of the devil is present all throughout the history of salvation. ⁸⁸ However, the devil has no absolute power over mankind, though he is called as the prince of darkness, the prince of this world (*Jn.* 12, 31), etc. In fact, he is only the head of the fallen angels and those men who adhere to him in the love of the world, as he is the source all such love, the *cupiditas* (1, 1). Neither he is invincible with regard to man. The fact that the only begotten Son of God has assumed the human nature and with it has defeated and subjected him is a guarantee that we can also subject him (1, 1). Therefore, this adversary is not, any way equal with God as some heretics thought; ⁸⁹ rather, he is a creature and like all the others whether good or bad, is subjected to the divine order (1, 1). The devil is neither, the patron of the world, nor he resides in the summit of the heavens; still he is of spiritual nature (3, 3) and thereby is invisible. Hence the combat has to be done in a spiritual manner (2, 2).

Further, as *agon* is fought in both individual and ecclesial level, the devil is neither absent in this latter. Because, for Augustine the three attributes that make one similar to devil or convert one devil-like are *wickedness, pride and ungodliness*. ⁹⁰ Curiously these are also the most common Augustinian attributes to heretics. This coincidence thereby shows that the heretics have their inspiration or sponsor in Satan. ⁹¹

that it is “a wound inflicted upon humanity by the devil: *hoc generi humano inflictum vulnus a diabolo quidquid per illud nascitur cogit esse sub diabolo*” (*nupt. et conc.* 1, 26) of which the guilt is removed by baptism, but not the effects” (p. 1119), G. Bonner, *Concupiscentia*, in *Augustinus-Lexikon* Vol. 1, Schwabe & Co. AG, Basel, 1986-1994.

⁸⁷ “*Ibi ergo vincuntur inimicae nobis invisibiles potestates, ubi vincuntur invisibiles cupiditates: et ideo quia in nobis ipsis vincimus temporalium rerum cupiditates, necesse est ut in nobis ipsis vincamus et illum qui per ipsas cupiditates regnat in homine*” *agon.* 2, 2 PL 40, 291

⁸⁸ Cf. “The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him...”, *Jn.* 13, 2; “Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.” *1 Pet.* 5, 8, etc.

⁸⁹ We would remember here the Manichean idea of two principles and the kingdom of darkness who waged war against God, See **section 1.**, above.

⁹⁰ “... *sic malis moribus per nequitiam et superbiam et impietatem hoc efficitur quisque quod diabolus, id est, similis eius*”, *agon.* 2, 2 PL 40, 292

⁹¹ We cite, for example: “*Errat autem quisquis putat veritatem se posse cognoscere, cum adhuc nequiter vivat. Nequitia est autem mundum istum diligere, et ea quae nascuntur et*

Commenting on pride, J. O. Reta,⁹² affirms that it is the most dangerous one that goes against the love of God and neighbour, the charity. Thus, the enemy become ultimately the oppositor of all Christian charity and the basic Christian life, that is, the life of the Church!

2.2.3. It is not a Greek-Model Combat

In the evolution of the concept of *agon*, we have seen how those prominent elements of self assertion and rivalry gave way to accept a key role of God in this struggle in the course of becoming a Christian metaphor (*I Chapter*). Augustine has no doubt in this role of divine, when he says we win fighting only if we remain with Christ.⁹³ This change of stress is also explained by the *end* that each one of them sought for. While the Greek agonist searched for an earthly glory, the Christian combatant is looking for a *corona*, which is precisely after death,⁹⁴ where God is the only competent authority and only He can offer it! But, that is not the only reason to dismiss an exclusive resort to the self-effort. In fact, for Augustine, Christ's incarnation or the assumption of human nature is the very foundation of any Christian *agon*, by which every baptised is habilitated for this combat!⁹⁵ However, this does not, in no way disregard or underestimate the human effort because only the fighters receive it.⁹⁶ According to Augustine, Paul is a perfect example of it (*2 Tim.* 4, 7-8; *1 Cor.* 9, 26-27) and reminds the combatant of Paul's invitation: "*Be imitators of me as I am of Christ,*" (*1 Cor.* 11, 1). This just equilibrium between nature (*human capacity*) and grace is later clarified by Augustine once he had made further progress in this matter when he wrote his *Retractationes*

transeunt, pro magno habere; et ea concupiscere, et pro his laborare, ut acquirantur; et laetari, cum abundaverint; et timere, ne pereant; et contristari, cum pereunt." *agon.* 13, 14 *PL* 40, 299; "... *et multum errant, quoniam superbi sunt.*" *agon.* 15, 17 *PL* 40, 299; "*Sed absit ut hoc credamus, quod confinxit temeraria caecitas et superba loquacitas.*" *agon.* 19, 21 *PL* 40, 301; "*A nostra ergo fide etiam ista impietas excludatur,*" *agon.* 21, 23 *PL* 40, 302

⁹² Cf. J.O. Reta, 117

⁹³ "... *ut etiam nos in illo permanentes vincamus*", *agon.* 1, 1 *PL* 40, 291. Here it is important to remind the gospel passage of vine and branches, Cf. *Jn.* 15, 1-8

⁹⁴ "... *quid cogitandum est de illa vita, quae nobis promittitur, ubi nullam de corpore molestiam sentiemus?*" *agon.* 7, 8 *PL* 40, 295. The Apostle Paul expects it only at the end of his life, Cf. *2 Tim.* 4, 7-8, as cited in *agon.* 1, 1 *PL* 40, 291

⁹⁵ Cf. *agon.* 1, 1; 10, 11 *PL* 40, 291; 297. This will be further explained in the *section 3.7. Christus medicus humilis* below.

⁹⁶ "*Corona victoriae non promittitur nisi certantibus*", *agon.* 1, 1 *PL* 40, 289-290

reiterating the healing of human nature by the grace.⁹⁷ All these make us agree happily with the comment of B. Rolan-Gosselin that ‘*the spirituality of Augustine is both divine and human*’.⁹⁸

2.2.4. The Arms and Ways of this Combat

Once defined the basic elements of the struggle to be fought, we now attempt to analyse the mode and instruments with which it can be carried out successfully. For Augustine, the first and foremost arm of this combat is our human nature. In fact, it is an indispensable element as the restoration begins there. This strategy is quite proper as it is through our nature we have sinned and contracted our present state of existence. Therefore, the Son of God assumed our nature to heal it.⁹⁹ He also made it capable (*otherwise weakened by the original sin and the resulting concupiscence*)¹⁰⁰ of subjugating the devil (*I, I*). Thus the son of God, through the assumption of the human nature made possible this fight.¹⁰¹ This capacity is shared to those who stick to him (*like branches*)¹⁰² through the adhesion to the “*Word*” and renunciation of the world.¹⁰³ On the other

⁹⁷ “*In another passage I said, ‘We sin by loving bodily things because we are commanded by justice to love spiritual things and are able to do so by nature, and it is then that we are best and happiest in our kind. ‘Here it can be asked why I said that we are able to do so by nature and not by grace. But it was a question concerning nature that was raised in response to the Manicheans. To be sure, grace brings it about that nature, once it has been healed, is, through him who came to seek and to save what was perishing (Lk. 19,10), able to do what it cannot do when it is subject to vice’*”, retr. 1, 15, 8, (*Revisions*), New City Press, New York, 2010, 74

⁹⁸ B. Rolan-Gosselin, 79

⁹⁹ “*Sed quia naturam nostram deceperat, dignatus est unigenitus Dei Filius ipsam naturam nostram suscipere, ut de ipsa diabolus vinceretur, et quem semper ipse sub se habet, etiam sub nobis eum esse faceret*”, agon. 1, 1 PL 40, 291; “*Non enim intellegunt quid sit aeternitas Dei, quae hominem assumpsit; et quid ipsa humana creatura, quae mutationibus suis in pristinam firmitatem revocabatur*”, agon. 11, 12 PL 40, 297

¹⁰⁰ “*Qui nostrae imbecillitatis misertus est; quam imbecillitatem non eius opere, sed nostra voluntate meruimus*”, agon. 10, 11 PL 40, 296; “*Ostendebatur enim nobis ad quam fragilitatem homo sua culpa pervenerit, et ex qua fragilitate divino auxilio liberetur*”, agon. 11, 12 PL 40, 297. It is quite significant, Augustine’s particular use of these terms: *imbecillitatis; infirmitas, fragilitatem!*

¹⁰¹ “*Filius ergo unigenitus Dei, qui est Virtus et Sapientia Dei, et Verbum per quod facta sunt omnia, quia immutari non potest omnino, suscepit humanam creaturam, quam lapsam erigere, atque inveteratam renovare dignatus est*”, agon. 23, 25 PL 40, 303

¹⁰² Cf. Jn. 15, 1-10

¹⁰³ “... qui cohaerent verbo Dei, et non diligunt mundum”, agon. 1, 1 PL 40, 291

hand, this adhering to God automatically expels the devil from the heart of the faithful (1, 1).

This necessarily makes us think about the battlefield. For Augustine, the way to win the devil is the same way he uses to control us.¹⁰⁴ Thus, if the enemy uses our *inordinate desires*¹⁰⁵ to rule over us; then by overcoming these desires within ourselves we can triumph over the oppositor.¹⁰⁶ In other words, the invisible enemy is won by winning the invisible *cupiditas* (2, 2). Augustine considers that this is the true meaning of Paul's affirmation when he said: "*Exuens se carne, principatus et potestates exemplavit, fiducialiter triumphans eos in semetipso*".¹⁰⁷ Thus what is fought against us externally (*world and its attractions*)¹⁰⁸ we triumph by winning the concupiscence within ourselves. Consequently, our heart¹⁰⁹ becomes the battle field where this fierce battle is fought. On the other hand, those who fall into this inordinate love, the *concupiscence* by means of bad customs - born of wickedness, the pride and ungodliness which are characteristic to the devil, will become devil-like and consequently will be subject to the future destiny that awaits him (2, 2). Augustine in this context interprets the real meaning of the exhortation of Paul in *Ephesians* 6, 12:¹¹⁰ that the Christian *agon* is a battle against devil and his angels and not as the Manicheans thought like a battle against the Princes of Darkness by performing their ritual alimentation and the observation of three seals.¹¹¹ Hence, the best way to carry on this combat is to lead a good life. In other

¹⁰⁴ "*Per hanc cupiditatem regnat in homine diabolus, et cor eius tenet*", *agon*. 1, 1 *PL* 40, 291

¹⁰⁵ Augustine knows that God has created us for "immortality" (Cf. *Wis.* 2, 23, as cited in *agon*. 10, 11 *PL* 40, 296), therefore, when we cling to or desire what is passing, we are, in fact, going against our own destiny and the will of God, hence it is an *inordinate desire*!

¹⁰⁶ "... *et ideo quia in nobis ipsis vincimus temporalium rerum cupiditates, necesse est ut in nobis ipsis vincamus et illum qui per ipsas cupiditates regnat in homine*", *agon*. 2, 2 *PL* 40, 291

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Col.* 2, 15, as cited in *agon*. 2, 2 *PL* 40, 291

¹⁰⁸ "*For it is by sinful pleasures, by vanity and baneful curiosity that the world can obtain the mastery over us... and compel them (us) to serve the devil and his angels*", *agon*. 6, 6 *PL* 40, 294; See also, Cf. A. Bussoni, 19, f. note. 3.

¹⁰⁹ In the antiquity, heart was considered as the seat of all emotions!

¹¹⁰ "*Non est nobis collectatio adversus carnem et sanguinem, sed adversus principes et potestates huius mundi, rectores harum tenebrarum, adversus spiritualia nequitiae in coelestibus*", *agon*. 3, 3 *PL* 40, 292

¹¹¹ Cf. *agon*. 4, 4 *PL* 40, 292; see also, A.M. La Bonnardière, *Le combat chrétienne. Exégèse augustiniennne d'Eph. 6, 12*, in *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 11 (1965) 237

words, the best strife against these spiritual forces is to obey the spiritual commandments of God,¹¹² which elevates us to the spiritual realm as these adverse forces always try to distant us from there.¹¹³ Augustine remembers the example of Apostle in this respect. Paul by the discipline and subjugation of the body, made himself this struggle;¹¹⁴ and he invited us to imitate him as he imitated Christ.¹¹⁵ Because this is the only way to keep us away from desires of worldly things that enslave us to devil (5, 5). This bodily discipline and subjugation/subjection is easy to understand and is easy to do if we first subject ourselves to God in faith with good will and unfeigned charity in such a way that, that itself may convert a true *agon* against the devil (7, 7). Besides, this mode of battling is the wisest when one knows the divine ordinance of the things: that is, God governs everything and under him the good and wicked are justly ordered!¹¹⁶ Then the choice is between to serve or obey God like a son or slave, in other words to serve freely or in chains (7, 7)! It follows then that the most intelligent choice is to go with His will than to rebel against as the devil did, even though it was impossible not to serve God or escape his Law.¹¹⁷ Hence for a Christian fighter, the true *agon* is this striving against the spiritual forces who distant him from the divine Law and the yearning with all heart for that life of eternal bliss by serving God voluntarily!¹¹⁸

2.2.5. Possible Difficulties of This Fight

Augustine contemplates that during the course of this fight, certainly the faithful may encounter with some difficulties.¹¹⁹ So, in order to cheer

¹¹² “... in spiritualibus praeceptis Dei ambulantes, dimicemus adversus spiritualia nequitiarum, quae nos inde conantur abstrahere”, *agon*. 5, 5 PL 40, 294

¹¹³ This is again affirmed by Augustine in one of his sermons: “Arma te, sume instrumenta bellorum: praecepta Dei arma tua sunt”, Cf. s. 128, 10, 12, PL 38, 719

¹¹⁴ “Non sic pugno, quasi aerem caedens; sed castigo corpus meum, et in servitutem redigo”, 1 Cor. 9, 26-27 as cited in *agon*. 6, 6 PL 40, 294

¹¹⁵ “Imitatores mei estote, sicut et ego Christi”, 1 Cor. 11, 1 as cited in *agon*. 6, 6 PL 40, 294

¹¹⁶ Here, in the following chapters, Augustine tries to explain the suffering of the just holding upon this same divine providence, Cf. *agon*. 7, 8-8, 9 PL 40, 295-296

¹¹⁷ “Boni sunt autem, qui tota voluntate Deo serviunt; mali autem necessitate serviunt: nemo enim leges Omnipotentis evadit”, *agon*. 7, 7 PL 40, 294

¹¹⁸ “Illa vita, quae nobis promittitur, ubi nullam de corpore molestiam sentiemus?”, *agon*. 7, 8 PL 40, 295

¹¹⁹ “Nec nos moveat quod in hac vita secundum carnem quam portant, iusti multa gravia et aspera tolerant”, *agon*. 7, 8 PL 40, 295

up the *agonist* he brings the example of Paul for whom suffering was a motive of joy (*Rom.* 5, 3-5) because the suffering would strengthen the hope for the promised future life (7, 8). Besides, unlike the wicked who loves the material things and suffers when they are deprived of,¹²⁰ the just, not loving them, are not only un-sorrowful, but are happy knowing that what they love really (*the corona*) nobody can snatch them off (7, 8). Nonetheless, in the ordinary day-to-day life of the faithful it is not an easy task to persevere in this struggle, as one may face different difficulties in the motivation to carry out this fight (9, 10). It may happen that one may get discouraged, because while we are in this body away from the Lord, the *corona* of eternal life is still unattainable, and to go ahead with the battle could be seen as a task without any guarantee. Then the Lord had willed to give us the Holy Spirit as a pledge, in whom we could experience His sweetness, so that we may have a foretaste of the heavenly bliss which will help us to forget all that is earthly and keep our spirit up. This experience will further enable us to keep alive our thirst for the fountain of life (9, 10).¹²¹

Yet another hindrance to the Christian *agon* is the impossibility of the soul even to taste this sweetness of the Lord, owing to the infirmity caused by the love of this world (10, 11). Consequently one may fall in despair feeling that the kingdom of heaven is closed to him. The only solution (*way-out*) for this dilemma is to believe in the testimony of the Scriptures that assures (*witness*) us about the incidence (*Jn.* 1, 14) and effects (*Phil.* 2, 6-9) of the incarnation in the life of Christian. Augustine teaches that by the incarnation -*through the assumption of human nature by God's eternity*- man was restored to his original soundness.¹²² Moreover, by the example of the incarnated Son of God, we know how the infirmities we have contracted by sinning can be healed by right living.¹²³ Thus the incarnation gave the human race the possibility to rediscover the dignity of its nature and to keep the hopes up. It made possible that mankind can reopen its *combat* by imitating Him, whom in his time the fishermen and publicans

¹²⁰ For Augustine the wicked are those who make peace with the enemy, they either do not know, or do not want to know the enemy and hence not even resist them. He calls them unholy or wicked, Cf. J.O. Reta, 115-116

¹²¹ Here, perhaps Augustine has in mind the ecstasies of Paul, Cf. 2 *Cor.* 12, 1-10

¹²² "*Non enim intellegunt quid sit aeternitas Dei, quae hominem assumpsit; et quid ipsa humana creatura, quae mutationibus suis in pristinam firmitatem revocabatur*", *agon.* 11, 12 *PL* 40, 297

¹²³ "... *ut disceremus, docente ipso Domino, infirmitates quas peccando collegimus, recte faciendo posse sanari*", *Ibid.*

imitated!¹²⁴ Thus, nobody has any reason to think that the heavens are closed if the publicans and prostitutes entered in it by imitating Him.¹²⁵

But if somebody still doubts, we have in front of us the examples of many men and women of all ages and states of life who have been moved by the hope of eternal life. They lift themselves to the divine and leave aside the material; others, though they do not dare to do what these former did, still stand in admiration of them. However, Augustine warns that one may still find in the same Church people who murmur about it like the heretics (12, 13).

And thus Augustine comes to the final exhortation (13, 14): that if we want to subject our body to discipline and conquer the devil, we need first to subject the soul to God! It is faith that first makes the soul subject to God, then the commandments of right living. With the observance of these commandments, the hope is being strengthened and the charity is being nurtured, then what before only believed, begins to be clearly understood. Moreover, as true *agonists* we need to abstain from error in knowledge and from sin in actions because only the uncorrupted knowledge and the pure actions make man happy.¹²⁶ This prompts him to warn his audience again to keep away from wicked life.¹²⁷ Because, nobody can see the unchangeable “Truth” while indulging in and abiding with a wicked life.

Finally, what is fitting for one who seeks the *corona* is to *believe*,¹²⁸ before the soul can be purified because the prophet says (*Is.* 7, 9): “*unless you believe, you shall not understand*”!¹²⁹ It is in this context that Augustine offers to the newly baptised Christians (*agonists*) the symbol of faith in a simple way like light food to children¹³⁰ giving particular atten-

¹²⁴ “*Si multum de nobis sentimus, dignemur imitari eum qui Filius Altissimi vocatur: si parum de nobis sentimus, audeamus imitari piscatores et publicanos, qui eum imitati sunt*”, *agon.* 11, 12 *PL* 40, 298

¹²⁵ “*Quis sibi esse clausum regnum coelorum putet, qui cognoscit publicanos et meretrices imitatos esse Filium Dei*”, *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ “*Sicut in cognitione cavendus est error, sic in actione cavenda est nequitia*”, *agon.* 13, 14 *PL* 40, 299

¹²⁷ “*It is wicked to love this world and all that is momentary; it is wicked to esteem them and to covet them, all the more to strive to acquire them, to rejoice in when they are plentiful, and fear their loss*”, Cf. *agon.* 13, 14 *PL* 40, 299

¹²⁸ That is, regarding the fundamentals of *agon*, the *regula fidei*!

¹²⁹ As cited in *agon.* 13, 14 *PL* 40, 299

¹³⁰ “*Ista fidei simplicitate et sinceritate lactati nutriamur in Christo*”, *agon.* 33, 35 *PL* 40, 30

tion to the errors to be avoided.¹³¹ Thus, this unpolluted faith itself becomes yet another principal arm of this combat. Further, the life of combat is progressed in the acquisition of good customs and Christian righteousness, wherein the love of God and neighbour is made perfect and strong, thereby one can win the interior victory over the hostile devil and his angels. This understanding of the *agon* also makes evident the progressive nature of this battle.¹³² In short, this *agon* would mean the closing of two doors by which the devil enters in our heart: love of the world and the fear to lose it (33, 35).

2.2.6. *Agon* as Combat against the Heretics

Just above, we have seen that true *agon* can only be realized on the basis of an unpolluted faith. Thus, the longing for an unpolluted faith itself becomes another combat. Because, the event of redemption was decisive in the history of humanity as it is through the pascal mystery, the Son of God had definitely prepared us for the invisible things.¹³³ In that way, the equilibrium between good and bad, lost through the sin was radically re-established in Christ.¹³⁴ Consequently, the *impotent* combat of man in the past is definitively liberated in the New Testament era and the faith opens to the hope: “Hence, both men and women and people of every age and worldly rank have already been aroused to the hope of eternal life”.¹³⁵ So it becomes necessary for all men, particularly Christians to know and accept this salvific event without distortions in order to make a true *agon* against the enemies of God.

But the devil in the form of heretics is hindering this action of God as it happened in the missionary activity of St. Paul.¹³⁶ They not only hinder

¹³¹ “Sicut in cognitione cavendus est error...”, *agon*. 13, 14. PL 40, 299. This task is the content of the second part (14, 16-32, 34)

¹³² “Debemus itaque tanto avidius appetere apertissimam et evidentissimam cognitionem veritatis, quanto nos videmus in caritate proficere, et eius simplicitate cor habere mundatum, quia ipso interiore oculo videtur veritas”, *agon*. 33, 35 PL 40, 310

¹³³ “Nunc autem quia visibiliter nos commonere dignatus est, ut ad invisibilia prae-
pararet, displicet avaris...”, *agon*. 11, 12 PL 40, 297

¹³⁴ “Filius ergo unigenitus Dei, qui est Virtus et Sapientia Dei, et Verbum per quod facta sunt omnia, quia immutari non potest omnino, suscepit humanam creaturam, quam lapsam erigere, atque inveteratam renovare dignatus est”, *agon*. 23, 25 PL 40, 303

¹³⁵ *agon*. 12, 13 PL 40, 299

¹³⁶ Cf. **I Chapter 3.1.**

the propagation of the true faith but also try to distort or disfigure this *event*, making the combat impossible and consequently rendering the divine salvific action useless. Therefore, it becomes automatically the duty of all the Christians, not only to make their personal combat but also to resist or struggle against those who attempt to distort this salvific event, in order to make the combat possible for other fellow Christians.¹³⁷ In this context, Augustine's anti-heretics activity in turn becomes another combat. For this reason, we see that it is the Christological errors –related with incarnation (*six, 17, 19-22, 24*) and the redemption (*five, 23, 25-27, 29*)– which mainly Augustine rejects. This way, the anti-heretic activity becomes another front of combat, especially in the ecclesial level, protecting the true faith.¹³⁸ In the individual combat, if Christ was the norm and model of combat, here in this second, the symbol of faith (*regula fidei*) is the criteria to judge the heretical or schismatic deflection.¹³⁹

The heretics, enslaved to the devil, cannot understand or know these divine truths because they indulge in their concupiscence (*inordinate love*).¹⁴⁰ This, paired with the pride makes them stubborn in their error and transforms them antagonists of the Christian *agon* which is nurtured on the *ordinate love* or *charity*.¹⁴¹ The four groups of antagonists to the true faith mentioned in *12, 13*, are basically imbibed from this inordinate love.¹⁴²

The Church on the other hand, though, endures the attack of the heretics against the faith, bearing them each day, becomes stronger and mature in her handling these assaults (*12, 13*). This evokes us the image of wrestler who progresses himself through continuous combats. It is also

¹³⁷ Cf. L. Alici, 45

¹³⁸ “*Sed Ecclesia catholica per totum orbem longe lateque diffusa, impetus eorum prioribus temporibus frangens, magis magisque roborata est; non resistendo, sed perferendo...*”, *agon. 12, 13 PL 40, 298-299*

¹³⁹ “*Fides in Ecclesia brevissime traditur, in qua commendantur aeterna*”, *agon. 13, 15 PL 40, 299*

¹⁴⁰ “... *sed ab eis qui non in contentione et aemulatione et vanae gloriae cupiditate amant loqui quod nesciunt*”, *agon. 10, 11 PL 40, 297*. See also “*Fides in Ecclesia brevissime traditur, in qua commendantur aeterna, quae intellegi a carnalibus nondum possunt*”, *agon. 13, 15 PL 40, 299*

¹⁴¹ Cf. J.O. Reta, 117

¹⁴² “*Who, while appearing to be Catholics, seek their own interests in the Church; heretics who look for glory in the very name of Christ; Jews eager to justify their impious crime; pagans fearful of losing their empty joy in ever curious satisfactions*”, *agon. 12, 13 PL 40, 298*

affine to the image of martyr who fights shoulder to shoulder with the enemy (*I Chapter 2.2.1.*). Hence, this is another *agon*, of the Church as a community.¹⁴³

2.3. Conclusion

In short, Christian *agon* is a fight in three fronts: in faith, hope and charity but charity is the most important.¹⁴⁴ Against the heretics, it is a fight of faith; against the difficulties of life, suffering etc., it becomes the fight of hope; and against this world and its attractions that tie us to the mundane, it is the fight of *charity*. This last one is important because it is the example of Jesus our Lord.¹⁴⁵ Thus the ethical behaviour of the Christian definitely flows from incarnation, the very foundation of Christian doctrine.¹⁴⁶

This is the model of fight offered to the newly baptised! Hence, *De agone christiano* can be considered as an invitation to the neophyte to live the faith comparable to a hard fought battle, where the lasting reward is promised and given by somebody who had already experimented the fight, but not involved directly in the fight rather wished to be at our side all the way down.¹⁴⁷ As, it is a lifelong combat, becoming Christian or baptising is not a cheap way of gaining salvation; rather it is only a beginning, of a path which everyone must walk to reach the *corona*. Hence, it converts to an important admonition to the newly baptised in the social context where many became Christians after 313AD!

Besides, these newly baptised Christians have in their ambient the model of the so called Manichean *agon* against the demons through their food ritual and the prerequisite asceticism¹⁴⁸ –*mainly responsibility of the elect*– leaving their *hearers* to a rather tempting¹⁴⁹ comfortable life of sim-

¹⁴³ The utility of the heresies for the perfection of the Church is better developed in *De vera religione*. Cf. *vera rel.* 6, 10, in *On Christian Belief*, New City Press, New York, 2005, 36-37

¹⁴⁴ J.O. Reta, 104

¹⁴⁵ "... *nolite amare temporalia; quia si bene amarentur, amaret ea homo quem suscipit Filius Dei...*", *agon.* 11, 12, *PL* 40, 298. And ultimately this charity springs from God, the Father, Cf. *Jn.* 3, 16

¹⁴⁶ This is also remembered by L. Manca, 63

¹⁴⁷ "*Ideoque ipse Dominus iam triumphantem naturam hominis portans: Scitote, inquit, quia ego vici mundum*, *Jn.* 16, 33", *agon.*, 1, 1 *PL* 40, 291

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *mor.* II 15, 36, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85

¹⁴⁹ For other Christians: Catholics, Donatists, etc.

ply supplying fruits and vegetables to the *elect*. They were also free from the strict observance of *three seals* as a concession to their weakness!¹⁵⁰ In fact, their important fight against the demons was delegated to the *elect* alone¹⁵¹ and the destiny of the *hearer* was left to pure fate.¹⁵² Augustine, on the contrary reminds his flock that every Christian, without exception has to combat this battle according to his/her possibilities (12, 13) and only those who combat obtain the *corona*, whose essence is the detachment from the worldly things. In this sense, it is not simply anti-Manichean. And, at least in this aspect, the *elect* had something apparently common with the true *agon* in the observance of three seals.¹⁵³ But it became completely useless and absurd as they are deprived of the real fundament of Christian *agon*, the incarnation. Meanwhile the true religion (the *Catholica*), translated this combat in the simple precept of loving God and one's neighbour detaching oneself from the mundane!¹⁵⁴ Thus this proposal of Christian *agon* in itself becomes an alternative to and a fundamental critique of the Manichean *agon*, converting itself as an antidote to the Manichean proselytism. But this critique is not still complete! There are other concrete and secondary anti-Manichean polemics in this work which we will try to bring into light in the next section.

3. OTHER ANTI-MANICHEAN CRITIQUE OF *DE AGONE CHRISTIANO*

Without any doubt, the second part of *De agone christiano* shows an important anti-heretic face. As we have seen, the first part also demon-

¹⁵⁰ *Hearers* were allowed to eat meat, drink wine, etc. They could also marry or as Augustine would say, they preferred prostitution! Cf. *mor.* II 15, 36-18, 66, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85-99

¹⁵¹ Precisely because of this they are called *elect*!

¹⁵² It seemed that their future was quite unpredictable. It varied from a better reincarnation as *elect* to the worst part of being eaten by a animal in their unfortunate reincarnation as a plant or a fruit!, Cf. *haer.* 46, 12, 44-45; *mor.* II 17, 55, in *The Manichean Debate*, 94; *Ibid.* 17, 57, 96

¹⁵³ In fact, they boasted of it, which Augustine though recognised it, refuted in his two books of *De moribus*, Cf. *retr.* 1, 7, 1 *PL* 32, 591-592

¹⁵⁴ This essential difference of *agon* is demonstrated by Augustine in the Manichean denial of giving food to a non-Manichean beggar because of their fear of enslaving divine elements, while for the Christian *agon*, inspired in true charity, it is the primary duty (*Mt.* 25, 35!), Cf. *mor.* II 15, 36, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85-86; *Ibid.* II 16, 53, 92-93

strated an explicit Manichean polemic in the ambit of combat (*agon*). However, that is not the only anti-Manichean disputation in this work. A thorough study of the work shows up more of Augustine's anti-Manichean refute, majority of which Augustine concisely summarises in *chapter 10, 11*.¹⁵⁵ This section of our study is an attempt to give evidence and explain this polemic. In the exposition of the following themes, we will reiterate their anti-Manichean character showing that these same ideas are also found refuted in Augustine's direct anti-Manichean works like *De moribus, Contra Faustum, Contra Fortunatum, Contra Secundinum*, etc.

3.1. Scriptures as the Testimony of God

For Augustine one who lives in the wickedness cannot know the truth and that is the common impediment of all the heretics. Therefore, following the instruction of *Is. 7, 9*, he invites all to believe first the Scriptures so that they may understand.¹⁵⁶ This invitation is concretised in the same chapter (*10, 11*) where he would present all the important Manichean errors: *credamus divinae auctoritati, quam voluit esse in Scripturis*". This is better understood in the background of Manichean approach to the Scriptures: They accepted in general the scriptures, but it was according to their own advantage¹⁵⁷ and often they attacked it.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, most of the Old Testament was rejected or reinterpreted.¹⁵⁹ The New Testament had more acceptance, but was rather reduced to the Gospels and Pauline epistles. Here also the manipulation to support their ideas was evident, thus the *Acts of the Apostles* was eliminated from their accepted list of Scriptures as it contradicted their claim of Mani's possession of the Paraclete.¹⁶⁰ In fact, they defended their authority to decide the authentic canon of Scripture from this false presumption of Mani.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ L. Manca confirms the anti-Manichean character of this chapter, Cf. L. Manca, 93, *f. note 11*.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *agon. 13, 14 PL 40, 299*

¹⁵⁷ "If it bequeaths anything to me, I believe it; if not, I reject it", c. *Faust. IV 1, 161*. This polemic argument is seen also in c. *Faust. II 1-6, 156-159; haer. 46, 15, 45, etc.*

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *duab. an. 15, 24, in The Manichean Debate, 134*

¹⁵⁹ Cf. For more information, see the *f. notes 36; 41 above*. In fact, the Manicheans considered the serpent of Genesis (*Gen., 3, 4-5*) as an appearance of Jesus Splendour who brought the revelation to Adam against the god of Old Testament, whom they identified with the Prince of Darkness, Cf. *haer. 46, 15, 45; F. Decret, Introduzione, lxiv, f. note 7.*

¹⁶⁰ Cf. c. *ep. Man. 6, 7, in The Manichean Debate, 237-238*

¹⁶¹ Cf. L. Koenen, 167

In the *chapter 22, 24*, Augustine brings to our attention a clear example of their indiscriminate use of the Scripture to reject the virginal birth of Christ, which we will see next.¹⁶² This opportunistic use of the Scriptures is repeatedly refuted by Augustine that, it appears in all his major anti-Manichean works.¹⁶³

3.2. The Carnal Birth of Christ, according to the Lineage of David¹⁶⁴

Besides in the above said chapter of *10, 11* (“*Hanc ergo imbecillitatem nostram suscipere dignatus est Filius Dei, et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*”), we can also find this polemic in other parts of our work. We cite for example, *1, 1; 11, 12; 18, 20; and 22, 24*; of particular interest is this last one as it is closely related with their manipulating interpretation of the Scriptures. The Manicheans claimed that the body of Christ was an appearance like that of the Holy Spirit in the form of dove.¹⁶⁵ But Augustine chastises them recurring to the same Scriptures where both the appearance *in the form of dove* of the Holy Spirit and the carnal birth of Christ¹⁶⁶ are attested. For Augustine it is illogical that they accept one testimony while reject the other.¹⁶⁷ Besides, this same practice of opportunistic interpretation we see in *Contra Faustum* where Faustus tried to show that Paul had denied the incarnation, in his later years.¹⁶⁸

This negation of the carnal conception of Jesus was one of the important points, on which Augustine had fierce fight with the Manicheans.¹⁶⁹ For them, everything material was evil as they had origin in the kingdom

¹⁶² “... *et non oportet in parte credere Evangelio, et in parte non credere*”, *agon. 22, 24 PL 40, 302*

¹⁶³ Cf. *hear. 46, 15, 45; Cf. c. Adim. 17, 5, in The Manichean Debate, 210; c. Fel. I, 17, in The Manichean Debate, 292-293; c. Faust. III, 159-161, etc.*

¹⁶⁴ We don't claim here that the insistence of Augustine on incarnation is exclusively anti-Manichean. In fact, Augustine uses the argument of incarnation against the Platonists (*civ. X 29*) and in general against the docetists (*agon. 22, 24*). But the date of composition and the context of our booklet call us to consider it in this perspective, therefore we have wished to highlight this aspect in an anti-Manichean optic.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Mt. 3, 16*, as cited in *agon. 22, 24 PL 40, 302*

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *Mt. 1, 20* as cited in *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ “... *et non oportet in parte credere Evangelio, et in parte non credere. Unde enim credis in columbae specie demonstratum esse Spiritum sanctum, nisi quia in Evangelio legisti? Ergo et ego inde credo Christum natum de virgine esse, quia in Evangelio legisti?*”, *agon. 22, 24 PL 40, 302*

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *c. Faust. XI 1-8, 177-183*

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *haer. 46, 15, 45; c. Faust. III 1, 159*

darkness¹⁷⁰ and therefore, Jesus Christ whom they considered as the awakener and Illuminator *par excellence* could no way have human body. Hence, the body of Christ seen by men was a mere appearance and not a real one.¹⁷¹ Consequently, they denied any idea of incarnation as attested by the Scriptures.¹⁷² For the same reason of the evil nature of flesh, they do not eat meat,¹⁷³ or at least tried not to kill them as the animals had their origin in the Princes of Darkness.¹⁷⁴ The seal of bosom, prohibiting the procreation also attested this aversion of theirs to all that is flesh.¹⁷⁵ And Augustine cannot but only reject it totally, as incarnation and the consequent assumption of human nature was the very foundation of true Christian life that healed the human nature and made every Christian *agon* possible!¹⁷⁶ Consequently, for Augustine one of the primary instrument or arm for this combat is our human nature assumed by the “Divine Word”.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, he ironically notes that though they protest against the virginal birth of Christ they did not have any problem to have the divine particle mixed in every kind of animal bodies!¹⁷⁸ This denial of the carnal body of Christ had also repercussion in their liturgy. Thus, they did not have much celebration of the Pascua of the Lord. On the other hand, the bema festival made their highest celebration. Because only Mani, who had a true body really suffered the passion. Meanwhile Jesus Christ, for not having a true body, it was impossible for him to suffer really.¹⁷⁹

3.3. Creation and Present Human Condition

Augustine, following the Scriptural testimony was completely sure about the exclusiveness of the creation of the world through the only

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *haer.* 46, 12, 44-45

¹⁷¹ Cf. *agon.* 22, 24 *PL* 40, 302; *haer.* 46, 15, 45

¹⁷² Cf. *Jn.* 1, 13-14

¹⁷³ Cf. *haer.* 46, 11, 44

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *haer.* 46, 12, 44-45. The idea is also found in *c. Faust.* XX 15, 259

¹⁷⁵ Cf. *haer.* 46, 6, 42; 46, 13, 45

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *agon.* 1, 1 *PL* 40, 291; *retr.* 1, 15, 8 *PL* 32, 611; *c. Faust.* III 1, 159; III 6, 161

¹⁷⁷ “*Dominus autem Iesus Christus, qui venerat ad homines liberandos, in quibus et mares et feminae pertinent ad salutem, nec mares fastidivit, quia marem suscepit; nec feminas, quia de femina natus est. Huc accedit magnum sacramentum, ut quoniam per feminam nobis mors acciderat, vita nobis per feminam nasceretur: ut de utraque natura, id est feminina et masculina*”, *agon.* 22, 24 *PL* 40, 303

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *c. Faust.* III 6, 161

¹⁷⁹ Cf. *c. ep. Man.* 8, 9, in *The Manichean Debate*, 239

begotten Son of God.¹⁸⁰ Man was included in this creation and was created for the *immortality* which he should have been earned by the exercise of his free choice.¹⁸¹ But Augustine knew that the pseudo-Christians like Manicheans want to take away these hopes from the unlearned Christians.¹⁸² They considered this world as the product of a primordial combat resulting in the mixing of divine and evil elements (4, 4).¹⁸³ So, everything in the world bore the fruit of this mixing and the corresponding conflict between good and evil. Man, experimenting this same conflict and evil as part of this creation, was a by-product of the defensive work of god (*in which he helped himself of his own divine parts*) against the attack of the demons.¹⁸⁴ For this reason the Manicheans believed that our soul is the same substance as of God, (10, 11). But Augustine, faithfully following the Nicene–Constantinopolitan creed (13, 15),¹⁸⁵ and the genesis account of creation, (1, 1; 2, 2)¹⁸⁶ firmly affirmed that the weakness of human nature was not caused by God but was the fruit of our free will.¹⁸⁷

3.4. Omnipotence and Immutability of God

Augustine, had no doubt about the omnipotence (*he repeated it nine times in our work*) and the immutability of God.¹⁸⁸ And this latter was also attested some eight times in our work (1, 1; 10, 11(2); 13, 14; 13, 15; 17, 19; 18, 20 and 23, 25). But the Manichean attack on Catholic faith and their proselytism forced him to enter into the ground and counter-attack their fanciful cosmology and defend the true Christian faith which was the basis of true *Christian agon*.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Jn.* 1, 3, as cited in *agon.* 10, 11 *PL* 40, 296

¹⁸¹ Cf. *agon.* 10, 11 *PL* 40, 297

¹⁸² Cf. *Ibid.*; see also *c. Faust.* I 3, 156

¹⁸³ See also Cf. *haer.* 46, 4, 42; *c. Faust.* II 5, 158

¹⁸⁴ Cf. *agon.* 4, 4, *PL* 40, 292; *haer.* 46, 19, 46

¹⁸⁵ It seems that the exposition and composition of *De fide et symbolo*, had given Augustine sufficient opportunity to study in depth the Nicene–Constantinopolitan creed, Cf. F.G. Clancy, *De fide et symbolo*, in *Augustine through Ages*, 360-361

¹⁸⁶ This is more explicitly affirmed in other works, Cf. *c. Fel.* II 18, in *The Manichean Debate*, 311-312; *c. Sec.* 5, in *The Manichean Debate*, 366-368

¹⁸⁷ “*Qui nostrae imbecillitatis misertus est; quam imbecillitatem non eius opere, sed nostra voluntate meruimus*”, *agon.* 10, 11 *PL* 40, 296; see also Cf. *haer.* 46, 19, 46; see also L. Koenen, 157-159

¹⁸⁸ “*Credamus ergo in Patrem et Filium et Spiritum sanctum: haec aeterna sunt et incommutabilia, id est, unus Deus, unius substantiae Trinitas aeterna*”, *agon.* 13, 15 *PL* 40, 299

One of Manichean blasphemous idea was the existence of two eternal principles: one good and another, the tribe of darkness, which rebelled against the former whom they called God. The pitiful fact was that this God had no other remedy than to enter into fight; all the more pitiful, with his own elements, which resulted in their having been enslaved in misery and ignorance. Thus on the one hand, it made their God *impotent* and on the other, mutable as it was vulnerable to suffering in the attack of the evil world.¹⁸⁹ Besides, this commingling made that there is a divine element in every animate or inanimate being. They called it *Jesus Patibilis*.¹⁹⁰ In the same way, for them the soul of man was a part of God, result of this same conflict.¹⁹¹ Thus 4, 4, became a clear-cut Augustinian refutation of the Manichean cosmology which made God subject to change, corruption and contamination.¹⁹² The *impotence* of their God-concept was further affirmed from the fact that not all divine particles are purified. According to Augustine it was not only blasphemous but something sacrilegious beyond every imagination!¹⁹³ This, we will better deal in the next section.

Augustine on his part, in the paragraphs, 7, 7- 8, 9 reaffirms again the omnipotence of God in the incidence of suffering and injustice, showing that everything is subjected to Him willingly or unwillingly and everything is ordered justly, according the divine law or divine providence. Besides a possible objection of mutability of God in incarnation is cleared out in 10, 11. In fact for Augustine, the incarnation never brought any damage to God; rather it was an act of compassion towards mankind which was done voluntarily (*that is, not forced*)¹⁹⁴ and without any mutation to the divine and reestablished the human nature to its original state with immutable majesty.¹⁹⁵ That is, it was not in the divine nature but in the human nature, the “Verb” suffered in his passion and crucifixion!¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ In the chapter where it is dealt explicitly, Augustine repeats four times that it was a sacrilegious affirmation against the omnipotent God, Cf. *agon.* 4, 4 *PL* 40, 292-293

¹⁹⁰ Cf. *c. Faust.* XX 2, 253, see also *f. note* 3.

¹⁹¹ Cf. *agon.* 10, 11 *PL* 40, 297

¹⁹² This same criticism is seen in *Contra Faustum*, with the same adjective: *blasphemous*, Cf. *c. Faust.* XX 9, 256. This is the key argument in *Contra Fortunatum* that the suffering of the soul prejudice the immutability of God, (see also *c. Fort.* 1; 7; 9 etc.)

¹⁹³ Cf. *agon.* 4, 4 *PL* 40, 293

¹⁹⁴ Augustine served these following expressions to affirm this willfulness “*Qui nostrae imbecillitatis misertus est*”, *agon.* 10, 11 *PL* 40, 296; “... *dignatus est unigenitus Dei Filius ipsam naturam nostram suscipere*”, *agon.* 1, 1 *PL* 40, 291

¹⁹⁵ Cf. *agon.* 10, 11 *PL* 40, 297

¹⁹⁶ “*Itaque Filius Dei hominem assumpsit, et in illo humana perpressus est*”, *agon.* 11, 12 *PL* 40, 297

3.5. The Eschatology: Salvation or the Eternal Damnation of the Divine Elements

Augustine is quite sure about the damnation of those who rebel against God and stubbornly remain in that sin, as the devil.¹⁹⁷ This is understood without any injury to God, basing on two fundamental premises. The first one is that the whole creation is *ex nihilo*, and therefore is subject to change.¹⁹⁸ The second one is that the rational creatures are dotted with free will, therefore they can sin.¹⁹⁹ But that is not the Manichean case. With their cosmology of two principles and the battle between them, Manicheans inevitably bring the divine into mutation resulting in the commingling of the divine particles in the matter. But the worst conclusion of theirs is that some divine parts of this commingling will be eternally damned, and that is even without any sin from their part!²⁰⁰ This is an aspect which Augustine energetically denounced ever since he had a clear knowledge of this eternal damnation of the divine particles in the Manichean cosmology.²⁰¹ This also made him ask himself once painfully, *Sed quis tam simplex est, ut ista non sentiat esse sacrilega? (4, 4).*²⁰²

Meanwhile, except these dammed particles, rest of the divine particles are destined to return to the kingdom of the light, whether during the his-

¹⁹⁷ "... illum ignem qui paratus est diabolo et angelis eius", *agon.* 2, 2 *PL* 40, 292

¹⁹⁸ Cf. c. *Fel.* II 18, in *The Manichean Debate*, 311-313

¹⁹⁹ "... et ei liberum voluntatis arbitrium dedit", *agon.* 10, 11 *PL* 40, 296

²⁰⁰ "*Nunc vero infelices audent adhuc dicere nec totam posse purgari; et ipsam partem quae purgari non potuerit, proficere ad vinculum, ut inde involvatur et illigetur malitiae sepulcrum; et sic ibi semper sit pars ipsa Dei misera, quae nihil peccavit, et affigitur in aeternum carceri tenebrarum*", *agon.* 4, 4 *PL* 40, 293; also seen in Cf. c. *Faust.* XXVIII 5, 326; *haer.* 46, 2, 42

²⁰¹ Even though, we know different allusions to the details of Manichean cosmology in Augustine's previous works (*De moribus, Contra Fortunatum, De duabus animabus, etc.*) the first notice of *End Time* is attested only a bit later (*ca.* 394, Cf. c. *Adim.* 7, 1, in *The Manichean Debate*, 183). And it seems that he reached a full knowledge of the Manichean cosmology with the reading of the *Fundamental Epistle* which contained the beginning, the middle and the end (Cf. c. *Fel.* II 1, in *The Manichean Debate*, 299)

²⁰² And even today many ask the same question how Augustine, an intellectual man could have fallen into their trap with these fantasies! For Kaatz, it might be due to the fact that the original Manichean works like *Fundamental Epistle* were not totally read out, leaving out specific details about the *End Time* which were too secret to reveal to *auditors* or these matters about the *End Time* were too distressing to them. So Augustine could not have known the details (Cf. K.W. Kaatz, 200). In fact, Augustine himself gives us a clue to it as part of Manichean strategy of proselytism: "*Sed illi quando capiunt homines, non ista prius dicunt; quae si dicerent, riderentur, aut fugerentur ab omnibus,*" *agon.* 4, 4 *PL* 40, 293

tory of *Middle Time* or at the *last fire*.²⁰³ Moreover, in no way the Manicheans approve that the body will be saved. Against this negation that the body will not reach the heavens, Augustine affirms the Catholic doctrine of the resurrection of the body (*resurrectione carnis*).²⁰⁴ It is also a natural consequence of Christ's incarnation and resurrection.²⁰⁵

Besides, for Augustine man is created for immortality ("*Deus hominem inexterminabilem fecit*"). It follows then that the eschatological fin (the *corona*) of the just is the right side of the Father. It is the perpetual beatitude promised to the saints,²⁰⁶ where we will not any more feel the bodily sufferings.²⁰⁷ But only to the just, it is promised and in our case those who fight the *agon*! In fact, it is in this respect arise the dispute with the Manicheans regarding the resurrection of the body. Quoting Paul again and clearing the ambiguity which the Manicheans wanted to provoke, Augustine is sure to affirm that not the wicked but only the just (*we who combat*) will resurrect incorruptly, that is, *Et mortui resurgunt incorrupti, et nos immutabimur*, (1 Cor. 15, 52).²⁰⁸ This is later clarified by Augustine in the *Retractationes*.²⁰⁹ This polemic of eternal damnation of divine particles is also found repeated abundantly in *Contra Faustum*.²¹⁰

3.6. Free Will and Ethics

Like the Catholics, Manicheans also admitted good works, and we can guess it from the very affirmation of Augustine.²¹¹ In fact it was one of the aspects of the Manichean religion that Augustine had to fight with much fatigue,²¹² as it had much exit or appeal at least among the ordinary people of the localities where the Manichaeism was present!²¹³ For the same

²⁰³ Cf. *mor.* II 15, 36, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85; *haer.* 46, 2, 42

²⁰⁴ Cf. *agon.* 32, 34 *PL* 40, 309

²⁰⁵ Cf. *agon.* 7, 8; 25, 27 *PL* 40, 295; 304

²⁰⁶ Cf. *Eph.* 2, 6, as cited in *agon.* 26, 28 *PL* 40, 304

²⁰⁷ "... *quid cogitandum est de illa vita, quae nobis promittitur, ubi nullam de corpore molestiam sentiemus?*", *agon.* 7, 8 *PL* 40, 295

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Cf. *retr.* 2, 3, *PL* 32, 631

²¹⁰ Cf. *c. Faust.* XXI 16, 271; XXXII 19, 339; V 4, 164, etc.

²¹¹ "*Nam si nobiscum fatentur naturam nostram non sanari nisi recte faciendo*", *agon.* 10, 11 *PL* 40, 297

²¹² We have to see the entire book of *De Moribus* in this respect. And there is an entire chapter in this regard dedicated to it in *Contra Faustum*, Cf. *c. Faust.* V 1-11, 162-167

²¹³ Cf. *mor.* I 1, 1 in *The Manichean Debate*, 31

reason Augustine took it as an obligation to write on this to expose their real nature behind these apparent good works –*their deficiencies and contradictions*.²¹⁴ In fact, for the Manicheans the present state of man in internal conflict was a result of an aggression suffered by God from the evil principle and the consequent mingling of these contrary natures; and not a result of the exercise of free will as the Catholic Church taught.²¹⁵ Thus somehow they denied the responsibility of man for the present condition. On the other hand Augustine, basing on the Catholic doctrine affirmed that God has created man for immortality and gave him free choice of will; and man by its exercise merited the present state.²¹⁶

Still by the good use of this same free will we can reach the immortality as Christ had overcome our weakness in His assumption of human nature.²¹⁷ And for Augustine the true Christian ethics or Christian *agon* would be the strife to reach this immortality which is earned by living a life of charity. Meanwhile for a Manichean, basing on their cosmology the ethics or *agon* means placing limit to the mixing of divine particles with matter by the observation of *three seals*, and carry out the liberation of divine particles through the ritual alimentation, in their status of *elect*. The *hearers*, on their part, only needed to assist the *elect* in this task.²¹⁸ This service to the *elect* in general is called *Ruwānagān* in middle Persian.²¹⁹ However, this ethics of the Manichean community –*of the elect and the hearers*– was still not enough to guarantee the return of all the divine particles, as some of them will not be saved even without any sin from their part!²²⁰

²¹⁴ Cf. *retr.* 1, 7, 1, *PL* 32, 591-592. We see in two occasions Augustine demonstrates the falsity of their charity in their refusal to give food to a hungry beggar! Cf. *c. Adim.* 17, 4, in *The Manichean Debate*, 209; *mor.* II 15, 36, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85-86

²¹⁵ Augustine refutes this claim of Manicheans in the following affirmation “*Qui nostrae imbecillitatis misertus est; quam imbecillitatem non eius opere, sed nostra voluntate meruimus*”, *agon.* 10, 11 *PL* 40, 296; *haer.* 46, 19, 46

²¹⁶ Cf. *agon.* 10, 11 *PL* 40, 296; see also Cf. L. Koenen, 157-159

²¹⁷ “... *ut disceremus, docente ipso Domino, infirmitates quas peccando collegimus, recte faciendo posse sanari*”, *agon.* 11, 12 *PL* 40, 297

²¹⁸ Cf. *haer.* 46, 12, 44-45; *c. Faust.* II 5, 158

²¹⁹ It includes the provision of necessities of the *elect*, particularly their daily food supply. However, it does not mean in the ordinary sense of alms giving. Rather it was an indispensable duty of the *hearer*, contributing to the liberation of the divine particles and thus it signified as “*the work of soul*”, Cf. F.B. Rubio, 171-172

²²⁰ Cf. *agon.*, 4, 4 *PL* 40, 293

3.7. Christ, the *medicus humilis*

Throughout the exposition of the Christian *agon* we have repeatedly stressed the fundamental event of incarnation as a basic premise of the Christian *agon*. This present title of *medicus humilis* will help us to understand this even better. In his excellent study over ‘the concept of *Christus medicus* in St. Augustine’, Rudolph Arbesmann recognises the possibility that Augustine might have first known this idea during his Manichean period.²²¹ But for its content the influence seemed very improbable.²²² That is true, because the content of this idea was already found exposed in the Christian tradition anterior to Augustine, particularly in his Milanese teacher Ambrose: “by his own pride man has fallen, by Christ’s humility he is lifted up; only by following this example man can find rest in Christ.”²²³ For Arbesmann, then the specific feature of Augustine would be “the inimitable manner in which he uses the *Christus medicus* theme to link his doctrine on humility with his loftiest speculations on the redemption.”²²⁴ However, the publication of the new materials at the end of 20th century contributed fresh lights to the understanding in the usage and application of this concept in Augustine.

In the absence of these texts (*or their publication*) in 1954,²²⁵ Arbesmann showed that Augustine’s use of the *Christus medicus* was a continuation of the Christian tradition (*second and third centuries*) anterior to him that struggled against the cult of *Asclepius*, the pagan ‘*Saviour and Healer*,’ to defend the synoptic depiction of Christ as the true physician of soul and body.²²⁶ However, he is surprised over Augustine’s frequent use of this title, though already it was a stock-argument.²²⁷ In his attempt to

²²¹ In fact, he was limited in his Manichean resources, as in 1954 it was not available the recently discovered texts. Then, what he knew was only some Manichean psalms, Cf. R. Arbesmann, *The Concept of Christus medicus in St. Augustine*, in *Traditio* 10 (1954) 27

²²² In another article the same R. Arbesmann shows that not only the content but even the usage is prior to Mani and Manichaeism; first, as it was based on gospels and second, as it was expounded by the earlier Fathers of the Church, Cf. *Christ the medicus humilis in St. Augustine*, in *Augustinus Magister*, Congrès International Augustinien, Paris 21-24 Septembre, Études Augustiniennes, 1954, 624

²²³ *Ibid.*, 626

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ The texts were discovered but their critical edition and studies only appeared at the end of the last century, and continue even today.

²²⁶ This idea is demonstrated more or less in the same way in his two articles above cited: R. Arbesmann, *Medicus humilis*, 623-626 and *Christus medicus*, 3-11

²²⁷ Cf. *Medicus humilis*, 625

understand this exaggerated use, on the one hand, he thought that Augustine would have been motivated by the catechetical technique of repetition.²²⁸ But as if he was not so convinced, he looked for extra reasons and found a weighty reason for its repeated use: “*He (Augustine) must have considered it (Christus Medicus) especially well adapted to illustrate a doctrinal point which he had very much at heart and wanted to inculcate in his flock, namely the importance of the virtue of humility as the foundation of Christian life.*”²²⁹

Following this same thread, we can find two justifications for Augustine’s abundant use of it from a Manichean background. J. D. BeDuhn, depending on the texts that came from the Manicheans themselves showed their abundant use of Medical terms, in relation with the salvation.²³⁰ It is variably used with divine beings, Mani and even with the *elects*.²³¹ So on the one side, Augustine’s abundant use of this motif in his sermons,²³² could be explained as a contraposition to the Manichean application of the same idea to their Jesus in various appellatives,²³³ and particularly in contraposition to the application to their founder Mani, which went against the gospel idea of Jesus, the true physician of body and soul. Hence, this energetic use of Augustine would be comparable to that of Christian apologists, beginning with Origin who tirelessly fought against the devotion of *Asclepius*, the pagan ‘Saviour and Healer,’ differing only the target, that is, Manichaeism but not the usage!²³⁴

On the other side, this motif of *Christus medicus humilis* is repeatedly underlined directly or indirectly in our work (10, 11; 11,12; 18, 20).

²²⁸ That is, the repetition and its usefulness for remembering in catechetical instruction, Cf. *cat. rud.*, 12, 17 PL 40, 324, as cited in R. Arbesmann, *Christus medicus*, 8

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-9

²³⁰ We cite just one for example: “Therefore, [make an inspection of] yourselves as to [what] your purity [really is. For it is] impossible to purify your bodies entirely- for each day the body is disturbed and comes to rest through the secretions of sediments from it- so that the action comes about without a commandment of the Saviour. The purity, then, which was spoken about, is that which comes through knowledge, separation of light from darkness and of death from life, and of living waters from turbid [...]. This is in truth the genuine purity”, CMC 83. 20-85.3 as cited in Cf. J.D. BeDuhn, *Regimen for Salvation*, 111

²³¹ J.K. Coyle, *Healing and the ‘Physician’ in Manichaeism*, in *Manichaeism and Its Legacy*, NHMS 69, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2009, 111-115

²³² Cf. R. Arbesmann, *Christus medicus*, 7. The sermons were delivered to ordinary people in common liturgical gatherings and this fact suits well with our work whose addressee are the less-learned in Latin.

²³³ *Jesus the Splendour, Living Spirit* etc., Cf. J.K. Coyle, *Physician*, 111

²³⁴ Cf. R. Arbesmann, *Medicus humilis*, 624

This makes us think in the line of the second rationale of Arbesmann: That is, Augustine is using it to stress the value of humility (*incarnation, Phil. 2, 6*) in redemption. This can also be interpreted as a reaction against those who deny the incarnation, voiding it of all its redemptive value. We have sufficiently explained above how the Manicheans were in this path. They, on the other hand, proposed the performance of their ritual meal for the salvation or the liberation of divine particles! In a recent study J. D. BeDuhn, has showed the *literal application* of medical terminology in the Manichean idea of liberation of divine parts in the ritual alimentation.²³⁵ In this sense the *elects* were also called *medicus*.²³⁶ Thus for them, the ritual meal and the prerequisite asceticism were real (*literally*) physical instruments of salvation by which the souls are liberated from their comingling with matter in their combat against the Princes of Darkness.²³⁷

Against this, Augustine's proposal is a Christian *agon* that is interior, avoiding all doubts of exteriority, against the fallen angels and their head, devil. Its basic prerequisite is the incarnation which had reestablished the human nature to its original state!²³⁸ In this sense, the humility of Christ serves as medicine for all sickness of man, particularly pride, the root cause all evil.²³⁹ Thus, incarnation made our nature capable of combat.²⁴⁰ These premises, on the other hand, suggest an anti-Manichean tone.²⁴¹

²³⁵ Cf. J.D. BeDuhn, *Regimen for Salvation*, 109-134

²³⁶ Cf. *Kephalaion*, 82, as cited in J.K. Coyle, *Physician*, 115

²³⁷ "...that salvation is the product of digestion, that digestion is actually the separation of good from evil because both good and evil are material substances mixed together in our food, that pure digestion separates the good substance from the evil substance and sets it free, that digestion produces not just nutriment for the body but refines this still further into a conscious, divine exudation. This is no longer metaphor; it is identification- it is enunciated as a direct description of reality", J.D. BeDuhn, *Regimen for Salvation*, 124

²³⁸ "Non enim intellegunt quid sit aeternitas Dei, quae hominem assumpsit; et quid ipsa humana creatura, quae mutationibus suis in pristinam firmitatem revocabatur, ut disceremus, docente ipso Domino, infirmitates quas peccando collegimus, recte faciendo posse sanari", *agon. 11, 12 PL 40, 297*

²³⁹ "Itaque Filius Dei hominem assumpsit, et in illo humana perpressus est. Haec medicina hominum tanta est, quanta non potest cogitari. Nam quae superbia sanari potest, si humilitate Filii Dei non sanatur? Quae avaritia sanari potest, si paupertate Filii Dei non sanatur? Quae iracundia sanari potest, si patientia Filii Dei non sanatur? Quae impietas sanari potest, quae caritate Filii Dei non sanatur? Postremo quae timiditas sanari potest, si resurrectione corporis Christi Domini non sanatur?", *agon. 11, 12 PL 40, 297*

²⁴⁰ Cf. *retr. 1, 15, 8 PL 32, 611*

²⁴¹ In this respect, L. Manca affirms that: "alla luce di questa cristologia, -Deus humilis-, egli (Agostino) individuerà e sniderà, prima nella dottrina donatista e poi in quella pela-

The absence of particular methods of asceticism (*fasting, bodily penitence, etc.*)²⁴² in our work also can be considered as a precaution to avoid any Manichean idea of human self sufficiency (*as happened in their ritual meal*) which, Augustine, already had discarded as he found them in the Platonists, stoics, or in the Hellenistic philosophy in general.²⁴³ This is affirmed by L. Manca when he says: “*In other words, the agonistic effort of the Christian is definitively enlightened and oriented by the mystery of incarnation and not any more from the philosophical ideals*” (tr. mine).²⁴⁴ Thus, we can conclude that Augustine’s frequent and abundant use of *medicus* motif, and all the more the specific use of *Christus medicus humilis*, strongly suggest yet another anti-Manichean polemic in our work.²⁴⁵

4. CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF *DE AGONE CHRISTIANO*

In this last section of our work, we would like to synthesise the impressions and intuitions that have come out throughout the course of our study. This knowledge should help us to situate better our booklet in the context where it was written and to understand its significance for Augustine himself and the people to whom the holy Pastor of Hippo wrote this catechesis. This, on the other hand would become an evaluation of its transcendence! We will limit them in four headings!

4.1. Augustine’s Affinity with Paul in *De agone christiano*

In different sections of our study we have seen Augustine’s use of Paul’s epistles while weaving his concept of Christian *agon*. This dependence is quite evident from the multiple usages of Pauline verses in *De*

giana, il virus dell’ orgoglio e della presunzione nascosto sotto le spoglie di una fede pura per il primo caso, e di entusiasmo ascetico per il secondo”, L. Manca, 62. This is true, but still we would say that much before Augustine had successfully applied the same Christology in both these aspects together, against the Manicheans in *De agone christiano!*

²⁴² In fact, this could be one of the reasons of the delusion of many who looked in this work specific ideas of *Christian agon*.

²⁴³ His reproach to the Platonists: *they deprived themselves of the ‘medicine which could cure them’* is also valid for the Manicheans, Cf. *civ. X 29, 2 (The City of God)*, New City Press, New York, 2012, 339-341

²⁴⁴ L. Manca, 63

²⁴⁵ This is roughly suggested by J.van Oort, Cf. *Mani, Manichaeism & Augustine, The rediscovery of Manichaeism & its influence on Western Christianity*, Tbilisi, 1997, 48

agone.²⁴⁶ Nonetheless, we think that, it is appropriate to make a comprehensive view of this usage to give an adequate completion of our work.

One of the key to understand this affinity is Augustine's presentation of Paul as a role-model of Christian *agon*. Augustine, in the very first place presents the Apostle as a realised model of this combat: "*Opus perfecti, cursum consummavi, fidem servavi; iam superest mihi corona iustitia*" 2 Tim. 4, 7-8.²⁴⁷ Thus Pauline model is a guaranteed one to the neophyte who is asked to take up this battle! Then Augustine undertakes to clarify *the way of carrying out this combat* in relation with the nature of the devil.²⁴⁸ The key text of interpretation is yet another Pauline verse, Eph. 6, 12.²⁴⁹ This is the proper content of chapters between 2, 2 (this begins: "*Many people, however, ask this question: How can we overcome the devil, since we do not see him?*") and 5, 5 (this latter concludes: "*This matter of how we can war victoriously against unseen enemies must be investigated further, therefore, so that the unwise may not fancy that we are striving against the air*"). Finally as a personification of one who unfolds this combat we have, once again a model! That is none other than Paul: "*I so fight as not beating the air; but I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps after preaching to others, I myself should be found rejected*" (1 Cor. 9, 26, 27).²⁵⁰ So, Paul is a total model in the course of this *agon*! Besides, his life also is used to give example of suffering that purifies the good souls (Rom. 5, 3-5),²⁵¹ to give example of subjection to God by good will and unfeigned charity,²⁵² and ultimately for the very imitation (1 Cor. 11, 1)²⁵³ as a perfect imitator of Christ who winning first over these wicked potencies and powers made a public spectacle of them (Col. 2, 15).²⁵⁴

²⁴⁶ Cf. J.S. Remón, *La catequesis*, 182

²⁴⁷ As cited in *agon*. 1, 1 PL 40, 291

²⁴⁸ Cf. *agon*. 3, 3, PL 40, 292. This nature is completely opposed to that of Manichean idea, that is, he is only a fallen angel, Cf. c. Fel. II 11, in *The Manichean Debate*, 306

²⁴⁹ "*Non est nobis colluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem, sed adversus principes et potestates huius mundi, rectores harum tenebrarum, adversus spiritualia nequitiae in coelestibus*", *agon*. 3, 3 PL 40, 292. For more information we remit to the **section 2.3.2.** above.

²⁵⁰ As cited in *agon*. 6, 6 PL 40, 294

²⁵¹ As cited in *agon*. 7, 8 PL 40, 295

²⁵² "*Imitemur ergo et nos illum, sicut hortatur, et castigemus corpus nostrum, et in servitatem redigamus, si mundum volumus vincere*", *agon*. 6, 6 PL 40, 294

²⁵³ As cited in *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ As cited in *Ibid.*

One may ask naturally why this total and exclusive use of the model of Paul when there were some other resources at his disposal!²⁵⁵ This should necessarily make us think of a conscious or deliberate choice from the part of Augustine in favour of Paul beyond a mere dependence on a predecessor who had contributed amply on the same subject.²⁵⁶ Moreover, unlike the proper Pauline usage of *agon*, applied to the struggle or discipline of the *apostleship*,²⁵⁷ Augustine, here is more affine to the usage in the *pastorals* which began its usage applied to the faithful.²⁵⁸ And when this application comes to Augustine, we see a complete identification in the moral sense, almost hiding the Pauline idea of discipline of *apostleship*. Nonetheless considering the fact that in baptism every Christian becomes an apostle of Christ, we may say it retains some of the original sense.²⁵⁹ Thus in the exposition we have clear parallelism of the elements contained in the idea of *agon*. Beyond the explicit Pauline elements of *agon* like, *corona* (reward), devil, etc., we find the spiritual but real –*in the sense of existentially experimented in oneself* (Eph. 6, 12)– fight as in the case of Paul and the consequent suffering in this combat. Particular importance is the anti-heretic element of this combat which, as in the case of Paul is directed towards different fronts -varied from real heretics, Gnostic philosophies up to the false Christians.²⁶⁰ But the two most important elements that Augustine most dearly applied are: the *calling* and *perseverance* in calling. We know that since Tertullian, in the Christian Africa, baptism was considered to be almost equal to the military swearing.²⁶¹ Hence, when Augustine exposes this *agon* to the newly baptised, he is evoking this swearing and the *calling* in the sense of enrolling to a mission.²⁶² This automatically enjoins the faithfulness to the swearing of baptism which has to be continued and progressed united with Christ, through suffering till the end of life.²⁶³ In short, the idea of *agon* which Paul applied to his mission, that included his whole life –*in all*

²⁵⁵ Cf. *1 Pt.* 5, 8-9 and *Jam.* 4, 4-8

²⁵⁶ See **I Chapter. 3.**

²⁵⁷ See **I Chapter. 3.1.**

²⁵⁸ See **I Chapter. 3.2.**

²⁵⁹ And Augustine is exposing the Christian *agon* to the newly baptised!

²⁶⁰ For this purpose serves the second part (14, 16-32, 34) of *De agone*.

²⁶¹ As envisioned by Tertullian, Cf. **I Chapter 4.1.1.**

²⁶² It is the mission of conquering the *Corona* received in baptism! Cf. “*Corona victoriae non promittitur nisi certantibus*”, *agon.* 1, 1 *PL* 40, 289-290

²⁶³ Cf. *2 Tim.* 4, 7-9 as cited in *agon.* 1, 1 *PL* 40, 291

aspects– is applied by Augustine to all the Christian faithful considering baptism as the *calling* of every Christian, to be fulfilled in *agon* throughout the whole course of our pilgrimage on earth to merit the *coronam victoriae!*²⁶⁴

4.2. *De agone christiano* and Augustine's Pastoral Care

Augustine, in the *Retractationes* gives us the testimony that *De agone christiano* was written for the purpose of instructing simple Christians the *praecepta vivendi* and *regula fidei*.²⁶⁵ But beyond this testimony, it is the text of *De agone* itself that gives us enough signs of the pastoral care of the Bishop towards his flock. We cite for example of the final exhortation in 33, 35, where he invites them to nourish from the milk of simple faith. This same worry is also seen when he reminds the danger of Manichean proselytism among the simple people (4, 4).²⁶⁶ In fact, Augustine does not need any proof for its threatening power as he himself was once their ardent recruiter and was proud of his success among the less-learned Catholics. He was even able to bring a good number of his lifelong friends to the sect.²⁶⁷ However, Augustine was a truth seeker in every atom of his self, and this was the same passion that once brought him within the Manichean fold and yet another time made him go out in spite of the strong bonds of friendship and its utility for his personal ambitions.²⁶⁸ In the same way, the deception he experimented was so strong, that it would explain his many anti-Manichean works of that time.²⁶⁹ He realised from

²⁶⁴ "... *et post ista cum invisibili hoste certamina, quoniam volentibus et amanti-bus iugum Christi lene est, et sarcina eius levis coronam victoriae mereamur*", *agon*. 33, 35 *PL* 40, 310

²⁶⁵ Cf. *retr.* 2, 3 *PL* 32, 631

²⁶⁶ This is a constant worry of Augustine: "... *and I persistently tried to convince those whom I could of them and defended them stubbornly and spiritedly against others. I can therefore not rage against you at all, for I ought to support you now as I needed support at that time, and I ought to deal with you with as much patience as those closest to me dealt with me when I was in error, maddened and blinded by your teaching*", c. *ep. Man.* 3, 3, in *The Manichean Debate*, 235

²⁶⁷ Cf. J.K. Coyle, *St. Augustine's Manichaean Legacy*, in *Manichaeism and Its Legacy*, *NHMS* 69, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2009, 313-314

²⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 314-315

²⁶⁹ "... *I fell among a set of proud madmen, exceedingly carnal and talkative people in whose mouths were diabolical snares and a sticky mess compounded by mixing the syllables of Your name, and the names of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, who is our Para-*

his own experience that his young age (*lack of maturity!*) and lack of preparation were reasons of his fall. Hence, once converted, one of his priorities was to save unprepared people falling prey to their proselytism.²⁷⁰ Moreover, the permanency of some of his childhood friends whom he himself brought with into the *sect* tormented him tremendously.²⁷¹

These prompted him to carry out a strenuous personal study of the bible²⁷² and better understanding of the faith of Catholic Church.²⁷³ In addition, his further understanding of the true nature of Manichean religion and thereby their false pretensions made him impossible not to react.²⁷⁴ In fact, their claim of being true Christians, and the pretension of Mani as the “Apostle of Christ” were factors that drained away even the last drops of Augustine’s tolerance to a sect where he had a lot of good friends!²⁷⁵ His prolific literary productions of that time have to be understood in this way

To this we have to add Augustine’s recent reading of the text of “*Fundamental Epistle*” (ca. 395/396).²⁷⁶ K. W. Kaatz, basing on his study regarding ‘*when Augustine reached the full knowledge of Manichean cosmology*’, comments that Augustine would have reached a clear-cut knowledge of Manichean cosmology from the reading of this important book of Manichean faith.²⁷⁷ Moreover, following Augustine’s literary career as

clate and consoler. These names were never far from their mouths...”, conf. III 6, 10, (The Confessions), New City Press, New York, 1997, 80-81

²⁷⁰ Targeting unprepared people was one of Manichean proselyte strategy! Cf. *duab. an. 2, 3; 8, 10, in The Manichean Debate, 118; 124*

²⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.* 14, 23, 134

²⁷² Cf. *ep. 21, 3, in Letters I, (1-99), New City Press, New York, 2001, 56*

²⁷³ His presentation of *De fide et symbolo*, must have been a perfect preparation in this regard! Cf. F.G. Clancy, 360

²⁷⁴ Cf. *retr. 1, 7, 1 PL 32, 591-592*

²⁷⁵ Cf. J.K. Coyle, *Manichaeae Legacy*, 314-315

²⁷⁶ Cf. *retr. 2, 2 PL 32, 631*

²⁷⁷ K.W. Kaatz, analyzing various information from Augustine’s anti-Manichean dossier and basing on the studies of other scholars like P.van Lindt, (Cf. *The names of Manichaeae Mythological Figures, A comparative study on terminology in the Coptic sources*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1992, 224, f. note 49) comes to the conclusion that Augustine from his first anti-Manichean work *De moribus* (ca.388-390), showed a progress in the knowledge of Manichean cosmology. For example, ca. 392 Augustine says, “*I had not yet heard about the nature and cause of this mixture*”, (*duab. an. 12, 16, in The Manichean Debate, 129*). Later we see him for the first time alluding to the *End Time* information ca. 394, (Cf. *c. Adim. 7, 1, in The Manichean Debate, 183*). Then we know that ca.395/396 he had in his possession the *Fundamental Epistle* which according Felix contained the *beginning*,

drawn by *Retractationes* we find that he left uncompleted his polemic work against the *Fundamental Epistle*!²⁷⁸ Then, the next endeavour he takes up is *De agone christiano*! Did he interrupt this previous task in favour of *De agone*? Did he prefer a pastoral work, against a polemic work?²⁷⁹ These questions reasonably come to our mind. K. W. Kaatz says that our booklet is the first instance where Augustine made a detailed discussion of the *End Time*.²⁸⁰ This makes us think of a possibility that he purposefully opted for writing *De agone*, a pastoral work,²⁸¹ therefore, more useful for his flock, leaving incomplete a polemic work which would have had only a mere literary and polemic character!²⁸² It is all the more clear because he use the information of the *End Time* (*the eternal damnation of some divine particles without any sin from their part*) from *Fundamental Epistle* for his pastoral purpose of discrediting their *agon* totally (4, 4)!

Besides, we know that around this same time of composition (ca. 397),²⁸³ Augustine requests Jerome to make a list of heresies for the use of ordinary people.²⁸⁴ While expecting this, in the second part of *De agone christiano*, we see Augustine himself makes a list for the present dangers. It contains a list of all that errors, which are needed for the immediate purpose, particularly against Manichaeism!²⁸⁵ Thus *De agone christiano* becomes a perfect outcome of the ardent desire of a Bishop who is a vi-

the middle and the end (Cf. c. Fel. II 1, in *The Manichean Debate*, 299). And in the posterior works, we see Augustine prolifically use a particular *End Time* information -*the eternal damnation of souls-* to discredit the Manichean faith. Cf. K.W. Kaatz, 192-198

²⁷⁸ Cf. *retr.* 2, 2 *PL* 32, 631

²⁷⁹ We have enough examples of pastoral worry of Augustine especially when there is a particular external demand, Cf. *retr.* 1, 7, 1; 1, 17 *PL* 32, 591-592; 612-613

²⁸⁰ Cf. K.W. Kaatz, 198

²⁸¹ We know that *De agone* is the first document of exclusively pastoral stamp from the newly ordained bishop, Cf. L. Alici, 37

²⁸² P.de Luis opines that he might have left it uncompleted, perhaps because of the lack of time due to other pastoral tasks or because his polemic interests took other routes! Cf. P.de Luis Vizcaíno, 381. Besides in the **section 2.**, above we have sufficiently showed how *De agone christiano* was an alternative proposal to the Manichean *agon*, which was an imminent danger to the *fratibus in eloquio latino ineruditus*, and how it contradicted the Manichean rationale of life.

²⁸³ R. B. Eno, *Epistulae*, in *Augustine through the Ages*, 299

²⁸⁴ Cf. *ep.* 40, 6, 9, in *Letters I*, 151-152. This demand will later be fulfilled by Augustine himself after 30 years in *De haeresibus*, Cf. L. Manca, 65-67

²⁸⁵ We have noted elsewhere that in this negative list of heresies predominate the Christological errors which Manicheans denied! Cf. See **section 2.2.6.**, above.

gilant pastor! This, on the other hand, will perfectly match with our intuition of the scope of the work!²⁸⁶

4.3. *De agone christiano*: Augustine's Work of Maturity

L. Cilleruelo in his introduction to the Spanish translation of *De agone*, speaks about a possible delusion of a passionate reader who looked for specific techniques or moral program of Christian *agon* in our work.²⁸⁷ Nonetheless, we know that Augustine was not unaware of these means and techniques and altogether the classic Christian asceticism²⁸⁸ This prompts us to investigate into the possibility of Augustine's deliberate exclusion of them.

In the previous *sections 2. and 3. above*, we have sufficiently made clear the anti-Manichean stamp of *De agone*. There, we have seen that he was particularly fighting against the physiological and literal idea of *agon* which the Manicheans practised in their mechanical asceticism and ritual alimentation!²⁸⁹ In fact the Manicheans were boasting about their ascetic life, criticising the catholic Christians and specially those who were living an inappropriate life. In answering, Augustine agrees with them on the existence of bad Christians whom he himself rebuked, but he sees them inevitable as happened in the case of weeds (*Mt. 13, 3-30.36-43*), and shows similar cases even among their perfect ones (*the elect*).²⁹⁰ And opposing their boasting of ascetic life, Augustine points out the examples of true soldiers of Christ in the desert who make a real ascetic life –*of prayer, fasting, chastity, solitude etc.*– and therefore a genuine *agon*, unlike the Manichean fanciful one.²⁹¹ In this context, when he proposes a distinct but real *agon* for the ordinary baptised Christian,²⁹² it was logical not to stress on these external techniques which, on the one hand would not have made

²⁸⁶ That *De agone christiano* is directed to all the Christian denominations. Cf. **II Chapter 4.** (See *towards the end*).

²⁸⁷ Who may find only a commentary of *creed* and a list of heresies that are preceded by an introduction over the wickedness of devil, Cf. L. Cilleruelo, 476

²⁸⁸ Cf. *mor.* I 31, 65-34, 74, in *The Manichean Debate*, 60-65

²⁸⁹ The opposition meant here is better expressed in *De moribus*, Cf. *mor.* I 34, 74, in *The Manichean Debate*, 65

²⁹⁰ Cf. *mor.* I 34, 75-76, in *The Manichean Debate*, 65-66

²⁹¹ Cf. *mor.* I 34, 74, in *The Manichean Debate*, 65

²⁹² Cf. *retr.* 2, 3 *PL* 32, 631. We know it is of degree and not of kind! Cf. *agon.* 12, 13 *PL* 40, 298

much difference with the classic asceticism and on the other hand, would have given a false similarity to the Manichean one. [*We have already indicated that Augustine's idea of *medicus humilis* would also have prompted him this exclusion (see section, 3.7.)*]. Therefore, Augustine, sticks to the essential aspect of Christian *agon*, that is, the love of God and neighbour, (*charity*)²⁹³ making it a totally interiorised combat in the heart of each one, renouncing the world and its attractions (5, 5).²⁹⁴ In fact, it is an expression of the real *Christian freedom* which Paul advocated in *1 Cor.* 8, 1-13.²⁹⁵ Thus *De agone*, becomes Augustine's *first real application* of the maturity which he reached in the *idea of agon* to be materialised in a concrete work!²⁹⁶

This, demonstrates that *he was not simply writing a Christian agon neutrally; rather an anti-Manichean Christian agon*. Thus *De agone* perfectly becomes a wholesome criticism of the sect. That is, it is not this or that element and person of Manichaeism that are criticised, as Augustine did in various other works before and after this composition,²⁹⁷ rather the

²⁹³ "*Ista fidei simplicitate et sinceritate lactati nutriamur in Christo; et cum parvuli sumus, maiorum cibos non appetamus, sed nutrimentis saluberrimis crescimus in Christo, accedentibus bonis moribus et christiana iustitia, in qua est caritas Dei et proximi perfecta et firmata: ut unusquisque nostrum de diabolo inimico et angelis eius triumphet in semetipso in Christo quem induit*", *agon.* 33, 35, *PL* 40, 309-310. "... *deinde praecepta vivendi, quibus custoditis spes nostra firmatur, et nutritur caritas*", *agon.* 13, 14, *PL* 40, 299. And this charity includes all the commandments! Cf. *Mk.* 12, 28

²⁹⁴ "...*ut nos in coelestibus constituti, id est, in spiritalibus praeceptis Dei ambulantes, dimicemus adversus spiritalia nequitiae, quae nos inde conantur abstrahere*", *agon.* 5, 5, *PL* 40, 294. In fact, as we have seen in **I Chapter 4.3.**, this interiorisation is also seen in others like Origin. But the credit of interiorisation of combat applied to the faithful and accessible to all, irrespective of classes (*elect or hearer; monk or lay*) definitely goes to Augustine, Cf. L. Alici, 54; J.O. Reta, 115

²⁹⁵ That is, the freedom of Spirit, which the Apostle advocated in the controversy of eating meat offered to idols. On the other hand, we know that the *elect's* observance or asceticism was conditioned to the extent of facing "*the unpleasant choice of penance, abandonment of the faith, or starvation*" on violation, Cf. J.D. BeDuhn, *Regimen for Salvation*, 120

²⁹⁶ We used the phrase, '*Augustine's first real application*' purposefully, because in *De moribus*, we already saw that he had truly reached this maturity when he attributed the ascetic's abstention from food on account of love and spiritual freedom. The following citation shall demonstrate it: "*Those who can do so,... abstain from meat and from wine for two reasons; either on account of the weakness of their brothers or on account of their own freedom. Above all, love is preserved...*", Cf. *mor.* I 34, 73, in *The Manichean Debate*, 65. See also *Ibid.* I 34, 74

²⁹⁷ See **section 4.4.** below

whole Manichean religion is being refuted (*its cosmology and practice*) and the true Christianity (the *Catholica*) is presented or projected as an alternative with its *regula fidei* and *praecepta viventi*. Hence this criticism become altogether the product of his reaching *another maturity*, a maturity in the knowledge of Manichean cosmology as Kaatz affirmed.²⁹⁸

Adding to these are the Augustinian catechetical principles of *simplicity and brevity* that are proper to a simple audience. Augustine is obliged to apply them here! Besides, as it was a text intended for the catechetical use of other pastors, it was possible that the details could be added according to each one's context. So the lack of techniques and specific program (*which are otherwise possibly known to all*) can, thereby be excused from a catechetical point of view. This again shows the great pastor's prudence and maturity of catechetical style. L. Alici's affirmation that *-this is the first time the idea of agon gets an explicit elaboration, though the theme of combat is permeated the entire Augustinian corpus, (tr. mine)*²⁹⁹ - makes this concise attempt of *De agone christiano* all the more praiseworthy.

4.4. Conclusion: The Anti-Manichean Setting of a Project of Life

Thanks to the *Retractationes* (426/427), we have a precise idea of the historical setting of *De agone*, among the works of St. Augustine,³⁰⁰ and all the more its sequence among the anti-Manichean works of the

²⁹⁸ Cf. K.W. Kaatz, 197-198. One of the Scholars who argued for an Augustine's *thorough knowledge* of Manichaeism during his stage of *hearer* is J.van Oort (Cf. *The Young Augustine's Knowledge of Manichaeism; An Analysis of the Confessions and Some other Relevant Texts*, in *Vigiliae Christianae* (2008) 464). Still in the same article written in 2008, he admitted the possibility of some progress in *this knowledge*: "just like the young rhetor did before he met Faustus, so in his later years too he will actively study all writings that cross his path" (p. 456). In this same line, later in 2010 by the assertion that 'when Augustine wrote the *Confessions* he knew the Manichean writings very well', van Oort indirectly admits a progress in Augustine's knowledge through the direct Manichean readings, at least until the year 398 (Cf. *Manichaean Christians in Augustine's Life and work*, in *Church History and Religious Culture* 90.4 (2010) 508-509). This, on the other hand is a confirmation of the validity of Kaatz' idea (*f. note 277 above*) and is in concordance with our idea of attributing Augustine a maturity of Manichean knowledge when he wrote *De agone christiano*.

²⁹⁹ Cf. L. Alici, 36

³⁰⁰ Quoting P.F Beatrice, J.K. Coyle affirms that Augustine's explicitly anti-Manichean works were produced between the years 387-411, Cf. *Manichaean Legacy*, 324. That means, our work is situated almost at the middle period of this production!

saint.³⁰¹ This is very important as no Augustinian scholars of today would doubt the deep impact of Manichaeism³⁰² on the life and theology of Augustine.³⁰³ However, in the same pages of *Retractationes*, this anti-Manichean aspect of our work is not explicitly mentioned.³⁰⁴ Anyway, the mention of the resurrection of the body (*resurrectione corporis*), still reiterates this anti-Manichean seal! Besides, we have sufficiently explained above that this *praecepta vivendi* and *regula fidei* for the simple Christians, less educated in Latin are clearly in contraposition with the Manicheans! Thus together with those authors³⁰⁵ who have placed even, *Dialogues* and *Confessions*, to the list of anti-Manichean works, we can, after our study, add *De agone christiano* too! With reason, we will not sacrifice its catechetical setting; so still we will call it certainly an *anti-Manichean work* adding the qualification: *for the ordinary people, in a simple way!*

In fact, this anti-Manichean setting, in a detailed analysis is seen permeated even in the aspects we have discussed above, namely Pauline affinity, pastoral care and finally the maturity feature. For example, Augustine's complete association with Paul has yet another anti-Manichean inspiration. The concerned text is *1 Tim. 4, 1-5*³⁰⁶ in the ambit of Paul's anti-heretical activity. Accordingly, for Augustine it is the Manicheans that Paul anticipated in it.³⁰⁷ In this sense Augustine takes for himself this care of the simple Christians, *–in the context of Africa, against the Manichean threat,*³⁰⁸– which Paul entrusted to Timothy (*1 Tim.*

³⁰¹ Cf. *retr.* 2, 3 *PL* 32, 631

³⁰² Whether positive or negative, let us leave it to the scholars!

³⁰³ Cf. J.K. Coyle, *Manichaean Legacy*, 327-328

³⁰⁴ The non-mentioning of Manichaeism would be an indication of their loss of relevance then

³⁰⁵ R. Teske, in his introduction to Augustine's anti-Manichean works (*The Manichean Debate*, 9), includes many works of Augustine as anti-Manichean. We have also the opinion of J.van Oort who affirms that "...to a far-reaching extent, the *Confessions* is an anti-Manichean work...", *Mani, Manichaeism*, 51-52

³⁰⁶ "1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron. 3 They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; 5 for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer".

³⁰⁷ Cf. *c. Sec.* 2, in *The Manichean Debate*, 363-364

³⁰⁸ Cf. *mor.* II 18, 65, in *The Manichean Debate*, 98; *c. Adim.* 14, 2, in *The Manichean Debate*, 198; *c. Fel.* I 7, in *The Manichean Debate*, 284 etc.

4, 6).³⁰⁹ It is, in this exercise of the care of his flock Augustine reaches the maturity of the knowledge of Manichean sect as it forced him to study deeply on the sect. His previous anti-Manichean works were product of this care and personal study. Thus against the Manichean interpretation of the Scripture Augustine wrote, *De Genesi adversus Manichaeos*, *Contra Adimantum Manichaei discipulum* etc.; against their way of life, the two books of: *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*; and for the utility (*that is, for deterring those who were in danger of seduction by the sect and bringing back those who were already fallen*) of his fellow Christians (*his flock and friends*), he undertook, *De vera religion*, *De utilitate credendi*, etc. Finally, once reached a sufficient knowledge of the sect in its cosmology, he writes a complete work (*an all-comprehensive one, result of this maturity*) where both their cosmology and customs are criticised in a concise manner, offering a Catholic alternative in faith and customs! Hence, we can say that *De agone christiano* is a total Manichean critique. Besides, it is a project for Christian life because the booklet is meant to offer and instruct the new Christians a scheme or course of action on how to live the true Christian life. Further, this effort is ultimately done in favour of all his flock and thus it becomes a perfect example of the pastoral care, from a bishop who is a vigilant pastor –conforming himself to the picture of Timothy that the apostle Paul himself asked for– in the particular context of African Christianity, haunted by the plague of Manichean heresy! Therefore we conclude that ‘*De agone christiano* is a project of Christian life in the shadow of Manichean controversy’!

GENERAL CONCLUSION

1. CHRISTIAN COMBAT IN *DE AGONE CHRISTIANO*

Once we have concluded our study of *De agone christiano*, it is not with the same eye that we look at our booklet. Now we know that the whole Christian life is an *agon*. This Christian life which is to be lived day-by-day is summed up in two aspects. On one side, it means detaching from

³⁰⁹ “*6If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed*”.

the world and on the other, walking in charity or observing the precepts of love. One important feature of this way of life is its universality, that is, it is not exclusive to a few; rather it is the call and obligation of every Christian by baptism. Nonetheless, this does not mean any despise to a more radical form of *agon* as practised by the courageous (12, 13). In all its expressions, whether radical or *ordinary*, the most important inspiration is that: they all must be, ultimately the expression of freedom and love (“...*nos ipsos subiiciamus Deo, bona voluntate et sincera caritate*”, 7, 7).³¹⁰ And among these two, love or the charity prevails most (33, 35). Thus, this work becomes yet another expression of the predilection of Augustine for the Christian charity which is typical in him.³¹¹

Besides, the survey of *agon* motif in the first chapter and our occasional references in the third chapter, to these *agon* characteristics, demonstrate the continuity and the intimate relation of the idea to Augustine’s exposition. Thus it becomes clear that Augustine does not discard the traditional ways or ideas of this struggle. Rather clinging to the Pauline core idea, there is a strong impetus in Augustine to interiorise this combat, elevating it to a more lofty understanding proper to the Christian *agon*. Thus ultimately, he liberated it from mere exteriorities in a time and pastoral circumstances where he was conditioned by the fight against the Manicheans.

2. RELEVANCE OF *DE AGONE CHRISTIANO*

Our study of this little book, no more permits us to consider *De agone christiano* as a simple catechetical work that was meant only for its time of composition. Hence it follows that we will sum up some of the importance of this work in a few selected areas.

2.1. Relevance in the Field of Anti-Manichean Study

The information about Manichaeism which *De agone* furnished in this work is generally surpassed by Augustine’s anti-Manichean works, particularly by the posterior ones. However, we know that among the Augustinian works unto that time, it is in our work that the whole of Mani-

³¹⁰ For Augustine this is the same freedom of love which Paul advocated in the question of eating meat offered to idols, Cf. *I Cor.* 8, 1-13.

³¹¹ Cf. J.O. Reta, 117-119

chean cosmology gets a complete and concise description for the first time (4, 4, *perhaps this is a unique one of its kind which he formulated having in mind his readers of simple formation*). These anti-Manichean elements can also be found throughout the entire work; nonetheless, they are particularly concentrated in the first part (1, 1-13, 14). It also becomes an indicator of Augustine's knowledge of Manichean cosmology in the beginning of his episcopal ministry, as we have tried to demonstrate in the previous chapter (*section 4.3.*). Ultimately, we hope that our study demonstrated an explicitly anti-Manichean character of this work, primarily by highlighting the Christian *agon* in the background of Manichean *agon*; secondly by gathering together other implicit anti-Manichean elements dispersed throughout the entire book.³¹²

2.1.1. The Anti-Manichean Purpose of *De agone christiano*

With regard to the anti-Manichean feature, our principal conclusion of the study is that in *De agone christiano*, Augustine offers an antidote to the Manichean proselytism presenting a simple, biblically inspired idea of *agon* which would serve as an alternative to the much boasted Manichean *agon* among the north African Christians of Augustine's time (*III Chapter 2.*). However, within a broader context, it is an existential project to live the Christian life validly amid criticism from inside and outside!

In the past this booklet was only considered in its catechetical dimension (*L. Cilleruelo, A. Trapè, J. O. Reta, J. S. Remón, etc.*). Even though it is a very valid understanding, they have almost forgotten this anti-Manichean element presented in the 4th chapter. In the recent times some authors like L. Manca and L. Alici and others, stressed and highlighted the spiritual or interior nature of the Christian combat in this work. But their treating of Manichean background was limited to only some allusions to the Manichean error. In fact, many modern scholars did not see suffi-

³¹² It is possible that one may think, while naming the present opusculum as *De agone christiano*, Augustine had in mind the Circumcellions (*the armed band of Donatists*) who claimed to be true agonists. In fact Augustine in a posterior work (*En. in ps. 132, 6*), attests his knowledge of their claim. But as we have pointed out in the second chapter, the concern of Augustine was the unity of Christians when he mentioned the Donatists (in 29, 31, and almost at the end of the work, among other heresies!) and not their armed band. In fact, it seems that all kinds of provocations (*including the mentioning of Circumcellions*) are voluntarily avoided while they are addressed. Moreover, he invites them to unity, at least among themselves!

ciently Augustine's clear anti-Manichean target as the book was never in the list of Augustine's clearly defined anti-Manichean dossier. So the reference in chapter 4, 4 was considered only as a mere summary of Manichean cosmology. The absence of any definite program of *agon* (*III Chapter 4.3.*) and lack of allusion to the Manichean rituals (*Ruwānagān*) and asceticism (*three seals*) justified perfectly this lack of attention to the Manichean element.

However our close reading of the 4th chapter brought many interesting points. Here Augustine's intention is to protect his flock from the Manichean menace. They usually used the existential problem of the origin and presence of evil in life (*...sed eligunt capitula de Scripturis, quae simplices homines non intellegunt; et per illa decipiunt animas imperitas, quaerendo unde sit malum.*) in order to deceive the uneducated or simple but *curious* people without mentioning first the details of their fanciful cosmology (*Sed illi quando capiunt homines, non ista prius dicunt; quae si dicerent, riderentur, aut fugerentur ab omnibus*). Augustine knows that those faithful well instructed in the Catholic faith and well trained in her customs and piety can respond them easily even though ignore their sacrilegious heresy or at least they can be saved from their cheating (*Qui autem fidem catholicam bene didicit, et bonis moribus et vera pietate munitus est, quamvis eorum haeresim nesciat, respondet illis tamen. Nec enim decipi potest, qui iam novit quid pertineat ad christianam fidem...*). So his primary motive is the instruction of the Catholic *regula fidei* and *praecepta vivendi* (*retr. 2, 3*). But, still Augustine is not satisfied with that. He knew from the personal experience that knowledge of their absurd cosmology is also a good arm to prevent their proselytism (*Quis ergo ista non execretur? quis non intellegat impia esse et nefanda? Sed illi quando capiunt homines, non ista prius dicunt; quae si dicerent, riderentur, aut fugerentur ab omnibus...*). Hence the exposition of their cosmology in 4, 4, must be considered from this need to expose their absurd foundation. Moreover, throughout the pages of our book each premise of this cosmology that goes against the true *agon* is directly or indirectly refuted as we have demonstrated in *III Chapter 3.*, doubling the effect of this task.

Besides in the previous chapter (*section 4.3.*) we have shown how the absence of the mention of Manichean practices: their ritual alimentation and the practice of three seals, can be explained validly in the historical context of 396 when it was written. But for us who are separated from *De agone* more than 16 centuries, this Manichean presence is not immediately visible. Nonetheless, the recent discoveries of Manichean original texts and the respective studies demonstrated the literal and physiological

nature of the Manichean practices (*III Chapter 1.2.*) in their *agon* against the Princes of Darkness in view of salvation. This knowledge also helped us to understand that *De agone christiano* is a true antidote to Manichean proselytism as it superbly discredited all their claims or boasting of being better Christians from the unveiling of the absurdity of their cosmology (*theology, anthropology, eschatology, etc.*) which was behind their ethical practices!

2.1.2. The Anti-Manichean Nature of *De agone christiano*

Our second but still important conclusion regarding the nature of *De agone* goes along with the major conclusion above. Many authors in the past have seen only just one anti-Manichean reference in *De agone christiano*, that is, in 4, 4. Few others like L. Manca have pointed out some more allusions. But we, in the 3rd section of *III Chapter* were able to gather all its anti-Manichean references and thus highlighted further its anti-Manichean nature. A particular attention is given to the title *Christus medicus humilis* (section 3.7.). Prior to our study we have two articles over Augustine's use of this title by R. Arbesmann. J. D. BeDuhn and J. K. Coyle, besides have noted the abundant use of medical terms among the Manicheans. However, to our knowledge, so far nobody has affirmed its use by Augustine as an anti-Manichean appellative. This is what we have done in our work, that is: this appellative is used here in a clear anti-Manichean polemic in order to show the importance of incarnation in Christian *agon* against the Manichean *agon*. Thus on one hand, it discredited Manichean docetism ("*Hanc ergo imbecillitatem nostram suscipere dignatus est Filius Dei, et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*", (10, 11) which voided the Christian *agon* its basic premise: the assumption of human nature from the part of the "Eternal Word"; and on the other it disqualified their exclusive self-effort claim in *agon* highlighting the role of grace (*that was brought by the incarnation*) in the Christian *agon*.

2.2. Relevance in Other Areas

The list of heresies in the second part (14, 16 -32, 34) deserves a particular importance in the field of heresiology. First of all, it is a documental confirmation of the heretical threats that were present in a particular historical moment when Augustine wrote this work. So our work

not only provides crucial information for Manichean studies, but also for the general heresiology of the time, particularly Augustine's north Africa of 4th century.

Again from a literary view point, we can say that *De agone christiano* opens a new path in literary production. In a wider context, it can be included in the group of *De vera religione* and *De utilitate credenti*, where Augustine exploited some heresiological information for expounding another main argument. But in *De agone*, we find a new pattern, a hybrid. Here, both the catechetical and polemical parts are almost on equal standing. They are combined together ultimately to serve for the care of his flock. Thus, this work again and again shows that Augustine is not an *office-room* theologian or polemist, rather a real pastor in the footsteps of Paul with a profound theological reflection born of his personal and existential living of the faith amidst his flock, responding to the need of the time, the Manichean threat!

In the same way, we know the close contact between Augustine and Manichaeism, which makes us remember the opinion of Kevin Coyle quoted in the *introduction*, (“...to know Augustine one must know Manichaeism.”).³¹³ However, it is impossible to evaluate the depth of this opinion only with the study of *De agone christiano*. Still, the study of this small work helped us to better understand this assertion. At this point, undoubtedly we can at least say that Augustine was *conditioned* by the pastoral concerns which his surroundings provoked. In this sense, Augustine who knew Manichaeism from within naturally reacted to it with all the instruments he had in hand. Hence, we feel proud that in the study of this booklet, we have touched a small part of the huge pastoral labour of Augustine, where Manichaeism was the chief oppositor. Consequently this study also helped us to get some glimpses of, at least one of Augustine's multifaceted life and personality.

This pastoral behaviour of Augustine in crisis-moments calls us again to reflect on how we can adapt these patterns for our present times. Today, to speak about religion in the common circles has become almost a taboo. And, there is no need to blame others for this fact. We, the so called faithful have in part the responsibility for the said situation, as we have often overloaded the religion with too many meticulous moral prescriptions! In this background, it is worth to remember the positive appraisal of *De agone christiano* by Roland-Gosselin that ‘Augustine made a harmony of

³¹³ J.K. Coyle, *Manichean Legacy*, 328

both religion and moral in it'.³¹⁴ We perfectly agree with him. In fact, in *De agone*, Augustine tried to formulate a rationale for Christian behaviour. This attempt was not based on mere hypothetical beliefs;³¹⁵ rather Augustine gave more importance to provide sound reasons for the Christian behaviour from Christian anthropology and theology, holding to the essentials. Meanwhile, the details of this practice are left to the criteria of Christian freedom and charity. In this sense we cannot agree with the observation of Luigi Alici that Augustine did not totally do justice to the *title* of the work.³¹⁶ Because, we have suggested in the third chapter that the absence of details of *agon* in terms of techniques and concrete program must be understood from a Manichean background and from Augustine's idea of the key role of incarnation in this *agon*. Besides, we think that this choice of Augustine to *the essential and the fundamental* is the key reason for its relevance for the Church even today. So we totally agree with the opinion of A. Bussoni: "*The moral exhortation still retains all its relevance; the habits of men, their proclivities, the common temptations, in fact, are not changed, nor the teaching of the Church in this particular sector*" (tr. mine).³¹⁷ Neither, this relevance is absent in the liturgy of the Church today. Particular importance is the conception of Christian life as a combat against the devil, envisaged by a prayer of Ash Wednesday.³¹⁸ In this sense, *De agone* becomes a criticism of the "settled Christianity" as suggested by L. Alici.³¹⁹ Besides, we have said above that our booklet is a nice catechetical modal from the pen of Augustine to educate the faithful in Catholic faith and true piety in order to keep them intact against the danger of proselytism in a simple way!³²⁰ Hence, it is a model worthy

³¹⁴ Cf. B. Roland-Gosselin, 79

³¹⁵ This was Augustine's idea of Catholicism, when he left the religion of his mother!

³¹⁶ "*Se nel De agone christiano Agostino non può mantenere fino in fondo la promessa implicita nella scelta del titolo, in tutta la produzione successive egli raccoglierà e alimenterà costantemente questa linea tematica, qui appena abbozzata*". L. Alici, 52

³¹⁷ "*l'esortazione morale conserva ancora oggi tutta la sua attualità; non mutano, infatti, i costumi degli uomini, le loro proclività, le comuni tentazioni, né muta la dottrina della Chiesa in questo particolare settore*." A. Bussoni, 5

³¹⁸ This is found in the concluding prayer of *Laudes*. However, we note that while the Church invites her faithful to a assiduous battle in the *Lenten* season, for Augustine this battle is meant for the whole life of Christian till the end, Cf. *La Preghiera del mattino e della sera*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma, 1989, 230

³¹⁹ Cf. L. Alici, 35

³²⁰ "*Qui autem fidem catholicam bene didicit, et bonis moribus et vera pietate munitus est, quamvis eorum haeresim nesciat, respondet illis tamen*." *agon*. 4, 4 PL 40 293

of imitation for the pastors even now because many of Augustine's circumstances remain today, particularly in the field of proselytism.

Besides, Ludwig Koenen speaks about the contribution of Augustine in the formation of western culture. A particular contribution in this respect was the idea of "free will". Or in other words, the belief in man's responsibility for his deeds and for the misery which can result from them.³²¹ Seeing from this view point, we can say *De agone christiano*, from tip to toe, is a praise to this human freedom of choice.³²² But, beyond this positive appraisal of L. Koenen, the most important aspect for us, from a Christian point of view is the harmony that Augustine conceived between free will and divine assistance in the life of man. This one and the other are intimately and beautifully concretised in the concept of *Christus medicus humilis!*

At the end of the work, one may still think that the investigation could have been improved more. In fact, nobody can be hundred percent sure about the perfection of exposition of the true Augustinian idea of *agon* as it is spread through the whole of Augustinian corpus. But one thing we are sure, that this study can help the Christian faithful of today to understand better the essence of Christian life which should be a natural concern of every responsible Christian. Thus, St. Augustine can be proud of that with the fruit of his assiduous search, he still helps the present Christians in their search for the real meaning of Christian life. Augustine therefore is still continuing his pastoral care through his literal legacy. In the same line, this work reminds us of the *Rule (Praeceptum, yet another project of Christian life with a different addressee from the same author)*.³²³ Because, it seems to us that this small work shares some characteristics with the latter. For example, it is noted that the *Rule*, though

³²¹ L. Koenen, 156

³²² "*Corona victoriae non promittitur nisi certantibus.*" *agon* 1, 1; "...et post ista cum invisibili hoste certamina, quoniam volentibus et amantibus iugum Christi lenes est, et sarcina eius levis, coronam victoriae mereamur." *agon.* 33, 34 PL 40, 289-290; 310

³²³ Today the question of *Augustinian authorship of the Rule* is hardly raised, after the various scholarly studies realised in the past century, particularly by the exhaustive study of L. Verheijen.

³²⁴ Referring to *Rule* 3. 1., T.J.van Bavel says "It is remarkable how few severe, ascetical elements are to be found in the *Rule*. This reference to fasting is almost the only one". *Commentary on the Rule*, in *The rule of Saint Augustine, with Introduction & Commentary*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1984, 66

written as a guide to those who opt for a radical form of *agon* or ascetic life, is much far from being a severe ascetic rule.³²⁴

Finally, in terms of future research, the above mentioned possible affinity of *De agone christiano* with the *Rule* can be a motive for future study in some areas. We mention for example, *the areas of date, mutual dependence, fundamental inspiration*, etc. Besides in the *Indiculum* of Possidius, apart from the mention of Augustine's anti-Manichean books, there is a list of some Manichean errors. Those, from 8-17 are particularly important.³²⁵ How these errors are presented or dealt by Augustine in *De agone christiano* could be yet another field of study!

3. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

To sum up, we affirm that in *De agone christiano*, a true and complete idea of Christian *agon* in its essentials is explained. The techniques are not given because it was not meant to be a purely technique-oriented one, as were Greek and Manichean asceticism. Besides, Augustine loves the essential. In this respect we will remember the Manichean charity which, being slave to its cosmology was unable to open to non-Manicheans.³²⁶ Again we can say that the significance of *De agone* does not finish here. Because the exposition of *agon* idea which was treated here concisely, is permeated throughout the entire Augustinian corpus.³²⁷ The booklet was a precursor which contained the essentials and represented Augustine's maturity of the idea. Moreover, within our work, the *agon* definitely become interiorised.³²⁸

Thus, as we have mentioned in the introduction, the concept of *agon* was not new to Christianity. Augustine, from his part made a new elaboration of it in a more interiorised way and then handed it over to all the Christians as a patrimony or a spiritual legacy. Today, we can recognise the historical and religious importance of this writing, especially its contribution to a fundamental idea of Christian asceticism.³²⁹

³²⁵ Cf. Possidius, *The Indiculum of Possidius*, in *Revisions* (appendix I), 172-173

³²⁶ Cf. *mor.* II 15, 36, in *The Manichean Debate*, 85-86

³²⁷ However, we think that *De agone* presented the core idea, so the later contributions are more in the sense of clarifications and thereby *additives or cumulative*.

³²⁸ Cf. L. Alici, 36

³²⁹ A.D'Ales, 144; L. Alici, 40