

Pelagian and Anti-Pelagian Sermons

The Pelagian movement was strongly rooted in Roman aristocratic circles (Brown 1968). Should we deduce that its ideal of moral excellence was restricted to a social elite (Salamito 2005) and that Pelagius accepted a minority religion (Salamito 1997)? In part, surely (Löhr 2015: 178–190). But opponents of Pelagianism, especially Augustine, preached extensively against ‘Pelagianism’. This could prove that, in their view, the threat of this ‘heresy’ also hung over the Christian masses, and that the debate was widely known (Perrin 2017: 138–185; Löhr 2015: 191–200).

This chapter examines the role of sermons in the ‘Pelagian controversy’. First, it surveys the traces of sermons within the Pelagian current (I). Second, it discusses the characteristics of Augustine of Hippo’s preaching against the Pelagians (II–VI): the research questions raised by his anti-Pelagian sermons (II), the popular translation of his doctrine of grace (III), the use of Scripture (IV), the continuity and developments of his thinking on grace (V), and his heresiological strategies (VI). Third, it investigates mentions of Pelagianism in non-Augustinian sermons (VII).

I. ‘Pelagian’ Sermons

Few ‘heretical’ sermons have been preserved (list in Perrin 2017: 143–145). Pelagius and Celestius, as laymen, could not preach. But to spread their thoughts they used speeches, conversations or public readings of their treatises (s. *Dolbeau* 30.6 [=348A *auct.*]; Löhr 2015: 199), and Marius Mercator mentions the ‘incredibilis loquacitas’ of Caelestius, which prompted him to spread ‘palam publiceque’, ‘openly and publicly’, his opinions (*Commonitorium* 3.2). Moreover, some bishops supported them, and Julian of Aeclanum, as bishop, must have preached regularly (Perrin 2011). PS AUG s 71 (reused in AN h Tol 72) could be ‘pelagianus’ (CPPM 856). But no sermons clearly attributed to Pelagians have been preserved (Nuvolone 1986). Indeed, on the one hand, despite its title (*tractatus* can mean a sermon in Antiquity), the *Fragmentum tractatus contra Arrianos* (PEL Ar; cf. Sedlmayer 1903) is most probably an extract from Pelagius’ *De Trinitate*. On the other hand, in the dossier attached to the *Tractoria* of the bishop of Rome Zozimus (Wermelinger 1975: 209–218.307–308; Löhr), there is a fragment entitled *Iterum in alio sermone suo idem Pelagius* (Wermelinger 1979). But this fragment consists of only four short sentences, and gives no indication of what a Pelagius’

sermon might have looked like. The sermons of the Provençal masters (John Cassian, Hilarius of Arles, Faustus of Riez, Valerianus of Cemenelum...) have sometimes been called ‘semi-Pelagian’ (Olivar 1991: 454), but they may only transmit a doctrine of grace that predates Pelagius and is common to moralist preachers, such as John Chrysostom or Jerome (Tibiletti 1982; Parappally 2018).

Two pseudepigraphic sermons from the early Middle Ages use texts from the Pelagian movement, but neither of these excerpts addresses the polemical issues of the controversy. PS-AUG s 246 is a centon composed of two extracts, from Augustine’s *Io. eu. tr.* 78.1 and Pelagius’ *De Trinitate*; it refutes Arian Christology. PS-FU s 35 is another centon; it is mainly composed of excerpts from Augustine’s sermons, but quotes a short passage from the *Expositio fidei* of the so-called Ambrose of Chalcedon (CPL 778). This text was written in the context of the Pelagian controversy, possibly in northern Italy, but the chosen extract deals with the resurrection (Pignot 2025). Finally, AN h Esc 48 contains this warning: ‘Cave pelagianum errorem’. Two hypotheses have been put forward about it. The preacher might have been warning his audience against the Pelagians (Bass 2015; Meyers 2019). However, the inconsistency of language and content suggests that this warning is a gloss from a manuscript that was later copied into the sermon text (Alexander 2001; Schindler 2003), maybe during the controversy over double predestination in the ninth century (Meyers 2024). This gloss could include the following reflection on the *initium fidei*, up to a quotation of Phil. 2:13, a verse often involved in the Pelagian controversy (Zocca 2024). In this case, the medieval copyist would have felt that the sermon was spreading Pelagian ideas and wanted to warn his reader.

Finally, Pelagius, Caelestius and Julian spent time in the East, and the Pelagians used translations of Greek sermons to prove the traditional character of their doctrine (Lamberigts 2019). In particular, Annianus of Celada translated some of John Chrysostom’s sermons (Nuvolone 1986) to refute the ‘Manichaeans’, i.e. Catholic followers of Augustine (Musurillo 1970; Skaltzky 1971). Annianus had to defend himself with Pelagius at the Synod of Diospolis (415), and criticised Jerome for his attack on Pelagius (Lamberigts 2002). His translation of the first twenty-five *Homilies on Matthew* by John Chrysostom, made in 419–420, was dedicated to Bishop Orontius (Primmer 1972), one of the bishops who was later exiled by Zosimus. He also translated the seven homilies *De laudibus s. Pauli apostoli* (probably after 421), making some doctrinal adaptations in his translation (Bady 2008), and possibly other sermons of John Chrysostom. Eighteen Pelagian bishops who signed a *Libellus fidei* in 418 (PL 48: 525–526), then Julian of Aeclanum in 419, used Annianus’ translation of Chrysostom’s sermon *Ad*

neophytos (Bouhot 1971). Conversely, Augustine quotes other sermons of John Chrysostom during his controversy with Julian (Bady 2008; Finn and Dupont 2019).

Thus, no Pelagian sermons have been preserved, even if the preaching was an important part of the polemic. By contrast, some anti-Pelagian sermons have been preserved. Most of them were delivered by Augustine of Hippo (II–VI), but a few are the work of other authors, contemporary or later than Augustine (VII).

II. Augustine’s Anti-Pelagian Sermons: Research Questions

The most prominent scholar on pelagianism in Augustine’s sermons is A. Dupont. Where no reference is given, the data is taken either from his books (2013; 2014a) or from one of his many articles.

Among the 8000 sermons Augustine preached between 391 and 430, in Hippo, Carthage and other North African cities, 900 have been preserved. Before preaching, Augustine prepared a kind of plan. Then, usually, he would improvise his sermon, taking into account the reactions of the audience, and stenographers would record it. So, even though we must take into account the changes that medieval copyists made to some sermons (Dolbeau 2017b), these texts enable us to get very close to the living word of the bishop of Hippo. In his sermons, Augustine comments on Scripture according to the context in which the listeners live (Pauliat 2020). He therefore often addresses polemical issues. Augustine very rarely mentions Pelagian leaders in the preserved sermons (Drecoll 2016: 659–661): ‘Pelagius’ in ss. 183.12, *Dolbeau* 30.6–7, and *en. Ps.* 58.1.19; ‘Pelagianus’ in ss. 181.2/7 and *Morin* 10.3 [=163A]; ‘Pelagianista’ in s. 183.1/12; ‘Caelestianus’ in s. 181.7. But about fifty sermons, in whole or in part, are part of the Pelagian controversy (Dolbeau 2019): e.g. s. 294 on infant baptism and Rom. 5 (Drecoll 2007); ss. 26.131.163 in September 417 (Partoens 2007); ss. 151–156 on Rom. 7:19–8:17 in 417 too (Partoens 2008).

Preaching on grace raises two main research questions. On the one hand, Augustine preaches in order to bring his listeners’ lives into harmony with their Christian faith (*cat. rud.* 8; *doctr. chr.* 1.35.39–1.40.44). How is it possible to urge the listeners to convert while believing that man can do nothing without God’s grace, and that he is the object of predestination? In short: how to preach on grace or predestination in a mainly exhortative genre?

On the other hand, in his polemical writings, Augustine seeks to convince his adversaries of the wrongness of their propositions, functioning as both systematic theologian and as polemicist. He likewise discharges both functions in his *sermones*, because 'the preacher and teacher of the divine Scriptures must defend the true faith and fight error' (*doctr. chr.* 4.4.6). Indeed, the Augustinian sermons include a number of pointedly polemical examples. But in the sermons, Augustine is also a preacher of the Word of God, and he understands his preaching to be a proclamation of the Word of God. This grants the argumentation in Augustine's sermons a greater degree of authority. But does such a conception of preaching have an impact on Augustine's approach to Pelagianism in his sermons?

III. Popular Translation of Augustine's Doctrine of Grace

Is the content and treatment of the relationship between human freedom and divine grace different in the sermons (Burns 2022) and the treatises? 'Do different contexts furnish different insights?' (Dupont 2013) Not all of the anti-Pelagian arguments present in Augustine's writings are found in the sermons. The first reason is obvious: there are fewer anti-Pelagian sermons than treatises. But it is possible to specify further. Indeed, the context and the target group of some sermons have an impact on the content of Augustine's anti-Pelagian sermons. For instance, public debate and unrest in Carthage and Hippo prompted Augustine to deliver two sermons, during which the audience displayed its aversion in one way or another: during s. *Dolbeau* 30, against Pelagius and Caelestius; during s. 294, against Augustine's thought. Indeed, after this sermon, Augustine preached more cautiously on infant baptism. We shall analyse his treatment of four anti-Pelagian themes: faith as grace, infant baptism, sin, and predestination.

A. Faith and prayer

In the anti-Pelagian treatises, the grace aspect of faith and prayer were unique topics and specifically anti-Pelagian themes. In contrast, even if the grace aspect of the *initium fidei* and the *perseuerentia fidei* is thematised in the sermons (for instance, ss. 143 and 144), as a preacher Augustine very rarely explains that faith is *gratia* (Dupont 2014b). In the polemical s. 168, he thematises faith as *gratia* because he seeks to refute the Pelagian understanding of faith as human merit. Similarly, Augustine often preaches on prayer, including during the Pelagian controversy, but the *gratia orationis* is not thematised in the sermons (Knotts and Dupont 2015). Augustine urges humble and persevering prayer, which is necessary to fight *concupiscentia*, but he does not say that this prayer is itself a gift from God (s. 115). Thus, the doctrinal treatises

emphasize more the divine dimension of the moral life, and the sermons the human one. This difference could be explained by different factors: it would be superfluous to speak about the beginnings of faith and prayer in a sermon delivered in front of faithful people already engaged in faith and prayer, and gathered for a liturgical prayer service. Furthermore, the sermon is an exhortative genre: it is logical that the preacher, without denying the necessity of grace, should exhort above all to adhere to the true faith, to pray, and to lead a morally virtuous life. This means, moreover, that not only the Pelagians, but also Augustine, insist on human responsibility.

B. Infant baptism

Infant baptism (Pignot, Chapter 8, this volume) is thematised in the same manner in the sermons as in the treatises: it serves as an argument to support the original sin, the humanity's universal sinfulness, the need of grace for salvation, and the fact that the redemption of humanity in baptism is entirely a gift of God's mercy. But the theme is more frequent in the writings than in the sermons: the subject could be difficult to handle pastorally, with parents of young or deceased children (Dupont 2010c). Only s. 294 mentions the rejection of the *medius locus* and its consequence, *damnatio paruulorum*. Infant baptism is never treated *per se* in the other sermons; while this issue is central to the controversy with Julian, it is absent from the sermons after 417–418. For instance, against the Pelagian position on the naturalness of physical death, s. 165 describes physical death, including that of infants, as a punitive consequence of original sin, but does not raise the possibility of their damnation.

C. Sin and original sin

Augustine addresses the question of sin in the (quite) same way in his sermons as in his writings. Although sin and original sin are not the main theme of any of the sermons during the Pelagian controversy, the preacher addresses it at varying extents in many sermons, and develops all the important aspects of his thought on sin: ‘the three types of law, the insufficiency of the Mosaic law and the human *liberum arbitrium*, the fall of Adam, *mortalitas* and *concupiscentia* as continuing consequences of the fall (even for the baptised, *sub gratia*), and redemption by the sinless Christ’ (Dupont 2013: 634). Among the minor differences between sermons and treatises are the insistence on *Christus medicus*, or the connection between the natural fear of death, death as unnatural and the theme of martyrdom (Dupont 2010a). Furthermore, the discussion on *tradux peccati* via sexuality is absent from the preserved sermons. Several reasons explain the frequency and vehemence of the treatment of sin in the sermons. Certainly, Augustine preached on the struggle against sin before the Pelagian controversy (e.g. ss. *Denis* 25 [=72A]; 125; 142; 283), for the subject is normal in a sermon.

But above all, Augustine may consider the possibility of sinlessness as the most attractive part of the Pelagian tenant. Indeed, this idea was also supported by the Donatists, a very popular North African movement, which had just been condemned by the Council of Carthage in 411. In addition, the ascetic currents, especially the monastic communities in Hadrumetum, Marseille and Provence argued that it was possible to live virtuously if one does his best.

D. Predestination

In his treatises against Julian and the so-called ‘semi-Pelagians’, Augustine insists on predestination. In contrast, the theme seems to be absent from the sermons. This may be due to the specific genre of the sermon: if man is predestined, what is the point of behaving well? Or Augustine might have considered the subject closed in North Africa after 418. But it is also possible that the sermons reflecting the last two stages of the Pelagian controversy have not been preserved. In any case, in *perseu.* 22.57–62 (c. 428), Augustine explains that one should preach on predestination only carefully and pastorally tactically (Salamito 2005: 281–293): telling an audience of ordinary believers that they have been predestined, even if some are still living in sin; encouraging them to pray, since faith and perseverance are a gift of God; even if some Christians will not persevere, not presenting them as belonging to the audience he is preaching to. In general, the few sermons in which Augustine mentions predestination (e.g. ss. 26, 158, 165, 174; *Io. eu. tr.* 26, 45, 105) apply the caution mentioned in *perseu.* (Eelen 2012; Knotts and Dupont 2017).

Therefore, there is no contradiction between the content of the doctrine of grace in the sermons and the treatises, but the treatment differs from one occasion to another.

IV. Scripture in Augustinian Anti-Pelagian Sermons

The analysis of biblical quotations and commentaries in anti-Pelagian sermons leads to the same nuanced conclusion (Dupont 2013).

Some biblical quotations receive characteristic treatment in the anti-Pelagian sermons. First, some are present in the sermons and (almost) absent from the treatises. On faith: John 16:8–11 (grace status of faith; Dupont 2010b) and Eph. 3:17 (sermons preached between 411 and 417/418 identify Christ and faith; De Maeyer and Dupont 2017). On prayer: Luke 18:1–7 (exhortation to persevere in prayer; Dupont 2011b); Luke 18:9–14 (the tax collector as a model of genuine prayer; Dupont 2010d). On sin: 1 Tim. 1:15–16 (salvific reality of the incarnation testifies to human sinfulness; Dupont 2011a). Second, other scriptural passages show agreement between the sermons and the anti-Pelagian writings: John 3:13 on infant

baptism; John 6:44 on *fides* (Bochet 2012); Matt. 6:9.13 on human impotence and permanence of the *concupiscentia* after baptism; Matt. 5:22 and Jas. 3:8 on the need for grace to dominate the tongue (Pauliat 2020: 481–502). Third, other quotations build a bridge between the sermons and the complete oeuvre: Augustine takes up against the Pelagian interpretations that he had developed earlier. This is the case with John 1:21 and Rom. 1:17 on faith. In all kinds of works, Matt. 6:12 and 1 John 1:8 prove the permanence of the (post-baptismal) human sin. Finally, Rom. 6:12–13 and Gal. 5:16–17 attest an interior struggle and a subsequent need for God's help.

By contrast, other biblical quotations that abound in the treatises are (almost) absent from the sermons. This is especially the case of the quotations about infant baptism: Matt. 1:21; Matt. 9:12–13; John 3:5; 2 Cor. 13:7.

Thus, the sermons are not an isolated genre: Augustine draws quite the same arguments from Scripture in the treatises as in the anti-Pelagian sermons. But in some cases the sermons are also typified by their own unique use of Scripture. Indeed, sermons explain a liturgical reading within a liturgical (and sacramental) framework, before a particular audience. The sermons are thus liturgical commentaries on Scripture: whereas in the treatises Augustine uses Scripture as an authoritative argument against Pelagius (Scripture follows the argument), in the sermons, the liturgical readings are the starting point of his anti-Pelagian argument. Finally, the detailed exegeses of ss. 143 and 144 on John 16:8–11, 151–156 on Rom. 7:5–8:17, 163 on Gal. 5:16–21, 165 on Eph. 3:13–18, 169 and 170 on Phil. 3:6–16 have no equivalent in the treatises.

Moreover, the liturgical context gives some explanations a unique flavour not found in the polemical writings. For instance, in s. 30, Augustine employs scriptural *lex orandi, lex credendi* arguments, like Ps. 118:133 (the psalm of the day). Although he also uses the liturgical argument in his treatises, this argument employed during a liturgical prayer acquires surplus persuasiveness because the liturgy concretises the scriptural argumentation. For instance, when Augustine quotes the *Pater Noster* to show that prayer is necessary to ask for grace (e.g. s. Dolbeau 30.11), and the community then prays it together, the argument is reinforced.

V. Chronological Continuity and Development

The patterns of continuity and evolution in biblical ideas and quotations between literary genres also exist on a chronological level. We have already told that in his anti-Pelagian sermons Augustine takes up some of the developments on sin and some of the scriptural

quotations present in earlier works. We can be more precise. According to Augustine (*perseu*. 20.52–53; *retr.* 2.1.1), the turning point in his thinking on grace was not his discovery of Pelagius’ writings in 411, but the writing of *Simpl.* 2 in 396. He logically expressed his ideas on grace before 411, in his *Confessions*, but also in his sermons (Hombert 1996).

In the sermons preached before the Pelagian controversy, the teaching on grace is regular, but usually brief and occasioned by the liturgical readings (Hombert 1998). It focuses not only on the *gratia iustificationis*, but also on the *gratia auxilium* (e.g. s. 32.8). These sermons contain some of Augustine’s deepest convictions, which will reappear during the Pelagian controversy: grace is gratuitous (e.g. *en. Ps.* 44.7); God crowns his gifts, not our merits (e.g. s. *Dolbeau* 4.6 [=299A *auct.*]); when we act well, God acts (e.g. *en. Ps.* 103.4.16); Christ himself is presented as a grace (as *saluator*, *medicus*). Nevertheless, several doctrines mentioned in *Simpl.* are absent from the pre-411 sermons, and will reappear during the Pelagian controversy: the gratuitous election, the *initium fidei* (except *en. Ps.* 106), the influence of grace on the will. The commentaries on Rom. 7–8 change significantly: before the controversy, Augustine argues these chapters have to do with the human person and Paul *sub lege* (cf. s. 125); later, he considers they also concern Paul *sub gratia* (ss. 151; 154; Berrouard 1981). Finally, before 412, when Augustine comments on Rom. 5:5, he speaks mainly of charity in itself, its nature and its fruits, and less of charity as a gift (La Bonnardière 1954).

On liturgical feasts, the theme of grace is ‘occasionally specified’, both on the side of human responsibilities as on the side of divine grace (Dupont 2014a). For instance, on Christmas, Augustine exhorts the audience to imitate the Virgin Mary and the growing Christ; he presents the incarnation as a manifestation of God’s grace (Dupont 2012b). On Ascension, he urges belief in the two natures of Christ, purification of the heart, and hope for future realities (*sursum cor*) – actions that are themselves a gift from God (Dupont 2011c). On Pentecost, he invites to live/think spiritually, and preaches on the gifts of the Spirit, the fulfilment of the Law and the unity of the Church as gifts from God (Dupont 2012c).

Before 411, the fight against the Donatists also shapes the preaching on grace. The main idea is that God’s gifts come from God alone (e.g. ss. 266, 269), and that no one owns grace (e.g. *Io. eu. tr.* 10.6) – the Donatist ministers behave as if grace belonged to them. Against them, Augustine uses several biblical verses he will later use against the Pelagians: Rom. 10:2–3 (against pride); Jer. 17:5 (Hombert 1998). The anti-Donatist and anti-Pelagian sermons also retain strong ties, e.g. on the perseverance of the martyrs as a gift of grace (Dupont 2012a), the affirmation that death is the consequence of sin, the need to fight *concupiscentia* after baptism,

the impossibility of sinlessness (Dupont 2015), the refutation of the denial that Christ came in the flesh (Dupont and Van Reyn 2015). Thus, on the theme of grace in anti-Donatist and anti-Pelagian sermons, continuity dominates (Dupont and Wisse 2014) and the differences are not fundamental, but rather lie 'in the contextual framework of its thematisation: existential/eschatological/soteriological in the anti-Pelagian discourses and more ecclesiological/martyrological/sacramentological in the anti-Donatist expositions' (Dupont 2014a: 202).

In both his sermons and writings, the Pelagian controversy does not represent a chronological break in Augustine's thinking on grace: his thinking is continuous, reflecting an evolution, a deepening, and an elaboration of fundamental intuitions. The anti-Pelagian themes are therefore never sufficient to draw definitive conclusions in terms of dating (Yates 2010).

VI. Heresiological Strategies

The sermons are addressed to a broad audience: they provide Augustine with a unique opportunity to spread his own image of Pelagianism to a huge number of Christians. What are Augustine's heresiological strategies and how does he build the Pelagian heresy into his sermons?

In 413, Augustine mentioned 'the discussions of few people who seem to be spreading more and more and undertaking to upset the minds of many' (s. 294.1), but he did not specify their identity. His position changed in May or June 416, when he preached s. *Dolbeau* 30 'Against Pelagius' (Dolbeau 1995.1999): as long as Pelagius' position remained unknown, Augustine 'fought the error itself' without naming the Pelagians, because he hoped for their conversion (s. *Dolbeau* 30.5). But rumours of uprisings in Jerusalem in connection with Pelagianism had reached North Africa, and Pelagian doctrine was expanding. Thus, in order to 'prevent the cancer from spreading' (s. *Dolbeau* 30.8), i.e. to fight against the secret dissemination of Pelagian ideas (Löhr 2015: 199), Augustine refuted them openly. In s. *Dolbeau* 30, Augustine gives the impression of a pastor afraid that Pelagian thought will escape him, and who wants to regain control of the discourses in his church (Löhr 2015: 192). Later, in the preserved sermons, Augustine mentions only Pelagius and Caelestius and their supporters, but not Julian of Aeclanum (cf. *supra*, II).

On the one hand, in order to portray the Pelagian views as heresy, Augustine makes them traditional reproaches (Trapè 1985). Above all, Pelagian doctrine is new, *nouus* (ss.

294.3.3; *Dolbeau* 30.5); thus, it has no connection with the ancient, so true, Catholic faith (Malavasi 2018; Ribreau 2020). Augustine, as a good orator, also blames the pride (s. 181.2) and obstinacy (s. *Dolbeau* 30.5) of his opponents, according to the rhetorical device of *contumelia* (Quint., *instit. orat.* 5.13.38–41). Furthermore, in order to make the listeners judge the Pelagian doctrine as absurd, the preacher enters into fictive dialogues with a 'Pelagian' adversary who obstinately adheres to the absurd consequences of Pelagianism (ss. 165.6–8; 181; Partoens 2014). The presentation of Pelagianism in the sermons is satirical rather than polemical.

On the other hand, Augustine uses various devices to enhance his doctrine on grace and original sin. First, to present it as perfectly in line with the Church tradition, he employs arguments of authority: the Bible, e.g. through fictitious dialogues with Paul (s. 168.2; Martin 2000) or even Christ (s. 181); the Fathers (Chronister 2014), whose thinking he modifies (Dupont 2017, 2025). Second, he uses an imagery closely related to the social and intellectual milieu of his public: *Christus Medicus* heals the sick humanity (s. *Dolbeau* 30.1–4); the urge to commit adultery or a quarrel between husband and wife symbolises the struggle against *concupiscentia* (ss. 128; 152; *Morin* 4 [=154A]; 155). Third, to urge the listeners to put his teaching into practice, he uses biblical examples, such as Abraham (s. 168) or the virgin Mary (s. 290) for their faith, the Canaanite woman (s. *Morin* 10), the tax collector (s. 115) or John the Baptist (s. 293) for their humility, the widow for her perseverance in prayer (ss. 115; 163), Paul (s. *Dolbeau* 30; 299; Drecol 2014; *Dolbeau* 2017a), or Christ himself (Geerlings 1978).

Finally, Augustine as a preacher aims to build an anti-heretical *ethos* in his listeners (Perrin 2011). He therefore gives advice on how to react to this heresy: first, avoiding the heretic (s. *Dolbeau* 30.12), and second, denouncing him (s. 131.10; Partoens 2004). Finally, to be understood by all his listeners, he simplifies Pelagianism, systematizes it and presents it in a somewhat radicalized way: e.g. no Pelagian would have denied the necessity of infant baptism or prayer in the Christian life (Dupont 2013).

Augustine's method thus contributes to a unique rhetorical treatment of the Pelagian insights in his homilies.

VII. Non-Augustinian Anti-Pelagian Sermons

Some other anti-Pelagian sermons have been preserved. The homilies attributed to Jerome were dated from the early 5th (Jeanjean 1999: 79). But some of them can have been

preached after 415, during the Pelagian controversy: *Tr. in Ps. 89 (ser. alt.)* explicitly refers to the Augustinian doctrine of original sin (Caruso 2012: 614; Malavasi 2019); *Tr. in Ps. 90 (ser. alt.)* was preached immediately after *Tr. 89* (Malavasi 2019); *Tr. in Ps. 93 (ser. alt.)* warns against the most serious of sins, pride (Caruso 2012: 615); a cluster of sermons, *Tr. in Ps. 80*, *Tr. in Ps. 81*, *Tr. in Ps. 83 (ser. alt.)*, *Tr. in Ps. 84 (ser. alt.)*, *Tr. in Ps. 86*, stresses the theme of sin (Capone: 147–148); a statement about martyrdom in the sermon *De persecutione Xpistianorum* could refer to Pelagius (Cola 1990: 215).

After the death of Augustine in 430, explicit mentions of Pelagianism in sermons are rare (Ribreau 2021).

Leo the Great (pope, 440–461) refused the last approaches of Julian of Aeclanum who was exiled to the East and wished to be rehabilitated. Leo mentions his action against Julian in his letters, but does not quote Julian, Pelagius or Caelestius in his sermons. However, the influence of Augustine is present in his sermons; this would be easily explained if the actual author of these sermons was Prosper of Aquitaine (James 1993). These sermons take up the Augustinian doctrine of grace (not predestination), without a polemical charge. This shows either that the preacher considered this doctrine on grace to be Christian (and not properly Augustinian) or that the Roman audiences were not aware of the controversy.

Thirteen sermons are attributed to Quodvultdeus (bishop of Carthage 430–439, then exiled to Italy and died before 454), but are probably the work of several African preachers from the 5th century (Pignot 2023). They quote the Pelagians (cant 8.1; fer 6.1–2; cata 5.9; bar 1.3.3) and take up Augustine’s views on grace. In this way, the preacher builds up an ‘Augustinian ethos’: he presents himself in the footsteps of Augustine as a defender of the true faith, which is particularly useful in Arian Vandal Africa.

In the collection known as the ‘Gallican Eusebius’, Pelagius is mentioned once (s. 17.5). This sermon is probably the work of Faustus of Riez (Morin 1935; Villegas Marin 2021), addressed to clerics by their superior. Several other sermons deal with the theme of grace. They are inspired by Augustinian doctrine, but give a greater place to free will and to human effort (*labor, studium*) than Augustine; they therefore implicitly criticize Augustine’s doctrine. Their treatment of grace corresponds to the doctrine contained in the works of Faustus of Riez (Barcellona 2006) or more widely of Provencal circles.

In his sermons, Caesarius of Arles (bishop, 502–542) mentions several ancient heresies, but never the Pelagians, even though he was familiar with Pelagius’ *Letter to Demetrias* and

the anti-Pelagian works of Augustine (Delmulle 2020). Nor does he quote Augustine, even though he covers the main Augustinian themes related to grace, apart from predestination. His s. 226 is especially interesting: Caesarius brings together all the biblical quotations that had been debated at the beginning of the controversy. Two reasons may explain Caesarius’ attitude towards Pelagianism: first, this tenant was probably unknown to Gallic Christians from the 6th century; second, the figure of Augustine was problematic, since some of his doctrines (on predestination especially) had not been accepted at the Council of Orange in 529 (Mathisen 2014).

Finally, Gregory the Great (pope, 590–604) mentions Pelagius and Caelestius in his *Homily on Ezekiel* 9.2 at the end of a discussion about grace. This quotation is not linked to a polemical charge, but rather indicates a shared Augustinian culture between Gregory and his audience, probably clerics.

This overview of Pelagianism in sermons after 431 shows that Pelagius, Caelestius and Julian were probably quickly forgotten by the Christian people, but that they remained known to the clergy, especially through the works of Augustine. Even if Augustine remained an authority, preachers did not quote him because of the problematic legacy of his doctrine on predestination, or even criticize him, but always implicitly.

Conclusion

Only anti-Pelagian sermons have been preserved, and mainly sermons by Augustine. The preaching’s content is broadly the same as in the treatises, but different contexts entail unique frameworks and unique thematisation. Because of the exhortative objective of the genre of sermons, human role holds a central place. The sermons thus provide a more nuanced view of the interaction between God’s grace and human freedom than the treatises, and renew our perception of Augustine as a polemicist against the Pelagians. Finally, the sermons can be considered as a litmus test relationship between divine grace and human ethical responsibility, as Augustine himself says: ‘As far as it is up to us, let us strive with the will, to merit to obtain with prayer what we hope for’ (s. *Dolbeau* 30.4).

Suggested reading

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Final chapter abstract

No ‘Pelagian’ sermons have been preserved. The anti-Pelagian sermons, especially those of Augustine of Hippo, raise two research questions: how to preach on grace or predestination in a mainly exhortative genre? Do the specific contexts of the sermons furnish different insights with regard to Augustine’s anti-Pelagian tenant? This chapter analyses the popular translation of Augustine’s doctrine of grace, the place of Scripture, the chronological continuity and developments of his thought, and his heresiological strategies in his anti-Pelagian sermons. It shows that the preaching’s content is broadly the same as in the treatises, but that different contexts entail unique frameworks and thematisations, because the sermons emphasise human freedom and ethical responsibility. They thus provide a new understanding of Augustine, more complex than the treatises. Finally, Pelagianism is rarely mentioned by other preachers.

Chapter keywords

Pelagianism, Sermons, Heresiology, Augustine of Hippo, Grace, Rhetoric, Biblical exegesis.

Biographic information

Marie Pauliat is Senior Researcher (FWO-KU Leuven). Her research focuses on Latin late antique preaching, especially Augustine of Hippo, Caesarius of Arles and the Vienna Collection. In *Augustine exégète et prédicateur dans les Sermons sur Matthieu* (Paris, 2020), she explores the impact of contexts on the content of preaching, the relationship between the preachers and their audiences, and the rhetorical strategies of the preachers. She collaborates with the Institut d’Études Augustiniennes (Paris), with the Sources chrétiennes (Lyon) and with the journal *Augustinianum* (Rome).