

Scripture in Augustine’s *Sermones ad Populum*

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Introduction

Throughout late antiquity, sermons served as a primary means of religious education. Through them, leaders in the Christian church aimed at transmitting both knowledge and moral standards.¹ Whether these sermons dealt with polemical, disciplinary, philosophical, or doctrinal questions, they were usually based on a biblical text which, via exegesis and commentary, was applied to the daily, concrete realities of the audience. This is certainly the case with Augustine’s *Sermons for the People* (*Sermones ad populum*).

The title *Sermones ad populum* represents a collection of some 600 sermons delivered by Augustine in various African cities over the course of some forty years (391–430 CE).² They were thematically classified and published by the Benedictines of Saint-Maur in 1683.³ The Maurists’ categories included the sermons *De Scripturis* (*sermones* 1–183), all of which take a verse or passage of Scripture as their point of departure. At the same time, Scripture is ubiquitous in the sermons of the other Maurist categories such as the sermons *De Tempore*, on the liturgical seasons (*sermones* 184–272), the sermons *De Sanctis*, on the saints (*sermones* 273–340), and the sermons *De Diversis*, on various topics (*sermones* 341–395).⁴ Whether Augustine intended to comment on a particular reading, to solve an exegetical question, or to deal with a theological, moral, or topical issue, Scripture is omnipresent in his sermons.

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¹ J. Leemans, “Religious Literacy and the Role of Sermons in Late-Antique Christianity,” in *Preaching in the Patristic Era. Sermons, Preachers, and Audiences in the Latin West*, eds. A. Dupont, S. Boodts, G. Partoens and J. Leemans (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 3–7.

² For more on the *Sermones ad populum*, see F. Dolbeau, “*Sermones (ad populum)*,” *AugLex* 5:244–399; and M. Pellegrino, “Introduzione generale,” in S. Agostino, *Discorsi*, t. 1 (Rome: Citta’ Nuova, 1979). These sermons are usually distinguished from the *Enarrationes* on the *Psalms* (see *infra*, H. Müller, 000–000) and the *Tractatus* on the Gospel and the First Epistle of John (*infra*, A. Fitzgerald, 000–000), whose publication Augustine planned and organized. Cf. *Serm.* Boodts and A. Dupont, “Augustine of Hippo,” in *Preaching in the Patristic Era*, 178. Together, these preserved sermons represent just 10% of all the sermons that Augustine is thought to have preached.

³ *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi Operum tomus quintus, continens Sermones ad populum ..., Opera et studio monachorum Ordinis S. Benedicti à Congregatione S. Mauri, Parisiis*, printed by Franciscus Muguet ... 1683, reproduced in PL 38. The thematic classification was introduced in previous editions.

⁴ M. Pellegrino, “Introduzione,” X. On exegesis in Augustine’s sermons, including the *Enarrationes* and the *Tractatus*, see M. Pontet, *L’exégèse de saint Augustin prédicateur* (Paris: Aubier, 1946), a work that is yet to be superseded.

Prior to outlining the research questions raised by the use of the Bible in the *Sermones ad populum*, two methodological challenges that confront every serious student of them deserve mention: (1) the history of the sermons’ transmission and (2) the difficulty of dating (most of) the sermons with precision.

The Transmission of the *Sermones ad populum*

The *Sermones ad populum* that we read today are the result of a centuries-long chain of transmission.⁵ Most of them were stenographically recorded as Augustine was preaching, but only some were revised by Augustine for publication. Worse still, we have almost irretrievably lost the *actio* or “non-verbal aspects” of the sermons that have been preserved. This sometimes makes it difficult to understand the meaning of a particular comment or claim.⁶

We also know that in the Middle Ages many sermons were pared down, interpolated, reworked, or even recomposed.⁷ In the case of these texts, the role played by the Bible often gives us as much information about the customs, liturgies, or the preferences of the medieval world as they do about the customs, liturgy, or preferences of their original late antique contexts.

The Dating of the *Sermones ad populum*

Even though it was not the custom at the time, Augustine, whose reputation as a professional rhetorician preceded him, was permitted to preach in 391 CE soon after he was ordained to the priesthood.⁸ Four years later, in 395, he was made bishop of Hippo Regius. Between 395 and his death in 430, Augustine’s literary production expanded immensely. And the sheer size of the Augustinian literary corpus poses a problem for dating its constituent *opera*. The majority of the extant sermons are exceedingly difficult to date accurately.⁹ Nonetheless, the issues related to the

⁵ R.J. Deferrari, “Saint Augustine’s Method of Composing and Delivering Sermons,” *American Journal of Philology* 43 (1922): 97–123 and 193–219; and P.-M. Hombert, “Sténographie et transmission des prédications,” in *BA* 59/B:684–8.

⁶ The *actio* designates all the elements of “non-verbal communication” (e.g., rhythm, intonation, hand gestures, body language, etc.). Though they cannot be noted down, they remain necessary for the elaboration and specification of meaning. F. Dolbeau, “*Seminator uerborum*. Réflexion d’un éditeur de sermons d’Augustin,” in *Augustin prédicateur (395–411)*, ed. G. Madec, EAA 159 (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1998), 95–111, here 97–8.

⁷ F. Dolbeau, “*Sermones (ad populum)*,” 290–5.

⁸ Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 5 (H. T. Weiskotten, ed., *Sancti Augustini Vita Scripta a Possidio Episcopo* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1919], 49–51). See also G. Bardy, “Tractare, tractatus,” *RSR* 33 (1946): 217.

⁹ There are several methods for dating a sermon. The best method, and the only one accepted by H. R. Drobner, “The Chronology of St. Augustine’s *Sermones ad populum*,” *AugStud* 31 (2000): 211–8, is when an event that is independently datable is mentioned in the sermon. Nevertheless, with caution, it is also possible to use the position of the sermons in the manuscripts. See, e.g., F. Dolbeau, *REAug* 49 (2003): 424–8, which reviews Augustinus von Hippo, *Predigten zu den Büchern Exodus, Könige und Job (Sermones 6–12). Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung und Anmerkungen*, ed. H. R. Drobner (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003). Finally, some use a thematic method based on the conviction that certain ideas or biblical quotations can be shown to be characteristic of a particular period. See, e.g., A.-M. La Bonnardière, *Recherches de chronologie augustiniennne*, EAA 23 (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1965); and P.-M. Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustiniennne*, EAA 163 (Paris: Institut d’Études

appearance and use of Scripture in the *Sermones ad populum* remain consistent regardless of the period – to say nothing of the exact year – in which a particular sermon may have been preached. Therefore, to respect the chronological limits of this volume, this chapter will focus on the sermons that can plausibly be dated after 400. At the same time, when they are deemed helpful, what follows will also incorporate select passages culled from sermons thought to have been preached before 400.

Research questions

The *Sermones ad populum* were delivered in different contexts. Therefore, they offer an intriguing opportunity to study the relationship between biblical interpretation, the context in which a particular sermon was preached, and the audience to which it was delivered.¹⁰ One of the main challenges of the research on the sermons is to know whether Augustine comments on the Scriptures in them in the same way as he does in his treatises and letters, or whether the biblical exegeses we find in his sermons have been adapted to the liturgical and historical contexts, and/or to the different audiences. Scholarly opinions differ. While some argue in favor of homiletic specificity,¹¹ specificity possibly explained by the liturgical context in which most preaching is conducted,¹² others argue against it.¹³ Additionally, some wonder if the same or nearly the same expositions of biblical passages in compositions of diverse literary genres function in the same way.¹⁴

Suffice it to say that the question of adapting biblical commentaries to preaching continues to be debated. Nevertheless, these debates raise additional questions which this chapter will address including: (1) questions related to Augustine’s personality as an exegete and preacher: What training did he receive for Bible-based homiletics and what were his favorite verses? (2) questions related to the liturgical context: Did the version of the biblical text commented on and the

Augustiniennes, 2000). This last method is also not above critique. See, e.g., B. Meunier, *RSPT* 88 (2004): 116–9, which reviews P.-M. Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches*.

¹⁰ For a methodological proposal see W. Mayer, “John Chrysostom. Extraordinary Preacher, Ordinary Audience,” in *Preacher and Audience. Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics*, eds. M. B. Cunningham and P. Allen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 122–34. It is impossible to be exhaustive with Augustine’s *Sermons*. These references are only intended to provide illustrative examples of frequently recurring phenomena.

¹¹ E.g. G. Nauroy, “Formes de l’exégèse pastorale chez Ambroise et Augustin,” in *Saint Augustin et la Bible*, eds. G. Nauroy and M.-A. Vannier (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 102; and A.M. Kleinberg, “*De Agone Christiano*. The Preacher and his Audience,” *JTS* 38 (1997): 16–33.

¹² I. Bochet, “De l’exégèse à l’herméneutique augustinienne,” *REAug* 50 (2004): 368.

¹³ Analyzing *Sermo Dolbeau* 11 (90A), J. Lagouanère, “La notion de prochain chez Augustin au début de son épiscopat. Le rôle matriciel du sermon *De dilectione Dei et proximi* [*Sermon Dolbeau* 11],” *SacEr* 54 (2015): 79–110, concluded that, over the course of Augustine’s career, the differences between sermons, treatises, and letters tends to fade to the point of irrelevance.

¹⁴ M. Pauliat, “Mt 12, 46–50 dans la prédication d’Augustin. Exégèse inclusive et questions de genre,” *REAug* 65 (2019): 73–98.

organization of the liturgy in Africa have any influence on the homiletical commentaries? (3) questions related to the polemical context: Did Augustine use the Bible in the same way in his sermons and in his polemical treatises? (4) and questions related to interaction with the audience: How did biblical commentaries deal with the diversity of the audience and how did the audience and the preacher interact?

The Personality of Augustine the Exegete and Preacher

The role of the Bible in the *Sermones ad populum* is naturally linked to Augustine’s personality. We will discuss: (1) his rhetorical and exegetical training; (2) his scriptural preferences; and (3) the function of (some of) the verses and passages that he quotes most frequently.

Augustine’s Training: Rhetoric and Exegesis

Rhetorical Training

Augustine received the traditional rhetorical training of antiquity,¹⁵ training that he never denies and only rarely downplays when commenting on the Bible in the *sermones*. He explains the reasons for this in the *De doctrina christiana* (*Doctr. chr.*):¹⁶ in his view, the Christian preacher can legitimately use the knowledge received during his non-Christian education, both to understand the content of Scripture and to deliver his discourse.¹⁷ To paraphrase Augustine: Why should truth not use the same tools as error so that truth might triumph over error?¹⁸ Augustine thus takes the

¹⁵ C. Harrison, “The Rhetoric of Scripture and Preaching. Classical Decadence or Christian Aesthetic?,” in *Augustine and His Critics. Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, eds. R. Dodaro and G. Lawless (London: Routledge, 2000), 214–30.

¹⁶ *Doctr. chr.* sheds light on the relationship between the Bible and Augustine’s preaching. Augustine here deals first with the interpretation of the Scriptures (i.e. the *modus inveniendi* in Books 1 to 3) by establishing hermeneutical principles that are valid for sermons. He then deals with preaching itself (i.e. the *modus proferendi* in Book 4). See T. Toom, “Scripture in Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*,” 321–42. Principles of interpretation can be found elsewhere: C. Basevi, *San Agustín. La interpretación del Nuevo Testamento. Criterios exegéticos propuestos por S. Agustín en el De doctrina christiana, en el Contra Faustum y en el De consensu euangelistarum* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1977); and F. Van Fleteren, “Augustine’s Principles of Biblical Exegesis, *De Doctrina Christiana* Aside. Miscellaneous Observations,” *AugStud* 27 (1996): 109–30.

¹⁷ *Doctr. chr.* 2.39.58 (CCSL 32:72). According to Augustine’s interpretation of the “spoils of the Egyptians” (*Doctr. chr.* 2.40.60–61 [CCSL 32:73–4]), whatever truths are contained in secular knowledge also belong to Christians. Secular knowledge is used, among other things, to compare the readings of the manuscripts (s. 23.8 [CCSL 41:314–5]; *sermo* 169.1 [CCSL 41Bb:401]; *sermo* 319.3 [PL 38:1441]), and to elucidate the meaning of the words. In *sermo* 74.1 (CCSL 41Ab:152; *WSA* III/3:299, trans. Hill) he says: “I mean, we shouldn’t come to school in vain; we ought to know in what sense to take the words of the scriptures. Otherwise, when something is heard from the bible which is normally understood in another secular sense, hearers may be misled, and by taking for granted what they have been used to, may fail to understand what they have heard.” See M. Marin, “Retorica ed esegesi in Sant’Agostino. Note introduttive,” in *L’Umanesimo di Sant’Agostino*, ed. M. Fabris (Bari: Levante, 1988), 215–33.

¹⁸ *Doctr. chr.* 4.2.3 (CCSL 32:117–8).

rhetorical categories of Cicero and Quintilian and repurposes them.¹⁹ Indeed, the impact of Augustine’s rhetorical formation on his homiletic exegesis has long been noted. For example, the three parts of *sermo* 165 correspond to the three *genera dicendi* presented in *Doctr. chr.* Book 4.²⁰ The first part (§§ 1–5) is a technical explanation of Eph 3:13–18 in *genus submissum* (simple style). The second part (§§ 6–9) is an excursus in *genus temperatum* (ornate style). Finally, the third part (§9) is like a hymnic meditation in the *genus grande* (grand style) based on Eph 3:18.²¹ However, even if a preacher did not receive rhetorical training, he could still learn something about it by immersing himself in the Scriptures and the works of well-educated Christian authors.²² In fact, the styles of Paul,²³ Amos,²⁴ Cyprian, and Ambrose²⁵ all hold their own when they are compared to that of Cicero or Quintilian. In short, not only does Augustine consistently use his rhetorical training to explain the Bible in his sermons, but he also urges other preachers to do the same.

Exegetical Training

Augustine also received training in biblical exegesis. This is linked to preaching for two reasons: (1) while he had turned to Manichaeism in part because he did not understand some passages in the Old Testament,²⁶ it was while listening to the preaching of Ambrose in Milan in

¹⁹ For more on the relationship between classical and Augustinian rhetoric, see E. Fortin, “Augustine and the Problem of Christian Rhetoric,” *AugStud* 5 (1974): 85–100; and K. Pollmann, *Doctrina christiana. Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der christlichen Hermeneutik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustinus*, *De doctrina christiana* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1996).

²⁰ This sermon has traditionally been dated to September / October 417. See P.-P. Verbraken, *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de saint Augustin*, *Instrumenta patristica* 12 (Steenbrugge-The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 94; and G. Partoens, “La collection de sermons augustiniens *De verbis Apostoli*. Introduction et liste des manuscrits les plus anciens,” *RBén* 111 (2001): 330n48, both of which provide further bibliography.

²¹ G. Partoens, “Augustine on Predestination, Immortal Babies, and Sinning Foetuses. A Rhetorical Analysis of *Sermon* 165,” *AugStud* 45 (2014): 29–48. For other examples, see A. Verwilghen, “Rhétorique et prédication chez Augustin,” *NRTh* 120 (1998): 233–48; T. Martin, *Rhetoric and Exegesis in Augustine’s Interpretation of Romans 7:24–25A* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001); and L. Mechlinsky, *Der modus proferendi in Augustins Sermones ad populum* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2004), about *sermones* 12, 266, 240, 181. See also M. Glowasky, *Rhetoric and Scripture in Augustine’s Homiletic Strategy. Tracing the Narrative of Christian Maturation* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

²² *Doctr. chr.* 4.3.4 (CCSL 32:117–9).

²³ *Doctr. chr.* 4.7.11–14 and 4.20.39–44 (CCSL 32:123–7 and 144–51).

²⁴ *Doctr. chr.* 4.7.15–21 (CCSL 32:127–31).

²⁵ *Doctr. chr.* 4.21.45–50 (CCSL 32:151–7).

²⁶ *Sermo* 51.6 (CCSL 41Aa:16–7; *WSA* III/3:24, trans. Hill): “Yes, brothers; if you have no qualms about believing, there is nothing you need be ashamed of. I am speaking to you as one who was myself caught out once upon a time, when as a lad I wanted to tackle the divine Scriptures with the techniques of clever disputation before bringing to them the spirit of earnest inquiry. In this way I was shutting the door of my Lord against myself by my misplaced attitude; I should have been knocking at it for it to be opened, but instead I was adding my weight to keep it shut. I was presuming to seek in my pride what can only be found by humility. How much more fortunate are you people now! How serenely you learn, how safely, those of you who are still little ones in the nest of faith, being fed with spiritual food. But I, poor wretch, fondly imagining I was ready to fly, left the nest and fell to the ground before I

384 (when he was 30 years old) that Augustine “rediscovered” Scripture.²⁷ He then trained himself in biblical exegesis by reading the works of his exegetical predecessors.²⁸ (2) After his ordination to the priesthood, Augustine famously asked his bishop, Valerius, for time to study the Bible on his own in order “to tap its wisdom for ministry.”²⁹

The place of the Bible in the *Sermones* is thus shaped by these two formations, the initial formation in rhetoric and the later formation in exegesis.

The Biblical Preferences of Augustine the Preacher

By his own admission, Augustine only learned quite late in life to appreciate the Bible and the art of interpreting it. He also noted that for several years following his re-conversion to Christianity he knew the classical Latin authors, especially Virgil, Cicero, and Sallust – all of whom he read with care in his youth – better than he knew the Scriptures.³⁰ This detail helps to explain the statistical data scholars have collected regarding the presence of the Bible in the sermons. Among the *Sermones de Scripturis*, the most extensive section is that of the *Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew* (*sermones* 51–91).³¹ This is followed by several sermons on John’s Gospel (s 117 to *Denis* 12 [147A]) and a handful dedicated to Psalms (*sermones* 13–34). These sermons have been preserved alongside the *In Evangelium Johannis tractatus* (*Tract. Ev. Jo.*) and the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (*Enarrat. Ps.*). Additionally, the *Sermons on the Pauline Epistles* also form a distinct group (*sermones* 151–178). Hence, when considering not the lemmas of the sermons but, rather, the quotations that a particular liturgical reading or the pursuit of a particular theme brought to Augustine’s mind, the same passages tend to recur. This means that the books of the New Testament are cited more frequently than those of the Old. Psalms, Genesis, Exodus, Wisdom, and the books attributed to Solomon (Proverbs, Qohelet, Song of Songs) were cited with more

could fly. The Lord, though, in his mercy, to save me from being trampled to death by the passers-by, picked me up and put me back in the nest.”

²⁷ *Conf.* 6.4.6 (CCSL 27:77).

²⁸ About Augustine’s exegetical formation, see especially M. Dulaey, “L’apprentissage de l’exégèse biblique par Augustin,” *REAug* 48 (2002): 267–95; 49 (2003): 43–84; and 51 (2005): 21–65. Augustine also used Jerome’s work, especially on Hebrew names (*Doctr. chr.* 2.39.59 [CCSL 32:72–3]). Some questions still need to be answered about the sources of the Augustinian sermons, e.g., To what extent did Augustine borrow homiletic comments from others? If so, did he alter them so as to give his sources new meanings? Research would also benefit from a deeper analysis of the reception of Augustine’s homiletic interpretations in the centuries following his death. See, e.g., J. N. Hart-Hasler, “Bede’s Use of Patristic Sources. The Transfiguration,” in *StPatr* 28:197–204; and F. Dolbeau, “Bède, lecteur des sermons d’Augustin,” *Filologia Mediolatina* 3 (1996): 105–33.

²⁹ *Ep.* 21.3–4 (CSEL 34.1:51–52). Cf. M. Cameron, “Valerius of Hippo: A Profile,” *AugStud* 40 (2009): 16.

³⁰ *S. Dolbeau* 23 (374 *auct.*).19 (ed. Dolbeau, *Vingt-six*, 610).

³¹ *Cons.* 1.3 (CSEL 43:3). Augustine regards Matthew as the oldest of the Synoptics; thus, he treats Mark and Luke more briefly. See P.-M. Bogaert, “Ordres anciens des évangiles et tétraévangiles en un seul codex,” *RTL* 30 (1999): 298.

frequency than the books of the prophets (except Isaiah) and the historical books.³² However, studying the frequency of biblical citations in the sermons raises other important questions.

The Functions of Biblical Quotations in Augustine’s *Sermones ad populum*

What functions do these quotations serve? For Augustine, the objective of these quotations was one “of a psycho-pedagogical order: how does one take into account the word [of God] such that one draws closer to him?”³³ The *tria officia* (three tasks) of rhetoric, with which Augustine the rhetorician was familiar, offers some practical guidance.

(1) The comments on the Bible can be a source of teaching (*docere*; “to instruct”). For instance, one of the recurrent techniques for teaching an audience without boring them is to present a subject in the form of a *quaestio*.³⁴ This technique is especially prominent when dealing with two verses that appear to contradict each other. For Augustine, this cannot be since he was convinced that Scripture cannot contradict itself. A good example is provided by *sermo* 54.³⁵ In it, Augustine shows that the following precepts are not contradictory. Good works are to be done in order to give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:16). Therefore, the man who seeks only to serve God can act with confidence before men (Matt 6:1).³⁶

(2) Biblical verses are often inserted into contexts in which God is to be praised (*placere*; “to please” or “to satisfy”). In these cases, these verses are inserted using an ornate style. They tend to be featured on feast days and on occasions that stress the believer’s relationship with Christ. The sermons’ organization, style, and rhythm also tend to correspond with the mystery being explained.³⁷

³² These comments are based on the *Sermons on Matthew* (M. Pauliat, “Les citations bibliques dans les *Sermones in Matthaeum* d’Augustin d’Hippone,” unpublished communication at the Seminar “BIBLindex,” Laboratoire HiSoMA, Lyon, 2014). Nevertheless, pending an exhaustive study, studies of entire biblical books suggest that these conclusions can be extended, with caution, to all the *Sermones ad populum*. See especially the volumes of the *Biblia Augustiniana* published by A.-M. La Bonnardière; T.G. Ring, *Der Jakobusbrief im Schrifttum des heiligen Augustinus* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 2003); J.P. Yates, *The Reception and Use of the Epistle of James in the Writings of St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430)*, Ph.D. Dissertation, KU Leuven, 2005; and N. Potteau, *Augustin, lecteur et interprète du livre d’Isaïe*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Centre Sèvres, 2019.

³³ F. Dolbeau, “*Sermones (ad populum)*,” 257.

³⁴ A. Olivar, *La predicación cristiana antigua* (Barcelona: Herder, 1991), 825–7.

³⁵ This sermon’s date is uncertain (see CCSL 41Aa:127–8).

³⁶ See also, e.g., *sermo* 24, which treats Ps 82:2: “O God, be neither silent nor meek,” and Matt 11:29: “Learn from me that I am meek and humble of heart”; *sermo* 51, which treats both genealogies of Christ; *sermo* 70, which treats the “light yoke” of Christ (cf. Matt 11:28–30) and Christians’ trials (cf. 2 Tim 3:12; Matt 20:4; 2 Cor 6:45; 2 Cor 11:24); and *sermo* 149.11, which treats four exegetical questions.

³⁷ P.-M. Hombert, “La prédication sur le Verbe incarné dans les sermons d’Augustin pour Noël et l’Ascension. Rhétorique et théologie,” in *Tractatio Scripturarum. Philological, Exegetical, Rhetorical and Theological Studies on Augustine’s Sermons*, eds. A. Dupont, G. Partoens and M. Lamberigts (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 271–333.

(3) Nevertheless, the functions of *docere* and *placere* are subordinated to the all-important *movere* (“to move/persuade”), which is the third duty of the speaker.³⁸ Some quotations of Scripture support an exhortation that aims at transforming the listeners by convincing them that earthly life prepares them for eternity and that inner rebirth is necessary for salvation. Scripture provides the believer with a practical, moral standard of behavior which the preacher can, in turn, strive to instill in his listeners.³⁹ Interior attitudes, like humility⁴⁰ and interiority,⁴¹ both of which are rooted in charity,⁴² are translated into concrete acts, such as prayer,⁴³ fasting,⁴⁴ and almsgiving⁴⁵ (cf. Matt 6: 1–18) to which the congregation is then exhorted.⁴⁶ These actions also include rejecting avarice,⁴⁷ doing penance,⁴⁸ refraining from speaking ill of others,⁴⁹ rebuking a sinner in private,⁵⁰ and continence.⁵¹ To exhort his listeners to practice these virtues, Augustine often uses biblical characters as *exempla*. For example, Augustine invokes the figure of Job as part of a call for patience in sermons that followed the sack of Rome (in the summer of 410 CE),⁵² and in sermons describing Christ’s humanity and/or some of his typological predecessors.⁵³

³⁸ *Doctr. chr.* 4.12.27 (CCSL 32:135).

³⁹ For lists of recurring themes, see M. Pellegrino, “Introduzione. VI. La vita cristiana,” LIV–LX, and F. Dolbeau, “*Sermones (ad populum)*,” 255–63.

⁴⁰ E.g., *sermo* 70 and *Mai* 127 (70A) on Matt 11:28; *sermo* 160 and *Dolbeau* 26 on Col 2:8. See also A. Verwilgen, “Jesus Christ: Source of Christian Humility,” in *Augustine and the Bible*, ed. P. Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 301–12 (on Phil 2:6–11), and C. Mayer, “*Humiliatio, humilitas*,” *AugLex* 3:443–56.

⁴¹ P.T. Sanlon, *Augustine’s Theology of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

⁴² *S. Dolbeau* 11 (90A).3 (CCSL 41Ab:548) on Matt 22:40.

⁴³ *Sermones* 56–59 on Matt 6:9–13; *Mai* 26 (60A) on Matt 7:6–8; 80 on Matt 17:18–20. See also M. Pauliat, “Accorder Mt 6, 7–8 avec Mt 7, 7 et Lc 18, 1? Le *Sermo* 80 d’Augustin d’Hippone sur la prière dans la tradition patristique,” *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 41 (2020): 9–41; and T.J. van. Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart. Augustine’s Doctrine on Prayer* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008).

⁴⁴ B. Ramsey, “Ieiunium,” *AugLex* 3:474–81; and B. Marotta, “Il digiuno in alcuni *Sermones* di Agostino: modi e significati,” *Auctores nostri* 4 (2006): 590–7.

⁴⁵ Si 29:15 in *sermo* 14.1 (CCSL 41:185); Matt 7:7–11 in *sermo* 61; Matt 25:35–36 in *sermo* 37.29 (CCSL 41,472); 178.4 (PL 38:962–3); 236.3 (PL 38:1121); *Denis* 13 (305A).7 (MA 1:61–2); *s. Morin* 5 (358A).2 (MA 1:607); *s. Morin* 11 (53A).6 (CCSL 41Aa:116–8). See A. Kessler and J. U. Krause, “*Eleemosyna*,” *AugLex* 2:752–67.

⁴⁶ Especially in Lent. See *sermones* 206–10.

⁴⁷ *Sermo* 86 on Matt 19:21.

⁴⁸ *Sermones* 351–52 on Ps 50:11. See also R. Meßner, “*Paenitentia*,” *AugLex* 4:413–6.

⁴⁹ *Sermo* 55 on Matt 5:22.

⁵⁰ *Sermo* 82 on Matt 18:15–18, Pr 10:10 (LXX), and 1 Tim 5:20.

⁵¹ *S. Dolbeau* 12 with Matt 19:3–12 and 1 Cor 7:3–7, 27–33. See also A. Zumkeller, “*Abstinencia-continentia*,” *AugLex* 1:33–40.

⁵² *Sermo* 81.4 (CCSL 41Ab:305–7); etc. See A.-M. La Bonnardière, *Livres historiques*, EAA 11 (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1960).

⁵³ *Sermo* 81.4 (CCSL 41Ab:305–7); etc. See W. Geerlings, *Christus Exemplum. Studien zur Christologie und Christusverkündigung Augustins* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1978).

Thus, Augustine’s personality and training shape both his choice of biblical passages and the functions he assigns to the passages he has chosen. Another factor – the one to which we now turn – is the sermons’ liturgical context.

Scripture and the Liturgical Contexts of the *Sermones ad populum*

Most of the *Sermones ad populum* are linked, in one way or another, to a liturgical context. Often the starting point of a sermon is a biblical verse or theme as it is invoked during a particular Eucharistic liturgy.⁵⁴ This observation raises three questions: (1) Which Latin version of the biblical text did Augustine comment on? (2) How were the readings organized? (3) Does the presence of multiple readings influence either the nature or the number of the biblical comments that we find in Augustine’s homilies?

The Biblical Text

The first question is that of the biblical text. It is worth recalling that Augustine was familiar with many ancient Latin biblical translations which are collectively known as the “Old Latin.”⁵⁵ Among these, Augustine preferred the one known as the *Itala* for its (relative) clarity and for its fidelity to the original Greek.⁵⁶ In 403 CE, Augustine learned of Jerome’s recent (and ongoing) efforts to translate the Bible into Latin, efforts that would eventually provide the basis for the Vulgate. Augustine’s adoption of Jerome’s version was a gradual process.⁵⁷ It must also be borne in mind that medieval copyists sometimes replaced Old Latin quotations with the wording of the Vulgate simply because they were more familiar with the latter.

An important question thus becomes: Which version of the Latin Bible is found in the *Sermones ad populum*?⁵⁸ The answer depends on the status of the quotations. Some quotations we find there stem directly from the liturgical readings. Thus, even those sermons preached after 403 CE often comment on an Old Latin translation if such was still in use in the particular church in which Augustine was preaching. These Old Latin translations sometimes contained distinctly African

⁵⁴ The sermons on the Gospels were certainly preached during the liturgy. See M. Dulaey and M. Klöckener, “Euangelium,” *AugLex* 2:1144–50.

⁵⁵ P.-M. Bogaert, “La Bible d’Augustin. État des questions et application aux sermons Dolbeau,” in *Augustin prédicateur*, 33–47; H. A. G. Houghton, “Scripture and Latin Christian Manuscripts from North African,” in *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, eds. J. P. Yates and A. Dupont (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 15–50. Regarding the biblical canon, see T. Toom, “Scripture in Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*,” in *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, part I: *Commencement to the Confessiones of Augustine (ca. 180 to 400 CE)*, ed. J. P. Yates and A. Dupont, HBR 4.1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 321–42, esp. 324–9; and *supra*, R. V. Marin, “Scripture in the North African councils of 393, 397, and 418,” 000–000.

⁵⁶ *Doctr. chr.* 2.15.22 (CCSL 32:47–8). P.-M. Bogaert, “Les bibles d’Augustin,” *RThL* 37 (2006): 513–31; and T. Toom, “Scripture in Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*,” 327.

⁵⁷ H. A. G. Houghton, “Augustine’s Adoption of the Vulgate Gospels,” *NTS* 54.3 (2008): 450–64.

⁵⁸ See H. A. G. Houghton, “Scripture and Latin Christian Manuscripts,” and Id., *Augustine’s Text of John. Patristic Citations and Latin Gospel Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

motifs.⁵⁹ At the same time, not all of the biblical quotations we find in the sermons are drawn from the liturgical readings. Moreover, Augustine often quoted the Bible from memory in order to better explain the liturgical reading or the theme of that day’s homily. These latter quotations have often undergone a double process of “flattening” and “conflation” before being fixed in Augustine’s memory. Consequently, they give us access to what scholars sometimes call Augustine’s “mental text.” This mental text, originally based on the Old Latin versions, was gradually replaced in Augustine’s memory by a new mental text based on the Vulgate.

Nevertheless, it is rare (*a priori*) that a particular version of a quotation, whether from a *codex* or Augustine’s “mental text,” provokes a detailed comment.⁶⁰

The Organization of the Readings for the Liturgy

The organization of the readings and feasts of the liturgy also had an influence on the selections from the Bible that we find in the sermons. During Augustine’s lifetime, there was not yet a lectionary that grouped scriptural readings into a set liturgical order.⁶¹ Nonetheless, the *ordo* was beginning to be fixed for the feasts of the *temporale* (i.e., the liturgical feasts related to Christ, such as Christmas and Easter).⁶² On the feasts of the martyrs, the reading of their passion or a story of a miracle performed by the martyr often necessitated a short sermon.⁶³ On other days, the readings were freely chosen by the preacher,⁶⁴ or by the lector.⁶⁵ A given biblical book might also be the object of continuous reading and commentary.⁶⁶ Often a passage from the New Testament (and less frequently one from the Old) was read first, a psalm was sung, and the Gospel was read. Margoni-Kögler has listed the information provided by the sermons that are relevant to the

⁵⁹ H. A. G. Houghton, “Scripture and Latin Christian Manuscripts,” 44–45; and P.-M. Bogaert, “La Bible d’Augustin. État des questions et application aux sermons Dolbeau,” in *Augustin prédicateur*, 33–47.

⁶⁰ For Matt 10:16b, the lesson *astutus* explains why the content of Augustine’s commentaries on the verse are different from those of authors familiar with the *prudens* reading (cf., e.g., Gaudentius of Brescia, s 18.33 [CSEL 68:162]).

⁶¹ A.-G. Martimort, *Les lectures liturgiques et leurs livres* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992); and J.-P. Bouhot, “La lecture liturgique des Épîtres catholiques d’après les sermons d’Augustin,” in *La lecture liturgique des Épîtres catholiques dans l’Église ancienne*, eds. C.-B. Amphoux and J.-P. Bouhot, HTB 1 (Lausanne: Éditions de Zèbre, 1996), 269–75.

⁶² M. Margoni-Kögler, “Lectio,” *AugLex* 3:919–20.

⁶³ *Sermones* 94, 274, and 281. M. Margoni-Kögler, *Die Perikopen im Gottesdienst bei Augustinus. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der liturgischen Schriftlesung in der frühen Kirche* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 143–70.

⁶⁴ E.g. Augustine asked that a passage be reread because he had not finished explicating it. See *S. Wilmart* 12 (61A).1 (CCSL 41Aa:282), and *Mai* 126 (68 *auct.*).1 (CCSL 41Aa:437). Connections between the readings and the circumstances suggests that Augustine sometimes chose his readings. See, e.g., *sermo* 62, according to M. Pauliat, “*Non inueni tantam fidem in Israel*: la péricope de l’acte de foi du centurion (Mt 8, 5–13) interprétée dans les *Sermones* 62 et s. *Morin* 6 d’Augustin d’Hippone,” in *StPatr* 98:91–102.

⁶⁵ Augustine sometimes waited until he knew which passage was going to be read (s. 52.1 [CCSL 41Aa:58]); sometimes he even chose the theme of the sermon during the reading (s. 71.8 [CCSL 41Ab:24]).

⁶⁶ M. Schrama, “*Prima lectio quae recitata est*: The Liturgical Pericope in Light of Saint Augustine’s Sermons,” *Augustiniana* 45 (1995): 151–2n57.

readings that preceded them.⁶⁷ From an exegetical point of view, it often proves interesting to specify the reading that the preacher has chosen to explain, the reasons for his choice,⁶⁸ and the way in which his commentary was influenced by the joint explanation of the liturgical readings,⁶⁹ and/or by the feast being celebrated.⁷⁰

Some *Sermones ad populum* were delivered in extra-Eucharistic contexts. These included the Liturgy of the Hours,⁷¹ catechetical instruction to those preparing for baptism,⁷² and occasional events conducted apart from the liturgy in the strict sense such as “lectures.”⁷³ Even in these sermons, however, biblical quotations are numerous.

The organization of the liturgical year and the structure of the Eucharistic celebration therefore had a clear and definite impact both on which biblical texts were commented upon and on the scope of the comments provided.

The Organization of Biblical Quotations

As noted above, in the sermons, not all the quotations are taken directly from the liturgical readings. Another important question is: How are these quotations organized? In the *Sermones ad populum*, continuous, verse-by-verse expositions of a passage are rare.⁷⁴ It is also rare that Augustine explains all of that day’s liturgical readings in his sermon.⁷⁵ Typically, he brings together the response of the psalm or some verses from the readings of the day with other biblical passages. The goal of this technique is to provide a spiritual exegesis, similar to what the

⁶⁷ M. Margoni-Köglér, *Die Perikopen*, who helpfully observes that the precise readings were not always easy to identify. E.g., thanks to similar wording and/or conflation it can be difficult to know which Synoptic Gospel the preacher has in mind. See M. Pauliat, “Les *Sermones Mai 25* et *Morin 7* d’Augustin d’Hippone, des *Sermones in Matthaeum?*,” in *Le livre scellé*, ed. L. Mellerin, Cahiers de Biblindex 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 251–71.

⁶⁸ M. Pellegrino “Introduzione,” XXIII–VII.

⁶⁹ E.g., in *sermo* 78 on the Transfiguration the exegesis of Matt 17:1–9 is influenced by the reading of 1 Cor 13:1–12, which had preceded it, and Psalm 18, which had probably been sung.

⁷⁰ M. Pontet, *L’exégèse*, 157.

⁷¹ A. Zwinggi, “Der Wortgottesdienst im Stundengebet,” *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 20 (1970): 129–40.

⁷² M. Pignot, *The Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 210–20. In no way does this imply that the Bible is absent. On the contrary, during the *Traditio* of the *Pater Noster*, Matt 6 was commented on.

⁷³ E.g., *sermo* 10 (a *quaestio*) and *sermones* 240–242 about Porphyry. See I. Bochet, “Résurrection et réincarnation. La polémique d’Augustin contre les platoniciens et contre Porphyre dans les Sermons 240–242,” in *Ministerium Sermonis. Philological, Historical and Theological Studies on Augustine’s Sermones ad Populum*, eds. G. Partoens, A. Dupont and M. Lamberigts (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 267–98, esp. 280.

⁷⁴ The case of *sermones* 153–56 is unique. The different ways that Phil 3:3–16 was treated in *sermo* 169, which offers a verse-by-verse commentary, and *sermo* 170, which is structured as an answer to a *quaestio*, is, according to A. Eelen, “Augustine and Phil. 3,3–16: One bible fragment, several exegetical approaches,” *SacEr* 50 (2011): 227–63, best explained by the fact that a more sophisticated audience was in attendance for *sermo* 169.

⁷⁵ E.g. *sermones* 112 and 308. Augustine sometimes observes that it is necessary to choose which readings he will comment on. See, e.g., *sermo* 45.1 (CCSL 41:515); s. *Denis* 25 (72A).1–2 (CCSL 41Ab:108–11); s. *Wilmart* 12 (61A).1 (CCSL 41Aa:282); as well as *sermones* 266.8 (PL 38:1229) and 347.1 (PL 39:1524).

Alexandrians often did.⁷⁶ It also freely associates a wide variety of different exegetical approaches, including the search for: (1) the literal meaning, which is often treated very quickly; (2) the typological, Christological, or ecclesiological meanings; (3) one or more concrete and moral applications; and (4) the eschatological import (if any). These groups of quotations are sometimes referred to as “scriptural orchestrations.”⁷⁷ In these “scriptural orchestrations,” the verses echo each other because: (1) they deal with the same theme; (2) they form part of the same liturgical mystery;⁷⁸ or (3) they use identical “hook words” that suggest a connection or that make a proposed connection easy to follow. These scriptural orchestrations may also be characteristic of a given period or a particular controversy. Thus, they are sometimes used by scholars to establish a *terminus post/ante quem* for a particular sermon’s date.

While this method presents several risks,⁷⁹ the liturgical context of the sermons had an impact on the role played by the Bible. Furthermore, the scriptural orchestrations allow for an easy transition to another dimension of the use of the Bible in the sermons, namely, the quotations and the comments that appear in overtly polemical contexts.

The Bible in the Polemical Sermons

Many sermons refute heresies because the preacher takes on the role of “the defender of the right faith and the hammer of error.”⁸⁰ Several chapters of the present volume are dedicated to elucidating the role played by Scripture in various controversies. Thus, what follows is limited to the question of the frequency with which these emphases recur as Augustine switched from one literary genre to another.⁸¹

In Augustine’s extant corpus, some polemical interpretations are found only in polemical treatises, i.e., they are not also found in the sermons. For example, the young Augustine used the pericope that records the cursing of the barren fig tree (Matt 21:18–22) against the Manicheans. The Manicheans believed that trees have a “rational soul” (*anima rationalis*) that is capable of hearing and seeing. Based on these principles, the Manicheans claimed that “the suffering Jesus” (*Jesus patibilis*) hangs from any wood that may be found in nature, including trees.⁸² Consequently, the Manicheans were forbidden to kill or injure any plant or small animal. For his part, Augustine emphasized the literal meaning of this pericope. He argues that, since Jesus himself

⁷⁶ M. Simonetti, “Sulla tecnica esegetica di alcuni sermones vetero testamentari di Agostino,” *Augustinianum* 25 (1985): 185–203; and A. Isola, “L’esegesi biblica del *Sermo* 286 di Agostino,” *VetChr* 23 (1986): 267–81.

⁷⁷ F. Châtillon, “Orchestration scripturaire,” *Revue du Moyen Âge latin* 10 (1954): 210–9.

⁷⁸ M. Pontet, *L’exégèse*, 157.

⁷⁹ Cf. n.9 *supra*.

⁸⁰ *Doctr. chr.* 4.4.6 (CCSL 32:119; *WSA* I/11:302, trans. Hill). For details, see F. Dolbeau, “*Sermones (ad populum)*,” 259–60 and 317–65.

⁸¹ The volumes of the *Biblia Augustiniana* also make it possible to compare exegeses.

⁸² *Faust.* 20.2 (CSEL 25/1:536). About the “seal of the hands,” see F. Decret, *Aspects du manichéisme dans l’Afrique romaine : les controverses de Fortunatus, Faustus et Felix avec saint Augustin*, EAA 41 (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1970), 302–3.

made the fig tree wither, killing a tree is not homicide. Therefore, for Augustine, the Manicheans belief in “the seal of the hands” has no basis.⁸³ This specific interpretation was not developed in any sermon that has been preserved.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, most of the exegeses that occur in the polemical compositions are also found in sermons. This is largely because Augustine did not soften his discourse against opponents of the *Catholica*.⁸⁵ However, while the themes in Augustine’s treatises and sermons are very similar, they often do have a different tone and/or serve different functions. This is because the polemical comments in the sermons were not only intended to refute opponents – even if heretics were sometimes in the congregation.⁸⁶ Augustine’s sermons also aimed at fortifying and equipping his audience against doctrinal errors.⁸⁷ This is true for his polemics against Manichaeans, Donatists, Pelagians, Jews, and various pagans.

Sermons Against the Manicheans

The Manicheans rejected the Old Testament and, from the New Testament, focused only on those passages that they considered divinely inspired.⁸⁸ They also explicitly rejected “contradictory” passages of Scripture. This is precisely what the Manichean Adimantus does in his *Disputationes*. Notably, in *sermones* 1, 2, 12, 50, 71, and 82 Augustine refutes Adimantus in the same way and by using the same techniques as those he employed in his anti-Manichaean treatises.⁸⁹

Sermons Against the Donatists

The anti-Donatist sermons are distinguishable from the anti-Donatist treatises and letters more by their tone than by their content or their biblical exegesis.⁹⁰ Three illustrative examples are: (1) The exegesis of Matt 12:33 (“Either make the tree good, and the fruit will be good; or make the

⁸³ Mor. eccl. et mor. Manich. 2.17.54–55 (CSEL 90:136–7); and *Adim.* 22 (CSEL 25.1:181).

⁸⁴ For additional examples, see M. Pauliat, *Augustin exégète et prédicateur*, 570–1.

⁸⁵ *S. Dolbeau* 4 (299A auct.).3 (ed. Dolbeau, *Vingt-six*, 513–4); and *s. Dolbeau* 26 (198 auct.).45 (ed. Dolbeau, *Vingt-six*, 401).

⁸⁶ *S. Guelf.* 17 (229O).4 (MA 1:498); *s. Dolbeau* 25 tit. (ed. Dolbeau, *Vingt-six*, 248); and Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 15 (H. T. Weiskotten, ed., 74–77).

⁸⁷ See, e.g., *Sermones* 12.2 (CCSL 41:165–6) and 126.8 (*RBén* 69 [1959]:186).

⁸⁸ In this sense Manichean exegetical principles represent one of the earliest attempts at biblical criticism. See M. Tardieu, “Principes de l’exégèse manichéenne du Nouveau Testament,” in *Les règles de l’interprétation*, ed. M. Tardieu (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 123–46. On the Manichean presence in North Africa, see V. H. Drecoll, “Manichaei,” *AugLex* 3:1132–59.

⁸⁹ *Retract.* 1.22.1 (CCSL 57:63–4). See J. A. van den Berg, *Biblical Argument in Manichaean Missionary Practice. The Case of Adimantus and Augustine*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean studies 70 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 75–95 and 119–21.

⁹⁰ P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l’Afrique chrétienne depuis les origines jusqu’à l’invasion arabe*, t. 7. *Saint Augustin et le Donatisme* (Paris: Culture et civilisation, 1923), 146–88, which is focused on the sermons. See also I. Tholen, *Die Donatisten in den Predigten Augustins. Kommunikationslinien des Bischofs von Hippo mit seinen Predigthörern* (Berlin: Lit, 2010).

tree evil, and the fruit will be evil. Because the tree is recognized by its fruit”). Donatist exegetical principles helped to further the conceit that biblical trees signified the church’s ministers. Similarly, they saw in biblical fruit images of the baptized.⁹¹ For Augustine, by contrast, a tree represents the human person and a tree’s fruit a person’s deeds. A person’s fruit will be good if she chooses the good and it will be bad if she chooses evil.⁹² (2) The numerous commentaries on pericopes which evoke the idea of the *ecclesia permixta* (e.g. Matt 13:24–30’s image of the tares among the wheat,⁹³ or Luke 5:1–11’s miraculous catch of fish).⁹⁴ While the Donatists defended the purity of the true church, Augustine comments on these pericopes to show that the church is already thoroughly mixed since its membership is so obviously composed of both the good and the wicked. This mixed membership will only be sorted at the Last Judgment. (3) The Song of Songs. In sermons as well as in treatises and in letters, contrary to the standard Donatist reading and application of the Song of Songs, Augustine affirms that the church is not limited to Africa but is spread throughout the entire world.⁹⁵

Sermons Against the Pelagians

Regarding the anti-Pelagian sermons, A. Dupont writes that “other contexts do not offer fundamentally different insights ... although they do exhibit differences in the representation and thematization of the same insights.”⁹⁶ This is also true of the many biblical comments through which Augustine seeks to correct those who, like Pelagius, would exalt human ability at the expense of divine grace.⁹⁷ For example, in *sermo* 55, which probably dates to ca. 415 CE,

⁹¹ Chrysostomus latinus, *sermo* 18 (*RBén* 107 [1997]: 260).

⁹² *C. litt. Petil.* 1.8.9 (CSEL 52:8–9); 2.6.12–13 (CSEL 52,26–27); *Cresc.* 3.11.14 (CSEL 52:420); and *sermo* 292.5–7 (PL 38:1323–6). See M. Pauliat, “L’arbre et ses fruits (Mt 12, 33),” in *BA* 77/B:419–22. The answer here is the same as that given to the Manicheans, who understood the verse differently (M. Simonetti, “Matteo 7, 17–18 (= Luca 6, 43) dagli gnostici ad Agostino,” *Aug* 16 [1976]: 271–90).

⁹³ C. E. Straw, “Augustine as Pastoral Theologian. The Exegesis of the Parables of the Field and Threshing Floor,” *AugStud* 14 (1983): 129–51.

⁹⁴ John 21:1–14; cf. *sermo* 251.

⁹⁵ See M. Cameron, “Augustine’s Use of the Song of Songs Against the Donatists,” in *Augustine, Biblical Exegete*, 99–127; A. Dupont and M. Dalvit, “From a martyrological ‘*tabernacula pastorum*’ towards a geographical ‘*in meridie*’. Augustine’s Representation and Refutation of the Donatist Exegesis of Sg. 1,6–7,” *RHE* 109/1–2 (2014): 5–34. In the latter, the authors offer a possible reconstruction of the Donatist interpretation of *in meridie* (Ct 1:6–7). This new reading is different from that presented by Augustine in *Serm.* 46 and places the question of martyrdom at the heart of the Donatist movement. *Mutatis mutandis*, Augustine’s anti-Pelagian sermons also become more understandable through the identification of this doctrine. See e.g., A. Dupont, *Gratia in Augustine’s Sermones ad Populum during the Pelagian Controversy. Do Different Contexts Furnish Different Insights?* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), and A. Dupont, *Preacher of Grace. A Critical Reappraisal of Augustine’s Doctrine of Grace in his Sermones ad Populum on Liturgical Feasts and during the Donatist Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), both of which argue this thesis.

⁹⁶ A. Dupont, *Gratia in Augustine’s Sermones ad Populum*, 641.

⁹⁷ E.g. M.-F. Berrouard, “L’exégèse augustinienne de Rom., 7,7–25 entre 396 et 418 avec des remarques sur les deux premières périodes de la crise ‘pélagienne’,” *Recherches augustinienes* 16 (1981): 101–96; P.-M. Hombert, “Augustin, prédicateur de la grâce au début de son épiscopat,” in *Augustin prédicateur*, 217–45; and V. H. Drecoll,

Augustine refutes the exegesis of Jas 3:8 that Pelagius offered in his *De natura*.⁹⁸ In *sermo* 55, Augustine repeats an idea that he already expressed in *De natura et gratia* (*Nat. grat.*) – his polemical response to *De natura* – but he applies it differently: here man’s inability to stop swearing is used to inspire fear (i.e., *pathos*), before Augustine goes on to conclude with a prayer for the grace that is essential for obeying (any of) God’s commandments.⁹⁹

Sermons Against Jews and Pagans

Regarding his polemics against Jews¹⁰⁰ and pagans,¹⁰¹ it is worth noting that Augustine’s taste for antithesis led him to develop an exegesis built on the opposition between the “two groups of people.”¹⁰² Examples of this opposition include: (1) the donkey and the ox in Isa 1:3;¹⁰³ (2) the Good Shepherd’s two flocks in John 10:16;¹⁰⁴ (3) the synagogue official’s daughter and the hemorrhagic woman in Matt 9:18–26;¹⁰⁵ and (4) the two blind men in Matt 20:30–34.¹⁰⁶ Also important for him are Matt 15:24 (“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”), which

“*Gratia*,” *AugLex* 3:226–33. The latter includes a list of biblical verses that were prominent in the controversy as well as details about how and where they were commented on.

⁹⁸ M. Pauliat, *Augustin exégète et prédicateur*, 481–502. The demonstration remains valid even if we retain the traditional dating of this sermon to sometime “before 411.” Two studies have shown that it anticipates anti-Pelagian themes: P.-M. Hombert, “Augustin, prédicateur de la grâce,” 218 and 240; and J. P. Yates, “Is the Tongue Tamable? James 3:8 and the Date of Augustine’s *Sermo* 180,” *REAug* 63 (2017): 81–98.

⁹⁹ As with the anti-Donatist sermons, a study of anti-Arian sermons would probably yield a similar result. Such study remains to be done, but see S. González, *La preocupación arriana en la predicación de San Agustín* (Valladolid: Estudio Agustiniano, 1989); U. Heil, “Antiarianisches in den neutestamentlichen Predigten von Augustinus. Eine Problemanzeige,” in *Tractatio Scripturarum*, 373–403; and H. J. Sieben, “Augustins Auseinandersetzung mit dem Arianismus außerhalb seiner explizit antiarianischen Schriften,” in *Augustinus. Studien zu Werk und Wirkungsgeschichte* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2013), 191–228.

¹⁰⁰ On references to the Jews in the *sermones*, see J. van. Oort, “Jews and Judaism in Augustine’s *Sermones*,” in *Ministerium Sermonis*, 243–65. For a more comprehensive analysis of the place of the Jews in Augustine’s thought and theology, see P. Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews. A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); and A. Massie, *Peuple prophétique et nation témoin. Le peuple juif dans le Contra Faustum manicheum de saint Augustin*, EAA 191 (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 2011).

¹⁰¹ Concerning Augustine’s arguments against the pagans, with particular attention to the biblical verses used, see I. Bochet, “Résurrection et réincarnation.”

¹⁰² *Sermo* 137.6 (PL 38:757–8).

¹⁰³ Cf. *Sermo* 375.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Sermo* 138.5 (PL 38:765–6); *s. Mai* 26 (60A).2 (CCSL 41Aa:255); and *Exp. Gal.* 31 (CSEL 84:96–99). See M.-F. Berrouard, “Deux peuples, un seul troupeau, un unique Pasteur. Ecclésiologie de saint Augustin et citations de Jean 10:16,” in *Augustine. Second Founder of the Faith*, eds. J. C. Schnaubelt and F. Van Fleteren (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 275–301.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *sermones* 62.5–7 (CCSL 41Aa:299–302); 77.6–8 (CCSL 41Ab:203–6); *s. Mai* 25 (63A).3 (CCSL 41Aa:338–9); *s. Mai* 95 (375C).6 (MA 1:345); *s. Morin* 7 (63B).1–3 (CCSL 41Aa:345–6); *s. Guelf.* 23; *s. Guelf.* 24; *qu.* 7.49.26 (CCSL 33:372); and *C. mend.* 27 (CSEL 41:507–8). See M. Dulaey, “La guérison de l’hémorroïsse (Matt 9, 20–22) dans l’interprétation patristique et l’art paléochrétien,” *REAug* 35 (2007): 103–8.

¹⁰⁶ Matt 20:30–34; cf. *sermo* 88.10 (CCSL 41Ab:474–6).

maintains the pre-eminence of Israel over the nations,¹⁰⁷ and Eph 2:20 (Christ as the “cornerstone”), which recalls the bond between Jews and Gentiles that Christ made possible.¹⁰⁸

For the most part, then, the biblical exegeses and commentary that we find in the polemical sermons are identical to what we find in the treatises, even though they do sometimes have a different tone or function precisely because they are addressed to a specific congregation or assembly.

The Interaction between Biblical Commentary and the Audience

The interaction between the preacher and the congregation is another important point that impacts the role played by the Bible in Augustine’s sermons. This interaction raises three questions: (1) When offering biblical comments, how does Augustine deal with the diversity of the audience? (2) How does he position himself relative to the audience? (3) How does Augustine the preacher take into account the feedback he receives from the audience?

Biblical Commentary and Audience Diversity

Augustine’s audience included a wide variety of people: men and women, young and old, rich and poor, dedicated Christians and nominal Christians (i.e., those who remained open to the arguments of other religious groups or of heretics, etc.).¹⁰⁹ Augustine believes that both the sermons and the biblical commentary they contain must be addressed to everyone in the audience. Moreover, Augustine believed that sermons are also to be oriented towards the edification of the ecclesial community.¹¹⁰ He expressed this conviction via the following principle: “If it seems to you that you have understood divine Scriptures, or any part of them, in such a way that by this understanding you do not build up (*ita ut non aedificet*) this twin love of God and neighbor, then you have not yet understood them.”¹¹¹ The verb *aedificare* seems to allude to Eph 4:15–16, a passage in which Paul claims that the church (as the Body of Christ) *builds* itself *up* in charity. To participate in this “ecclesial construction project,” Augustine develops several distinct exegetical strategies.¹¹²

Inclusive Exegesis

When a verse seems to be addressed only to a part of the audience (the elderly, the rich, women, etc.), Augustine would often develop an inclusive exegesis of it that, after he addressed one faction,

¹⁰⁷ *Sermones* 77.8 (CCSL 41Ab:205) and *s. Mai* 26 (60A).2 (CCSL 41Aa:254).

¹⁰⁸ *Sermones* 4.18 (CCSL 41:33) and *s. Mai* 26 (60A).2 (CCSL 41Aa:255). See also P. Borgomeo, *L’Église de ce temps dans la prédication de saint Augustin*, EAA 48 (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1972), 75–86.

¹⁰⁹ M. Pontet, *L’exégèse*, 55–62.

¹¹⁰ M. Pauliat, “Commenter l’Écriture pour construire la communauté ecclésiale. L’exemple des *Sermones ad populum* d’Augustin d’Hippone,” *Augustiniana* 72 (2022): 33–66.

¹¹¹ *Doctr. chr.* 1.36.40 (CCSL 32:29; *WSA* I/11:124, trans. Hill).

¹¹² N. Kamimura, “Augustine’s *Sermones ad Populum* and the Relationship Between Identity/ies and Spirituality in North African Christianity,” in *Praedicatio Patrum. Studies on Preaching in Late Antique North Africa*, eds. G. Partoens, A. Dupont and S. Boodts, IPM 75 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 429–60.

he could then extend in order to apply to everyone in attendance. For instance, when a verse calls for conversion, younger people may think that they have time to convert, that conversion is urgent only for the old. Augustine, however, reminds both the young and the old of the urgency of conversion and the danger of procrastination: even if the Lord, in his benevolence, accepts the workers until the eleventh hour,¹¹³ no one knows which hour will be his last. And, even if God has promised forgiveness to everyone who turns to him, he has promised no one that he will live to see tomorrow.¹¹⁴

In this way, Augustine shows both the rich and the poor that God is their commonwealth. Moreover, he shows them that humility is the true way to live in poverty and that everybody, whether rich or poor, will know death. These differences do not, however, exempt the rich from almsgiving or the poor from being patient.¹¹⁵

Augustine also exhorts both men and women to imitate Mary’s motherhood.¹¹⁶ They can do so provided they understand this exhortation spiritually: the “virginity of their faith” will result in a “spiritual motherhood,” one that leads other Christians to the baptismal font.¹¹⁷

Totalizing Discourse

To gather the assembly – especially the less fervent Christians who remained open to the arguments of pagans and heretics – Augustine resorts to a “totalizing discourse:” a discourse in which Christian interpretations of the world and Scripture subjugates or excludes others.¹¹⁸ This is especially the case with regard to the sack of Rome (cf. *supra*).¹¹⁹ Augustine’s biblical expositions aimed at building a community in opposition to the perils that surrounded it. To this end, through the sermons preached after news of Rome’s fate reached North Africa, Augustine

¹¹³ *Sermo* 87 on Matt 20:1–16.

¹¹⁴ *S. Caillau* 2, 5 (73A).2 (CCSL 41Ab:141); and *sermo* 82.14 (CCSL 41Ab:3423–5).

¹¹⁵ *Sermo* 85.6 (CCSL 41Ab:394–6). See also H. Rondet, “Richesse et pauvreté dans la prédication de saint Augustin,” in *Saint Augustin parmi nous*, eds. H. Rondet, C. Morel, M. Jourjon and J. Lebreton (Le Puy: Éditions Xavier Mappus, 1954), 114–34; and P. Vismara Chiappa, *Il tema della povertà nella predicazione di Sant’Agostino* (Milano: A. Giuffrè, 1975).

¹¹⁶ In some African churches, they were segregated. See, e.g., *Civ.* 2.28 (CCSL 47:63) and *s. Dolbeau* 2 (359B).5 (F. Dolbeau, ed., *Vingt-six*, 330, and comments on 320 and 633).

¹¹⁷ *S. Denis* 25 (72A) on Matt 12:46–50. See M. Pauliat, “Mt 12, 46–50 dans la prédication d’Augustin. Exégèse inclusive et questions de genre,” *REAug* 65 (2019): 73–98.

¹¹⁸ A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire. The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 2–3, 57–58, and 217–21. Through this “totalizing discourse,” Christians interpret reality by assuming within the discourse all other interpretations “to achieve a totalizing interpretation in which secular discourse could be subsumed and brought within the universal Christian interpretative field” (p.58).

¹¹⁹ Five sermons were certainly preached relatively soon after the sack of Rome in 410: *s. Denis* 24 (113A); *sermones* 81; 296; 105; and *Exc. urb.* (Saint Augustin, *Sermons sur la chute de Rome*, trans. J.-C. Fredouille [Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 2004], 9–17). Three others (*s. Denis* 21 [15A], *s. Denis* 23 [33A], and *sermo* 25) mention difficult situations and were perhaps preached at the same time (T. S. de Bruyn, “Ambivalence within a ‘Totalizing Discourse’. Augustine Sermons on the Sack of Rome,” *JECS* 1 [1993]: 405–21).

integrated the objections of the pagans in order to better refute them, and in order to urge the faithful to disassociate themselves from the values of the pagans.¹²⁰

In sum, according to Augustine, the Bible contributes to the edification of the audience in charity. The biblical comments in the sermons extend this mission in two different ways: either inclusive exegesis or a totalizing discourse.

Augustine's Positioning as a Preacher in Relation to the Audience

If we now turn to consider Augustine's position in relation to his audience, it quickly becomes clear that the bishop sees himself as a disciple of Christ who is actively listening to the Word of God along with his audience. As he does so, he also actively teaches them how to interpret Scripture for themselves.

The Preacher as a Member of the Audience

The church, as a school of faith, sees Christ as her teacher. As members of this school, Augustine and his hearers are fellow students.¹²¹ Nevertheless, among the believers, the preacher bears such heavy responsibilities that Augustine can state publicly that would have preferred to lay his burden down.¹²² He is the servant who is responsible for the salvation of his brothers,¹²³ and, more particularly, for the distribution of the "bread of the Word" (cf. John 6).¹²⁴ Hence, for Augustine, if his teaching conforms with the church's faith,¹²⁵ then the preacher's words may be said to come from God.¹²⁶ The preacher receives his authority from Christ's authority, and this

¹²⁰ T. S. de Bruyn, "Ambivalence," (discussing *sermones* 81, 105 and 296).

¹²¹ *Sermo* 134.1 (PL 38:742-3; *WSA* III/4:341, trans. Hill): "Your graces know that all of us have one Teacher, and that under him we are fellow disciples, fellow pupils. And the fact that we bishops speak to you from a higher place does not make us your teachers; but it's the one who dwells in all of us that is the Teacher of us all. He was talking to all of us just now in the gospel, and saying to us what I am also saying to you; he says it, though, about us, about both me and you: 'If you remain in my word' – not mine, of course, not Augustine's, now speaking, but his, who was speaking just now from the gospel: 'If you remain in my word,' he says, 'you are truly my disciples.'" Cf. *sermones* 23.2 (CCSL 41:309); 261.2 (SPM 1:88); etc.; G. Madec, "L'école du Christ. Menus propos sur la prédication d'Augustin," *La Maison-Dieu* 227 (2001): 67-78.

¹²² *Sermo* 82.15 (CCSL 41Ab:345-6). See I. Bochet, "L'expérience spirituelle du prédicateur selon saint Augustin," *Connaissance des Pères de l'Église* 74 (1999): 46-53.

¹²³ *Sermo* 46.2 (CCSL 41:530; *WSA* III/2:264, trans. Hill): "We bishops ... are also in charge of you, and as such will render God an account of our stewardship." And *Doctr. chr.* 4.30.63 (CCSL 32:167; *WSA* I/11:249, trans. Hill): "when you are toiling in word and teaching for the people's eternal salvation (*qui pro aeterna hominum salute in verbo et doctrina laborat*);" cf. *Ep.* 261.2 (CSEL 57:618).

¹²⁴ *Serm.* 95.1 (PL 38:581; *WSA* III/4:19, trans. Hill): "When I expound the holy Scriptures to you, it's as though I were breaking bread to you. ... So, what I am dishing out to you is not mine. What you eat, I eat; what you live on, I live on." See also Y. Congar, "Les deux formes du pain de vie dans l'Évangile et dans la Tradition," in *Sacerdoce et laïcité devant leurs tâches d'évangélisation et de civilisation* (Paris: Cerf, 1962), 123-59; W. M. Gessel, "Gemeinschaft durch die Speise des Wortes nach Augustinus," *REAug* 12 (1966): 241-5; and J. Pintard, "Presencia del único pastor en la predicación, según san Agustín," *Augustinus* 26 (1981): 221-6.

¹²⁵ *Doctr. chr.* 4.15.32 (CCSL 32:138-9).

¹²⁶ *Sermo* 51.1 (CCSL 41Aa:9; *WSA* III/3:24, trans. Hill): "While we may safely assume that what I have to say to you is God's word and not mine.;" and *sermones* 71.38 (CCSL 41Ab:70-71); 93.1 (CCSL 41AB:598-9); etc. See

authority is granted to the preacher regardless of whether his life confirms to what he preaches or not (cf. Matt 23:2–3).¹²⁷ He is like the sower who sows and waters, but he must also be keenly aware that it is God alone who causes the growth and who generates the harvest.¹²⁸ In this regard, Augustine willingly applies 1 Cor 3:7 (“He who plants is nothing, he who waters is nothing: only God counts, he who makes it grow”) to his preaching.¹²⁹ For Augustine, a sermon is ineffective if the “Inner Teacher” does not “teach inwardly” when the preacher’s words strike the ears of the listeners.¹³⁰ For Augustine, the preacher, like all other Christians, is a hearer of the Word long before he is its dispenser.

The Preacher as a Teacher of Scriptural Interpretation

Augustine considers his preaching to be an extension of the Scriptures.¹³¹ Like the Word of God itself, preaching is an act of mediation that is designed to pass away;¹³² in heaven, there is neither book nor teaching. Preaching is also not an end in and of itself. Therefore, in his sermons, Augustine not only comments on the Bible, but he also explains the rules and techniques that will enable the listeners to interpret the Scriptures for themselves. As he explains in the Prologue to *Doctr. chr.*, it is commendable for a teacher to read stories to his pupils, but it is even better if he teaches them how to read.¹³³ The *Sermones ad populum* testify to this pedagogical approach: Augustine consistently exhorts his listeners to engage the Scriptures for themselves.¹³⁴

also W. Wieland, *Offenbarung bei Augustinus* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1978), 202–5; D. Dideberg, “Inspiratio,” *AugLex* 3:634; and F. Schnitzler, *Zur Theologie der Verkündigung in den Predigten des hl. Augustinus* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 107. Nevertheless, Augustine also explicitly distinguishes his own words from those of inspired Scripture, see, e.g., *Ep.* 147.39 (CSEL 44: 313–4) and *Ep.* 148.15 (CSEL 44:345). See also C. Horn, “Numerus,” *AugLex* 4:226–36.

¹²⁷ M. Pauliat, “*Cathedram Moysi sedent* (Mt 23, 2). La représentation de l’autorité du prédicateur dans les *Sermones in Matthaeum* d’Augustin d’Hippone,” in *Les mises en scène de l’autorité dans l’Antiquité*, ed. Laboratoire ERAMA (Nancy: ADRA, 2015), 201–13.

¹²⁸ *Sermo* 73.3 (CCSL 41Ab:129; *WSA* III/3:292, trans. Hill) explains Matt 13:4–30 with: “Yes of course, it’s the Lord who sows the seed, but we are his workmen. But be good soil.”

¹²⁹ *C. litt. Petil.* 3.54.66 (CSEL 52:220–1). See also P.-M. Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches*, 242. The image of fruitfulness that results from the combination of grace and preaching recurs frequently, particularly when verses referencing agriculture are being considered. Cf. M. Pauliat, *Augustin exégète et prédicateur dans les Sermons sur Matthieu*, EAA 205 (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 2020), 337–51.

¹³⁰ *Tract. ep. Jo.* 3.13 (BA 76:174–8). See also I. Bochet, “Grâce et médiations humaines,” in BA 11/2:433–8.

¹³¹ A. D. R. Polman, *The Word of God according to St. Augustine*, trans. A. J. Pomerans (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961); D. Pirovano, “La parola di Dio come ‘Incarnazione’ del Verbo in Sant’Agostino,” *Aug* 4 (1964): 77–104; and F. Schnitzler, *Zur Theologie der Verkündigung*.

¹³² *Ep.* 266.3 (CSEL 57:649). For Augustine, in the economy of salvation, Scripture and its explanations are mediations willed by God (*Doctr. chr.*, *Proem.* 6 [CCSL 32:4]). However, like all other mediations, they are destined to disappear. Cf. *Doctr. chr.* 1.39.43 (CCSL 32:31; *WSA* I/11:125, trans. Hill): “People supported by faith, hope and charity, and retaining a firm grip on them, have no need of Scriptures except for instructing others.” See also I. Bochet, “L’Écriture et le Maître Intérieur selon Augustin,” *RSR* 72 (1998): 20–37.

¹³³ *Doctr. chr.*, *Prooemium.* 9 (CCSL 32:5–6).

¹³⁴ *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 34.1 (CCSL 36:311). Indeed, it does not seem that it was simply either humility or a rhetorical *topos* that compelled Augustine to conclude sermons on difficult issues by saying that he leaves it to his listeners to

This is the case, for example, in *sermones* 89, 133, and *Dolbeau* 10 (162C).¹³⁵ This three-sermon series was most probably preached ca. 396–398 CE.¹³⁶ Rather than forming part of a cycle of liturgical readings, they are related to Augustine’s tense dispute with Jerome over the absolute truthfulness of the Scriptures.¹³⁷ In these sermons, Augustine teaches hermeneutical principles he took to be fundamental,¹³⁸ including: (1) the absolute truthfulness of the Scriptures (i.e., that their divine author cannot lie); (2) the sincerity of the biblical characters; and (3) the criteria used to discern when one should transition from the literal to the figurative sense.¹³⁹

Beyond these hermeneutical principles, several secondary principles were explained in the sermons. Some are theological: (1) that comments on biblical passages must align with the *regula fidei*;¹⁴⁰ (2) that Scripture must be understood “spiritually” (*spiritaliter*), not “carnally” (*carnaliter*);¹⁴¹ (3) that Scripture must be explained by Scripture since, despite their obvious differences, all the books of the Bible form a unity because they were all written by the same divine author;¹⁴² (4) that the Old Testament is united to the New Testament in the mystery of Christ;¹⁴³ (5) that the Old Testament, since it is fulfilled by Christ,¹⁴⁴ must be understood in an allegorical or

do better. He was convinced that, after hearing good sermons and being helped by the Holy Spirit, some listeners will be able to find better and more profound meanings in Scripture. Cf., e.g., *sermo* 51.35 (CCSL 41Aa:49–50).

¹³⁵ In the Mainz Lectionary as well as in the *Indiculum*, these three sermons follow one another: 133 = Mainz 26 = X⁶. 112; *Dolbeau* 10 (162C) = Mainz 27 = X⁶. 113; and 89 = Mainz 28 = X⁶. 114. They were, however, preached in an order different from the one in which they were copied. See F. Dolbeau, “Quatre sermons prêchés par Augustin au début de son épiscopat,” *Augustiniana* 66 (2016): 7–62.

¹³⁶ See the chronological discussion in F. Dolbeau, “Quatre sermons,” 12–30, in which he refutes the effort of P.-M. Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches*, to date these sermons to 405. For *sermo* 133, see 341–6; for *s. Dolbeau* 10, 347–54; and for *sermo* 89, 355–8.

¹³⁷ According to F. Dolbeau “Quatre sermons,” 15–21, these homilies should be read in connection with the *De mendacio*, which dates to 394–395.

¹³⁸ M. Pauliat, *Augustin exégète et prédicateur*, 279–300.

¹³⁹ *Sermo* 89.4 (CCSL 41Ab:513; *WSA* III/3:442–3, trans. Hill): “So then, brothers and sisters, I have to tell you, and suggest to you to the best of my ability, which the Lord endows me with for your sakes, and convince you about something you must hold on to as a kind of rule in all the scriptures. Everything that is said or happens is either to be taken in its proper sense (*aut per proprietatem cognoscitur*), or it signifies something symbolically (*aut significat aliquid figurate*), or at all events it has each: both its proper sense and its symbolic meaning (*aut certe utrumque habet, et propriam cognitionem, et figuratam significationem*). I have proposed three possibilities, and I must give you examples, taken of course from the holy scriptures.”

¹⁴⁰ *Sermones* 7.3–4 (CCSL 41:71–73); 41.6 (CCSL 41:500–1); and 265.9 (PL 38:1222–3).

¹⁴¹ *Sermones* 6.1 (CCSL 41:62) and 25.1–2 (CCSL 41:335).

¹⁴² *Sermo* 170.1 (CCSL 41:335–6).

¹⁴³ *Sermo* 300.3–5 (PL 38:1377–8).

¹⁴⁴ *Sermones* 2.7 (CCSL 41:14–16) and 8.1 (CCSL 41:79–80). See also M. Dulaey, “Sur quelques points d’exégèse figurée de l’Ancien Testament dans les sermons de Mayence,” in *Augustin prédicateur*, 247–66.

typological way;¹⁴⁵ (6) that the Gospels also have a spiritual meaning;¹⁴⁶ and (7) that, when the Scriptures speak about Christ, some passages speak about Christ before the Incarnation, i.e., according to his divinity (e.g., John 1), others speak about Christ incarnate, i.e., according to his assumed humanity (e.g., John 14:28. 20:17), and still others speak about the whole Christ (*totus Christus*), i.e., about the church as Christ’s body, with Christ as the head and with believers collectively comprising his members (e.g., Gen 2:24; Isa 61:10).¹⁴⁷ Augustine holds to still other hermeneutic principles that are philological. These include: (1) respect for the letter of the text;¹⁴⁸ (2) taking into account the presence of literary devices such as metonymy¹⁴⁹ and arithmology,¹⁵⁰ in the Bible; and (3) making allowance for variation in the spiritual sense of the Scriptures.¹⁵¹

At the same time, Augustine is convinced that intellectual knowledge alone is not sufficient for interpreting Scripture. He often insists that the exegete must have faith.¹⁵² This is particularly the case when he interprets Isa 7:9 (LXX; “Unless you believe, you shall not understand”).¹⁵³ For Augustine, faith is not hyper-critical of the biblical text.¹⁵⁴ On the contrary, faith is expressed when one humbly prays to understand Scripture. This faith is often also expressed in the course of sermons dedicated to verses such as Matt 7:7b (“seek, and you shall find”).¹⁵⁵ Additionally, faith

¹⁴⁵ *S. Dolbeau* 31 (272B).1 (*REAug* 44 [1998]:196) and *s. Mai* 14 (350A).2 (MA 1:293).

¹⁴⁶ *Sermones* 98.3 (PL 38:592–3) and 124.1 (PL 38:686–7).

¹⁴⁷ *S. Dolbeau* 22 (ed. Dolbeau, *Vingt-six*, 553–78).

¹⁴⁸ *Sermones* 2.7 (CCSL 41:14–16) and 252.1 (PL 38:1171).

¹⁴⁹ *Sermo* 12.2 (CCSL 41:165–6).

¹⁵⁰ *Sermones* 8.17 (CCSL 41:95–96); 51.32–35 (CCSL 41Aa:46–49); 125.7–10 (PL 38:694–7); and *Denis* 25 (72A).2 (CCSL 41Ab:110). See M. Pontet, *L’exégèse*, 278–303; A. Quacquarelli, “Le scienze e la numerologia in St. Agostino,” *Vetera Christianorum* 25 (1988): 359–79; and C. Horn, “Numerus,” *AugLex* 4:234–6.

¹⁵¹ *Sermo* 73.2 (CCSL 41Ab:128–9; *WSA* III/3:292, trans. Hill): “In parables and comparisons one thing can be called by many names. ... Isn’t Christ a lamb? Isn’t Christ also a lion? Among animals, wild and domesticated, what is a lamb is a lamb, what’s a lion is a lion; each is Christ. ... More than that, it can happen in comparisons that things which are miles apart from each other are called by the same name. What could be further apart from each other than Christ and the devil? Yet Christ is called a lion, and so is the devil. Christ as a lion: The lion has conquered, from the tribe of Judah. The devil as a lion: Do you not know that your adversary the devil goes about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. So, he’s a lion and he’s a lion; he’s a lion for its courage, he’s a lion for its ferocity; he’s a lion to conquer, he’s a lion to harm.”

¹⁵² *Serm.* 43.1 (CCSL 41:508).

¹⁵³ *Serm.* 89.4 (CCSL 41Ab:512; *WSA* III/3:442, trans. Hill): “Let’s say what the evangelist wrote, and when we’ve said it, let us understand it. But in order to understand, let us first believe. For unless you believe, you shall not understand (Isa 7:9 [LXX]), said the prophet.” See E. TeSelle, “Crede ut intellegas,” *AugLex* 2:116–9.

¹⁵⁴ *Serm.* 6.8 (CCSL 41:66–67).

¹⁵⁵ *Serm.* 51.1 (CCSL 41Aa:9–10) and 66.1 (CCSL 41Aa:408; *WSA* III/3:210, trans. Hill): “May the Lord help me to solve [this question] for you, as he has solved it for me.” Cf. *s. Morin* 15 (306C).4 (MA 1:649). For more on Augustine’s use of Matt 7:7, see M. Pauliat, “*Quaerite, et inuenietis*. Recherches sur l’exégèse augustinienne de Matt 7, 7,” in *Nihil veritas erubescit*, eds. J. Delmulle, C. Gerzaguët and C. Valette, IPM 74 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 73–87.

must be completed by a life that is congruent with the texts being commented on.¹⁵⁶ This principle aligns with both Plotinus¹⁵⁷ and the Fathers.¹⁵⁸ However, if the interpreter seeks to understand Scripture with faith and humility (as well as to build up and to live by charity) he may pursue his exegeses without fear of falling into error.¹⁵⁹

In sum, Augustine the preacher sees himself as a Christian just like the other members of the congregation. However, he also sees himself as a Christian who is at the service of his sisters and brothers. As a result, he often shows his audience how they too can interpret the Bible.

Reactions of the Audience to the Biblical Comments

The sermons do not preserve only the words of the preacher. They also preserve the reactions of the audience. These reactions tell us both whether the listeners understood Augustine's explanations and how Augustine responded to their reactions.

Did the Congregation Understand Augustine's Biblical Commentary?

Some of the exegetical comments in the sermons are complex.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Augustine did not hesitate to try to explain difficult biblical passages when he thought his comments might be profitable to his congregation. In his view, when the Scriptures seem opaque it is sign of a deeper and more salutary mystery which is an integral part of the divine economy. Such scriptural darkness stimulates closer reading and deeper study of the Scriptures while also fostering a sense of humility in the interpreter.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Augustine will occasionally offer exegetical explanations that he is uncertain about.¹⁶² Were his hearers able to comprehend these nuanced efforts?

R. MacMullen claimed that the difficulty of the sermons was due to the quality of the assemblies, which consisted mainly of the rich and the educated.¹⁶³ This assertion has failed to convince many scholars (including this chapter's author), not least because it is at odds with what

¹⁵⁶ *Doctr. chr.* 1.10.10 (CCSL 32:12) and *Serm.* 91. See also M.-F. Berrouard, "*Mores perducunt ad intellegentiam*," in BA 72:733, and I. Bochet, "Herméneutique platonicienne ou herméneutique chrétienne?," in BA 11/2:471–3.

¹⁵⁷ Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6.9 (LCL 440:260–1): "You must become first all godlike and all beautiful if you intend to see God and beauty;" cf. *Enn.* 1.2.1 (LCL 440:126–31).

¹⁵⁸ L. Perrone, "Iniziazione alla Bibbia nella letteratura patristica," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 12 (1991): 1–27.

¹⁵⁹ *Doctr. chr.* 1.35.39–37.41 (CCSL 32:28–30). See also G. Madec, "Le principe Charité," in BA 11/1:237–41 and I. Bochet, "Le cercle herméneutique," in BA 11/2:438–49.

¹⁶⁰ *Sermo* 52 on Matt 3:13–17 and the Trinity; *sermo* 71 on sin against the Spirit in Matt 12:31–32; and *sermones* 151–6 on Rom 7–8. See also E. TeSelle, "Exploring the Inner Conflict: Augustine's Sermons on Romans 7 and 8," in *Collectanea Augustiniana. Augustine, Biblical Exegete*, eds. by F. Van Fleteren and J. C. Schnaubelt (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 313–45.

¹⁶¹ *Sermones* 8.18 (CCSL 41:97–98); 51.5–6 (CCSL 41Aa:15–17); *Mai* 26 (60A).1 (CCSL 41Aa:253); 71.10 (CCSL 41Ab:27); 270.7 (PL 38:1243–4); *Dolbeau* 22 (341 *auct.*).22 (F. Dolbeau, ed., *Vingt-six*, 574); etc.

¹⁶² *Sermo* 265.9 (PL 38:1222–3).

¹⁶³ R. MacMullen, "The Preacher's Audience (AD 350–400)," *JTS* 40 (1989): 503–11.

we now know about that era’s oral culture.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, many of the sermons make Augustine’s concern for his less educated listeners clear when one observes the care with which he employed various pedagogical tools,¹⁶⁵ stylistic devices – e.g., repetition, images, *sententiae*, puns – and linguistic variations.¹⁶⁶ In fact, if we are to believe the reactions preserved by the stenographers, Augustine’s profound care and concern for the less educated in his audiences was sometimes integral to his more complex sermons.¹⁶⁷

How Does the Preacher Adapt His Comments to the Audience’s Feedback?

It seems that most of the audience understood Augustine’s sermons and reacted commensurately. It also seems that Augustine took these reactions into account in adapting his sermons and biblical commentaries “on the fly.” In the categories of rhetoric, this adaptation is labeled *aptum* (or *decorum*). According to Cicero, *aptum* was the marker of a good, forensic speech.¹⁶⁸ This concept is related to ethics (i.e., the relationship with the audience), aesthetics (i.e., the *dispositio* and the organization of discourse), and rhetoric (i.e., the adaptation of a style to the genre and purpose of the discourse). Along with these formal aspects, to be *aptum* requires certain congruencies including: the one between the subject (*res*) and the words (*verba*), the one between the speaker and the audience, and the one between the style of discourse, the demands of the audience, and the circumstances.¹⁶⁹ Hence, *aptum* as a quality is difficult to measure because it

¹⁶⁴ E.g. W. Kelber, “Language, Memory, and Sense Perception in the Religious and Technological Culture of Antiquity and the Middle Ages,” *Oral tradition* 10 (1995): 409–50; and M.-Y. Perrin, *Civitas confusionis. De la participation des fidèles aux controverses doctrinales dans l’Antiquité tardive (début III^e s. – c. 430)* (Paris: Nuvis, 2017), 168/510. For further references, see S. Rosenberg, “Beside Books. Approaching Augustine’s Sermons in the Oral and Textual Cultures of Late Antiquity,” in *Tractatio Scripturarum*, 426–7. According to P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 339–58, the term *pauperes* covers two different social realities: beggars and a “class.” Poverty is thus defined in relative terms: whenever one group possesses fewer assets than others, the former can be said to be in poverty.

¹⁶⁵ *S. Dolbeau* 11 (90A).3 (F. Dolbeau, ed., *Vingt-six*, 60).

¹⁶⁶ M. Banniard, “Variations langagières et communication dans la prédication d’Augustin,” in *Augustin prédicateur*, 73–93; M. Banniard, *Viva voce. Communication écrite et communication orale du IV^e au IX^e siècle en Occident latin*, EAA 25 (Paris: Institut des Études Augustiniennes, 1992), 65–104; and E. Auerbach, *Lingua letteraria e pubblico nelle tarda antichità latina e nel Medioevo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1974³), 33–79 (on *sermo humilis*).

¹⁶⁷ E.g. *sermo* 52.20 (CCSL 41Aa:77; *WSA* III/3:60, trans. Hill): “Really and truly, I’m telling your graces, I undertook to discuss this matter and put it across with the greatest trepidation; I was afraid, you see, that I might delight the wit of the clever, and bore the less clever to tears. But now I can see that you have not only grasped what I have said, listening so attentively and understanding so readily, but you have also flown ahead of what I was going to say. The Lord be thanked.”

¹⁶⁸ Cicero, *Orat.* 70–1.123 (LCL 342:356–9.396–9) and Augustine, *Ep.* 138.5 (CSEL 44:129–30).

¹⁶⁹ R. Dodaro, “Literary *decorum* in Scriptural Exegesis. Augustine of Hippo, *Epistula* 138,” in *L’esegesi di Padri latini. Dalle origini a Gregorio Magno*, SEAug 68 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2000), 159–74.

resides neither in the words nor in the text but in the interaction between the speaker and the audience.¹⁷⁰

Concerning the Bible, Augustine’s sermons are *aptum* in two ways or on two levels: (1) in the choice of verses and themes treated;¹⁷¹ and (2) in the treatment those chosen verses and themes receive. In this regard, Augustine assigns prayer the primary role, and regards it as even more important than preaching.¹⁷² From this perspective, the audience is no longer simply the target of the preacher’s comments. Rather, in a given context, the audience provides feedback, and the preacher attends to this feedback in order to maximize the impact of his arguments and of his comments on the biblical text. For example, after the sack of Rome, the agony of Jesus is no longer a lesson in patience to be imitated, but, rather, a consolation granted to those who suffer.¹⁷³ Furthermore, scandals are no longer defined *a priori*. Instead, a painful situation becomes scandalous if and only if the one who undergoes it consents to sin. Otherwise, a painful situation becomes a positive opportunity for purification and spiritual growth.¹⁷⁴ Consequently, Augustine often sees in new situations new opportunities to walk alongside his congregation as their needs change and develop. As he does so, Augustine also takes advantage of these opportunities to develop new expositions which he otherwise may never have elaborated.

Conclusion

The role of the Bible in Augustine’s *Sermones ad populum* encompasses numerous aspects. Even though Augustine’s techniques and interests are often far removed from our own, “one can be struck by Augustine’s ability to weave links between the texts and bring them to life.”¹⁷⁵

The central issue is the adaptation of biblical commentaries to homiletical contexts. Although this issue is still being debated by scholars, the points developed in this chapter offer some important indicators: if a given adaptation is not always to be located in the themes discussed, it usually can be located in how those themes are treated. Indeed, Augustine’s rhetorical training and his pastoral sensitivity lead him to take the congregation that was listening to him seriously: he

¹⁷⁰ R. Dodaro, “*Quid deceat uidere* (Cicero, *Orator* 70). Literary Propriety and Doctrinal Orthodoxy in Augustine of Hippo,” in *Orthodoxie, christianisme, histoire*, ed. S. Elm, Collection de l’École française de Rome 270 (Rome: École française de Rome, 2000), 57–81.

¹⁷¹ A.M. Kleinberg, “*De agone christiano*: the preacher and his audience,” *JTS* 38 (1997): 16–33. Some of these choices have already been characterized and discussed (cf. *supra*, “Bible, Preaching and Faith: Polemical Sermons”).

¹⁷² *Doctr. chr.* 4.15.32 (CCSL 32:138–9).

¹⁷³ Matt 26:36–46 in *sermones* 31.3 (CCSL 41:392–3) and *Guelf.* 27 (313D).3 (MA 1:533–4). See also É. Rebillard, “Interaction between the Preacher and his Audience. The Case-Study of Augustine’s Preaching on Death,” in *StPatr* 31:86–96.

¹⁷⁴ Matt 18:7 in *sermo* 81. See M. Pauliat, “*Si manus tua scandalizat te, amputa!* L’exégèse de Mt 18, 7–9 dans le *Sermo* 81 d’Augustin d’Hippone,” in *Cristianesimo e violenza: gli autori cristiani di fronte a testi biblici ‘scomodi’*, SEAug 44 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2018), 351–9.

¹⁷⁵ F. Dolbeau, “*Sermones* (ad populum),” 258 (my translation).

does not dilute his explanations by choosing simple topics; rather, he makes every effort to ensure that he is understood by everyone; he gives his listeners enough data to refute heretics; he takes into account the diversity of the audience in order to build up the congregation as a whole; he pays attention when they provide feedback *in medias res*; and he explains to them how to interpret Scripture for themselves. Perhaps this final point is the most striking when one reflects on the place of the Bible in Augustine’s sermons: Augustine knows that his role as a preacher is important, but he also knows that his role is not an end in itself. For him, preaching is an extension of Scripture. In other words, the Bible is not only the topic of the sermons, but it is also the matrix that shapes them.¹⁷⁶ Like the Bible, sermons belong to the economy of salvation; like the Bible, they will disappear when everyone has unmediated access to the Word. For Augustine, even the most beautiful biblical interpretation in an ideal sermon has only one purpose: to advance the relationship between the listener and God in the here and now even as it fades away as that relationship advances toward eternity.

¹⁷⁶ *Catech.* 4.8 (CCSL 46:128–9, my translation): “In these two commandments of the love of God and neighbor are summarized not only all the Law and the Prophets ... but also all the works of the divine Letters which were later written for our salvation and entrusted to posterity. ... Take this love, therefore, as the end that is set before you, to which you are to refer all that you say, and, whatever you narrate, narrate it in such a manner that he to whom you are discoursing on hearing may believe, on believing may hope, on hoping may love.” Cf. *Doctr. chr.* 1.35.39–1.40.44 (CCSL 32:28–32).

Marie PAULIAT, “Scripture in Augustine’s *Sermones ad Populum*”, dans *The Bible in Christian North Africa: Part II: Consolidation of the Canon to the Arab Conquest (Ca. 393 to 650 CE)*, edited by Jonathan P. Yates and Anthony Dupont, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2024, p. 31-60. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110492613-003>

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