
The new book of Peter T. Sanlon on Augustine’s theology of preaching brings an important contribution to the various ways the *Sermones ad populum* of the Bishop of Hippo could be read and understood. The *Sermones* which represent an important part of Augustine’s literary production and cover all the years of his pastoral activities, hitherto neglected, have become the object of many interesting studies over the last two decades and even beyond. The author of the book under review, however, knows only very few researches that focus on the theological convictions which shaped Augustines’ preaching. Sanlon unremittingly insists that the *Sermones ad populum* are not given due attention and also argues in the Preface to the book that «When the *Sermones ad Populum* are mentioned in academic studies, it is often in a surprisingly dismissive manner» (xix). Yet «When academics marginalise the *Sermones*, the real Augustine is not represented accurately» (xx).

He, therefore, sets out to provide a meaningful hermeneutic of Augustine’s preaching, which may be used to interpret his *Sermones ad Populum*. So Sanlon hopes to make an “original contribution” (xxi) in a number of ways: to suggest two hermeneutical keys for reading the *Sermones ad populum*, and to test them for their explanatory power in three areas of Augustine’s preaching. He identifies *Interiority* and *Temporality* as the guiding principles susceptible to help understand Augustine’s theological acumen in his preaching, and applies these keys to the case study of Riches and Money, Death and Resurrection, and Relationships in the *Sermones ad populum*. The book falls into seven chapters.
The first chapter offers a historical survey of the context within which Augustine preached. The chapter contemplates aspects such as the North African culture and its Church with a particular attention to the commonalities and the distinctives of Augustine’s preaching compared to other relevant preachers. It also highlights the role of architecture, liturgy, rhetoric and theological convictions. Affirming that order and passion manifested themselves in North African culture generally, the author contends that passion is evident in Augustine’s devotion to extemporary preaching, which allowed room for his love of God and listeners to be expressed in prayerful meditation and spontaneous interaction.

In chapter two, the author analyzes the issues raised by pagan oratory, highlighting how Augustine’s experiences of oratory prepared him to formulate his views on preaching. Five pagan orators, Gorgias, Plato, Cicero, Quintilian and Apuleius are held to have influenced Augustine. All these orators sought to transform and change their listeners through the power of the authority of their speech. Augustine’s Christian preaching, says Sanlon, utilised and transcended this secular background. He forged his Christian doctrine of preaching by utilizing a number of Christian teachings which he developed around the *loci* of *Interiority* and *temporality*. Mainly in his new approach, Scripture, not philosophical truth nor rhetorical persuasion, motivated, shaped and facilitated Augustine’s use of these *loci*. He establishes a connection in his preaching between the Holy Spirit, love and the Scriptures. Love was central to the desired transformation his preaching aimed at inculcating, and he is ever conscious of the facts that this love is infused in his listeners by the Holy Spirit. Hence his repeated use of *Rom. 5:5* in the *Sermones ad populum*. Sanlon brings to the chapter to an end affirming that as a Christian preacher, Augustine was convinced that Scriptures were peculiarly suitable to being used by God to shape the *Interiority* and *Temporality* of listeners.

The third chapter explores Augustine’s assumptions about the task of preaching, as expressed in *De Doctrina christiana* which makes an important contribution to our overall appreciation of Augustine’s preaching (p. 69). The emphasis of the author in this chapter is on the undergirding doctrinal assumptions of Augustine’s preaching in the light of *De Doctrina christiana*, with the intention to show that his approach does more than simply assessing the extent
to which Augustine was indebted to pagan rhetoric. He asserts that Augustine’s doctrine of preaching as expressed in the *De Doctrina christiana* was built upon a radical focus on *Interiority* and *Temporality*, which enabled him to explain how a preacher could understand Scripture by stepping into its temporal narrative and being taught by the Inner Teacher with Scripture as major exponent in this process. Sanlon suggests at the end situate the origin of the *De Doctrina christiana* around the period of the writing of the *Confessiones* as the most evocative aspect of Scripture’s role in shaping his doctrine of preaching. He acknowledges, though, that the theory is impossible to prove but it is very likely that the composing the *Confessiones* pushed Augustine in the direction of a kind of contemplative obsession with Scripture.

Chapter 4 which explores the hermeneutical keys: *Interiority* and *Temporality* in connection with Scripture which Augustine used to change his listeners. To provide a definition of *Interiority*, the author considers four major features of Augustines theological enterprise (self-reflection, the Inner Teacher, the Heart and hierarchical ordering), and ends up with the assertion that a definition of interiority posits an interior reality which is created to be not in isolation but in intimate relationship with God. Drawing on Augustine’s doctrine of use and enjoyment (*uti-frui*), Sanlon brings to bear the relation between *Interiority* (enjoyment) and *Temporality* (use) in the *Sermones*. He equally outlines some aspects of Augustine’s theology such as Created Matter, Time, Journeying which contributes to his concern with *Temporality*. All the efforts of Augustine to preach in the framework of *Interiority* and *Temporality* is upheld by his use of the Scriptures. So the *Sermones* add an existential and congregational aspect to Augustine’s approach to Scripture. He finally outlines how parts of the major themes he examined in relation to *Interiority* and *Temporality* have been addressed by other modern commentators such as Coleen Hoffman Gowans, Paul Ricoeur and Charles, whose contributions needed some addendum Sanlon brings from the study of the *Sermones*.

In chapters 5 to 7, the Author applies the hermeneutical keys examined above to the study of themes which were of particular importance in Augustine’s preaching mainly, Riches and Money, Death and Resurrection, and Relationships. Through the inductive explanation he offers in theses three chapters, Sanlon succeeds in
showing that *Interiority* and *Temporality* are valid terms with which to understand Augustine’s approach to preaching and Augustine’s approach to use Scripture in changing listeners were shaped by an undergirding hermeneutic which focused upon *Interiority* and *Temporality*. Sums up his findings in chapter 8 which is the conclusion before highlighting the contemporary value of our study and further avenues of research.

This work is interesting and convincing in the identification of two hermeneutical keys to the *Sermones* which have not been used before. The author painstakingly proves the validity of his approach by applying his hermeneutical keys to particular aspects of Augustine’s preaching. However Sanlon’s text, while a solid piece of scholarly research, does have a glaring problem. It shows signs of unfamiliarity with modern scholarship on Augustine’s preaching. Indeed, at the present stage of researches, one cannot carry out a serious study on the *Sermones ad populum* ignoring the monumental works edited by Partoens G., A. Dupont, M. Lamberigts (eds.), Ministerium sermonis. *Philological, Historical and Theological Studies on Augustine’s Sermones ad Populum*, Instrumenta patristica et mediaevalia 55, Brepols, Turnhout 2009, and Idd. (eds), *Tractatio Scripturarum philological, exegetical, rhetorical, and theological studies on Augustine’s sermons*, Instrumenta patristica et mediaevalia 65, Brepols, Turnhout 2012. Likewise various other works by Italian, French and German scholars who in the last decades have contributed to the study of the *Sermons* from the theological point of view are not mentioned in Sanlon’s book. His bibliography consists almost entirely of English language literature.

There are no errors in the text of this great monograph except some footnotes that appeared under the following page to where they were supposed to fall (note 4 appears on page xx, and note 12 on page xxii, note 33 on page 9, etc.). This is certainly due some mistakes in type-setting. Sanlon’s book most unquestionably finds its place among the most remarkable contributions to the study on Augustine’s *Sermones ad populum* since it provides new hermeneutical keys to reading them.

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