

Introduction

The Foundation of Humility for Augustine's Sermons

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It is my pleasure to introduce *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine's Sermons*. International authors, both established and rising, have contributed sixteen chapters that give reliable treatments in a comprehensive overview of this burgeoning field of study. The volume's divisions and chapter headings lead us through (Part I) Augustine's pastoral task of preaching sermons; (Part II) the scriptural readings and feasts of the liturgical year as guides to his thoughts and rhetorical strategies; and (Part III) the major themes that emerge.

When we hear Augustine's preaching today, we do so not literally standing among the people of Roman North Africa. Augustine preached in churches, after scriptural passages were read, and he expounded upon them before turning his people's attention to the Lord in prayer through further liturgical action, such as in the Eucharistic celebration. The extant sermon collection offers priceless insights into Augustine himself, one of the most influential persons in Christian theology and intellectual history. The sermons also mirror for us the people of his day, whose thoughts and actions he reflects in his preaching. Historians have a rich resource now being mined in scholarship.

Moreover, many people today find that Augustine's preaching has far more to offer than merely historical value. Augustine seems, at times, to speak to us, wherever we are and in whatever condition we are found. Just as innumerable readers enjoy overhearing Augustine's prayer to God in his *Confessions*, being caught up in a reflection on the meaning of their life before the Creator, so an increasing number of people are finding themselves struck by listening in on his vibrant preaching. For example, readers of Augustine's *Confessions* will most likely hear similarities between that great work, begun soon after Augustine became Bishop of Hippo, and his preaching on God saying through the psalmist, "I will accuse you" (Ps 49:3). Augustine expounds on that verse from the divine perspective:

And what shall I do to you when I accuse you? *I will set you before your own face* (Ps 49:21). Now when you do wrong you think you are good because you are unwilling to see yourself. You blame others, you do not look at yourself; you accuse others, you do not think about yourself. You place others before your eyes, you place yourself behind your back. When I accuse you, I do the opposite. I take you from behind your back, and place you before your eyes. You will see yourself, and grieve over yourself. (s. 17.5; CCSL 41, 241; WSA III/1, 369, alt.)

This Introduction will first undertake an overview of Augustine's sermons as well as opportunities for the worldwide academy and Church in studying and using this North African preaching today. Given the extensive significance of patristic preaching for our knowledge of early Christianity, much more can be done.¹ Then we will consider in brief the volume's sixteen chapters to prepare us for the rather complex enterprise of studying hundreds of texts from so long ago. Finally, the Introduction lays the foundation for the rest of the volume with attention to the humility that undergirds the three parts of this volume: (1) humility in Augustine's pastoral task through his life as a preacher and the goal of the sermons that have reached us through these many centuries; (2) humility in how he preached on Scripture, whether in direct comments on biblical books or used in celebration of liturgical feasts and topics of faith; and (3) humility's foundational role among his homiletic themes.

AUGUSTINE'S SERMONS: OVERVIEW AND OPPORTUNITIES

Augustine's homiletic corpus runs to over 900 extant texts.² With the English translations by Dominican Father Edmund Hill, Benedictine Sister Maria Boulding, and others of Latin editions available to them, what has been preserved from Augustine's vast corpus of preaching lies accessible to nonexperts in the English-speaking world in unprecedented fashion.³ Yet the complexity of the records can be daunting,

¹ For my overview of patristic preaching, with a chapter on Augustine, see Hofer 2023.

² For helpful summaries of Augustine's homiletic corpus, see Boodts and Dupont 2018, and Boodts 2019, which I consulted for some statistics and descriptions in these few paragraphs on the different sets of homiletic materials.

³ Notes of caution are in order. Ideally, translations are made from the best critical editions. These translators did not always have such editions available to them, as critical editions continue to be made of Augustine's sermons. One of the most recent is

and so an initial overview is in order. Later we will benefit from Shari Boothts's detailed analysis of the transmission and collections of the sermons in Chapter 3.

Most abundantly, we have about 570 *Sermones ad populum* (*Sermons to the People*).⁴ Thanks to the Benedictines of Saint-Maur in the 1680s, the *Sermons to the People* were ordered in consecutive numbering according to the following divisions: on the Scriptures; on the time of liturgical seasons; on the saints, and on diverse topics, before a separate division of sermons of doubtful authenticity. Sermons subsequently discovered have been assigned their place in the Maurist ordering with letters following numbers. Let us take examples of the ordering and insertion of sermons. S. 16 treats the Psalm verse, "Who is the one who wants life and desires to see good days?" (Ps 33:13).⁵ Sermons 1–15 deal with earlier passages in the biblical canon, and s. 17, as we saw in the previous section, treats Psalm 49. Between s. 16 and s. 17 we find s. 16A on Psalm 38, "Hear my prayer and my petition, O Lord" (Ps 38:13), and s. 16B on Psalm 40. Both were found after the order was established, and rich discoveries have continued since the later 20th century, such as the Dolbeau sermons and the Erfurt sermons.⁶ S. Dolbeau 20 on Psalm 17, for example, is also known as s. 14A. A sermon of great length against the pagans (and Donatists) given on New Year's Day, s. Dolbeau 26, was given the number s. 198, as it contains

a new edition of s. 313B, a sermon to honor St. Cyprian, in Dolbeau 2023. Also, Hill knew Augustine's preaching as few ever have, and he thought it best to offer a translation in a "colloquial, informal style" (WSA III/1, 164). The great writer from the American South Flannery O'Connor reviewed Hill's *Nine Sermons of St. Augustine on the Psalms*. Her review finds Hill's translation to be "determinedly folksy" and recalls that the translator underscored the surprisingly conversational tone of Augustine the preacher. In this July 25, 1959 review in *The Bulletin*, O'Connor says of Hill: "He apologizes in advance to those readers who find the translation altogether too colloquial. An apology is in order." See O'Connor 1983, p. 74. Some Augustinian specialists concur with O'Connor. Commenting on his own editorial work on Hill's translation of the *Homilies on the Gospel of John* in WSA III/12, Allan Fitzgerald writes, "As part of the extensive review of the original translation, done by Father Edmund Hill, contractions have been removed so as to avoid the impression that Augustine spoke in an off-handed or informal manner" (p. 38).

⁴ Dolbeau 2019–2021, col. 244. The exact count of the *Sermons to the People* varies in scholarship.

⁵ In his translations, Hill prefers to use the Masoretic Hebrew numbering of the Psalms found in most bibles today. Boulding's translations of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* and much scholarship retain the Psalm numbers that Augustine used. I prefer to retain the numbering system of the Psalms used by Augustine as commonly found in Greek and Latin bibles.

⁶ Dolbeau 1996, and Schiller, Weber, and Weidmann 2008–2009.

a fragment already published as s. 198; this sermon may have taken up to three hours to preach and should not be confused with the earlier known fragment.⁷ The sermons assigned numbers in the range of the 190s are in order of the liturgical calendar, so that the New Year preaching falls between Christmas and Epiphany.

In addition to preaching on some Psalms in the *Sermons to the People*, Augustine dealt with the entire Psalter, sometimes treating the same Psalms multiple times, in 205 sermons that Erasmus in the 16th century called *enarrationes* (expositions or explanations).⁸ Not all of these were preached in liturgical settings, but all can be counted as homiletic material. Having delayed commenting on the long and profound Psalm 118, Augustine looks back on his work on the Psalter and says that he expounded the Psalms “partly in preaching to the people and partly by dictating [*partim sermocinando in populis, partim dictando*]” (*en. Ps. prooemium*; CSEL 95/2, 68).⁹ More than twice the size of Augustine’s *City of God*, the *Expositions of the Psalms* “dominated the interpretation of the Psalms in the West for more than a thousand years.”¹⁰

We also have 124 *tractatus*, or tractates, on the Gospel of John and 10 *tractatus* on the First Letter of John, the latter not treated to that New Testament letter’s end in the extant material. This Latin term *tractatus* (used for both the singular and plural nominative) can mean a treatment or sermon, and it gradually came to identify treatments in a continuous reading of a biblical book. Referring back to Augustine’s

⁷ Hill calls it “perhaps the longest homily he ever preached” (WSA III/11, 229 n1). The 1997 printed edition of this translation calls the homily not only s. 198, but also “Dolbeau 198.” The electronic WSA edition rightly calls it “Dolbeau 26.”

⁸ Scholars use a variety of citation systems to the *en. Ps.*, such as the system found in Cameron 1999, p. 290. For his example there, *en. Ps. 30*[2].3.1 means that the citation is to Augustine’s treatment of Psalm 30, with the bracketed [2] indicating the second occasion, the penultimate number 3 refers to Sermon 3 in a series of that second occasion, and then 1 indicates section 1. Boulding’s translation calls this sermon Exposition 4, as it represents the fourth time he preached on this Psalm. Augustine preached on two separate occasions when treating Psalms 18, 21, 25, 26, and 29–32. Of these Psalms, only on Psalms 30 and 32 did he preach more than two times (in the second occasion), and so a bracketed number [2] is used to indicate the second series of sermons. If a number appears between the Psalm number and section number, without a bracketed number present, it indicates the number of the homily he preached on that Psalm.

⁹ Cf. the *retr.* epilogue regarding his wish to review his letters and “*sermones ad populum, alios dictatos alios a me dictos*” (CCSL 57, 143). For the textual variant affecting the translation of this passage, see the accompanying note on CCSL 57, 143 and Bogan 1968, p. 271n3.

¹⁰ Cameron 1999, p. 290.

own distinction between preaching and dictating, scholars debate how much of the homiletic material on the Gospel of John was originally preached to people in a liturgical setting and how much was dictated. The eminent Augustinian Allan Fitzgerald, introducing Edmund Hill's translation of what are called *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, judges about these tractates: "[T]he criteria for determining which ones may have been preached or dictated or even preached first and dictated later are not now, and may never be, adequate for a firm conclusion."¹¹

In addition to the *Sermons to the People*, *Expositions of the Psalms*, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, and *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, some other homiletic works preached (or dictated) are known through letters and treatises, a few transmitted in adapted form. Most of his preaching, however, has been lost without any trace. Augustine may have preached about 6,000 times.

As a point of comparison, we can also consider that Augustine produced biblical commentaries that are not counted among his homiletic works, such as important commentaries on Genesis and the Apostle Paul, but he thought the people needed him to spend his time on preaching rather than on erudite studies. Augustine tells Jerome, famous for his detailed biblical scholarship and translations, that he could not have Jerome's knowledge of Scripture: "And if I have some ability in this area, I use it completely for the people of God. On account of my work for the Church I cannot at all have the leisure for training in more details than the people will listen to" (*ep.* 73.5; CCSL 31A, 48; WSA II/2, 273, alt.).

Scholars approach Augustine's preaching with great interest. In a classic study, Frederik van der Meer opines that "no words from the pulpit have ever so fully come from the heart or combined that quality with such brilliance as did the words spoken by this one man in this remote corner of Africa."¹² Anthony Dupont suggests a twofold importance in the study of the *Sermons to the People*: "In the first instance, an analysis of the theological content of the *sermones* can provide insight into Augustine's pastoral and spiritual perspective on theological topics. The primary difference between his doctrinal writings and his homilies is rooted in the latter's concrete liturgical context and their direct contact with a (mostly) sympathetic audience."¹³ Dupont also states, "Secondly, the study of the *sermones* represents

¹¹ Fitzgerald 2009 (WSA III/12), p. 34.

¹² Van der Meer 1961, p. 412.

¹³ Dupont 2013, p. 21.

an essential and necessary complement to existing philosophical-theological research into Augustine's thought. His *sermones* do not limit themselves to the spiritual and pastoral-practical perspective, but engage on occasion with the philosophical-theological topics he deals with in his doctrinal writings."¹⁴

Secondary literature on Augustine's preaching is rapidly increasing. Several significant monographs in English were published from 2021 to 2023, for example. In a study on Augustine's preaching to catechumens, neophytes, and the faithful, Michael Glowasky argues that "Augustine's preaching is, above all, shaped by his conviction that the Christian life is a journey to the vision of God."¹⁵ Kevin Grove studies Augustine's preaching to show that "memory is the heart of shared life in the whole Christ."¹⁶ Capping several decades of research on Augustine, and particularly Augustine's changes of thinking, Patout Burns has given us *Augustine's Preached Theology: Living as the Body of Christ*.¹⁷ Adam Ployd offers a rich study of Augustine's works, especially the sermons, to articulate the North African's rhetoric of martyrdom.¹⁸ Charles G. Kim demonstrates the way of humility in the context and practice of Augustine's theology of preaching.¹⁹ This bounty of recent work from differing approaches holds great promise.

The original audience for Augustine's sermons, of course, was not academics looking into history, but people who came to church. In union with those early Christian worshipers, Christians of many different communities today want to hear Augustine with renewed interest. Surveying Augustine's major literary accomplishments, Johannes van Oort writes, "It was particularly through his sermons that the church father exerted an immense influence on later generations. Augustine's preaching talent is his most lasting gift."²⁰ Van Oort urges Protestants to return to Augustine's preaching today by questioning: "Does the expression 'Augustinus totus noster' used by Luther, Calvin and other reformers also hold for present-day Protestants? Is the African church father 'completely ours' indeed?"²¹

¹⁴ Dupont 2013, p. 21.

¹⁵ Glowasky 2021, p. 158.

¹⁶ Grove 2021, p. 2.

¹⁷ Burns 2022.

¹⁸ Ployd 2023.

¹⁹ Kim 2023.

²⁰ Van Oort 2009, p. 2.

²¹ Van Oort 2009, p. 8.

That the Orthodox Churches acclaim “Blessed Augustine” should not be forgotten. In an Orthodox liturgical service approved in 1955, we find this prayer exalting Augustine’s preaching:

O Father Augustine, thou didst clearly preach so that what is unapproachable to the corruptible mind may be gazed at through faith. Thou didst thunder forth as an apostle to the ends of the inhabited earth, shining with the lightning of doctrine. Entreat thou for us who honor thee, spiritual enlightenment and great mercy.²²

This early North African preaching is found to be a source of spiritual nourishment for both East and West today.

In the Catholic Church after Vatican II, Augustine holds an unparalleled place for liturgical preaching. Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, cites Augustine several times, including this oft-quoted comment on James 1: “an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly” (s. 179.1).²³ The Vatican’s *Homiletic Directory* (2014), issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, makes this point about the Roman liturgy’s Office of Readings, after the postconciliar changes: “The revision of the Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours has made many of these [patristic] writings available to preachers and people alike. Familiarity with the writings of the Fathers can greatly aid the homilist in discovering the spiritual meaning of Scripture.”²⁴ What do we find when we look at the revised Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours? The Readings feature selections from Augustine, and especially his preaching, far more than any other saint. The Office has eighty-two Readings from Augustine, and sixty-six of them come from his homiletic corpus.²⁵ His s. 46, *On Pastors*, most extensively, is heard thirteen times in the 24th and 25th weeks of Ordinary Time. In this, Augustine is the Catholic Church’s preeminent preacher.

²² From Canticum I in “Service to Our Father among the Saints, Blessed Augustine of Hippo,” compiled by Archimandrite Ambrose Pogodin upon the request of Archbishop John of Western Europe, and approved at the Synod of Bishops for use in churches, Synodal Document of May 15, 1955, in Rose 1996, pp. 117–138, at p. 128.

²³ Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 1965, no. 25.

²⁴ Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2014, no. 25.

²⁵ Of the sixteen remaining, six come from his *Confessions* and six come from his letter on prayer, ep. 130, to the widow Proba. The remaining are selections from the preface to his *Commentary on Galatians*, *Against Faustus*, *The City of God*, and *On the Predestination of the Saints*. The writers with the next most numerous Readings are Ambrose of Milan, with twenty-six, and Leo the Great, with twenty-five.

Given the great opportunities for studying Augustine's sermons in both the academy and the Church, we now preview the chapters that await us.

THE SIXTEEN CHAPTERS

While studies frequently mention preachers and their audiences, I choose in Chapter 1 usually to avoid the word "audience" and rely more upon the phrase that Augustine uses for the people who stand before him when he preaches: *fratres mei* (my brethren). Leading the volume's Part I on Augustine's pastoral task of preaching sermons, "Augustine as Preacher and His Brethren in the Church" first considers Augustine as preacher with a critical use of Possidius's *Life of Augustine*. One of Augustine's most devoted episcopal friends, Possidius knew him for nearly forty years and heard him preach many times. The chapter then considers how Augustine understood the people before him. It treats how he spoke to them and how he allows us to glimpse something of who they are and how they think, with attention to the descriptions of his people in *ep.* 29. Attending to this biography and letter can help us have a greater appreciation for the study of Augustine as a preacher and those with him when we focus on the extant sermon collection.

One of the world's most distinguished teachers of Augustine, Carol Harrison of Christ Church, University of Oxford, contributes Chapter 2, which is dedicated to the goal of Augustine's preaching.²⁶ This chapter first of all considers Augustine's understanding of the nature of reality and of human beings as wholly dependent upon God's grace. In this context, it argues that the question of the goal of preaching is effectively turned on its head: that it is not so much a question of what the human preacher should say or do – of what they should *give* in order to achieve a particular goal – but rather a question of how they are to *receive* what is given to them so that their goal can be achieved. It suggests that the answer is found in Augustine's identification of grace as the love of God, which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and demonstrates that love is the source, means, message and end, or goal, of preaching.

A scholar of astounding erudition in Augustine's sermons, Shari Boodts of Radboud University has contributed Chapter 3, "Transmission and Collections of Augustine's Sermons." The medieval transmission

²⁶ After the introductory sentence of each of the paragraphs in this section, I am indebted to the contributors for their abstracts, here lightly edited.

of Augustine's preaching, in particular that of the *Sermones ad populum*, has had a significant impact on which parts of his vast homiletic corpus have survived and what state the texts find themselves in after a millennium of being copied by medieval scribes. This chapter sketches a broad overview of the way Augustine's sermons were transmitted, focusing in particular on their dynamic organization in sermon collections throughout the Middle Ages. It will discuss the usability of these sermons as primary sources in light of the modes of transmission and the medieval afterlife of Augustine's preaching.

We now turn to Part II of this volume, which covers Augustine's sermons on the Scriptures and the liturgical feasts. An expert in Augustine and early Latin ecclesiology at Southern Methodist University, James K. Lee contributed Chapter 4, which explores Augustine's preaching on the Old Testament as preserved in three primary collections: (1) *Sermons to the People*, (2) *Expositions of the Psalms*, and (3) the Dolbeau sermons. The chapter begins by considering Augustine's Christo-ecclesial hermeneutic for the interpretation of Scripture, which Augustine employs while preaching in the context of liturgical worship. Then it provides an overview of Augustine's developing figurative exegesis of the Old Testament, especially during his debates with the Manicheans. Next, it examines how Augustine engages the different kinds of literature in the Old Testament, such as the Pentateuch, Psalms, and wisdom literature, in the aforementioned collections. The chapter concludes by arguing that Augustine's sermons on the Old Testament demonstrate the unity of Scripture and the underlying Christo-ecclesial meaning of the Old Testament in Augustine's thought.

Author of an accessible introduction to Augustine's major works and one of the most productive theologians in the English-speaking world, Matthew Levering has given us Chapter 5.²⁷ Bishop Augustine would have preached countless sermons on the New Testament, but fewer than three hundred remain extant. Most of his surviving New Testament preaching is found in his 124 *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, his ten *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, and his *Sermons* 51–183. The richness of these sermons is astounding. This chapter samples them, offering a starting point for further analysis. The first section focuses on the pastoral goals that stand behind Augustine's preaching on the Gospel of Matthew. Second, the chapter turns to his anti-Donatist *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, where he intersperses his commentary on 1 John with extensive citations of the

²⁷ Levering 2013.

Psalms and the other Gospels. Third, with respect to his *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, the chapter shows that Augustine preaches on John with a strong eye to his central theological interests, including his well-known arguments regarding grace and predestination.

Chapter 6 begins a series of studies on the feasts of the liturgical year, and it is written by David Vincent Meconi, author and editor of many incisive studies of Augustine, not least on Augustine's theology of deification. This chapter examines the sermons of St. Augustine (mainly ss. 184–96, ranging in date from 391 to 420) that address the nature and effects of Christ's birth. Augustine relates this revolutionary event to the festivities of January 1 as well as to the Solemnity of the Epiphany. As argued in the chapter, Augustine's homilies for each of these celebrations (1) stress how they fall and relate to the rest of the liturgical year, (2) focus on how the lowliness of the God's birth achieves humanity's salvation, and (3) highlight Mary's role in uniting heaven and earth.

Khaled Anatolios of the University of Notre Dame, whose several published volumes include *Deification through the Cross*, a landmark achievement in soteriology, studies the sermons for Lent, Good Friday, and Easter in Chapter 7.²⁸ Augustine's liturgical preaching is integral to his conception of the liturgical celebration as rendering present the unrepeatable saving acts of Christ. During the liturgical season from Lent to Easter, the North African bishop is consistently preoccupied with the present effectiveness of the mysteries of Christ's death and Resurrection. During Lent, he invites his congregation to fashion a cross for themselves – through prayer, fasting, and alms – for the sake of communion in Christ's crucifixion. On Good Friday, he invites his listeners to contemplate the suffering of the impassible God and to safeguard the integrity of the Church that is the fruit of his suffering. In the Easter celebrations, he instructs his flock to be strengthened in their Easter faith through participation in the Eucharist and through performance of works of mercy, and to hold fast to the objective content of their faith in the genuine corporeality of the Risen Lord. He guides them into an experience of Easter joy as a proleptic participation in the eternal joy of the Church's communion in the body of the Risen Lord, which can only be attained through a sharing in his crucifixion.

Thomas Clemmons, Associate Professor of Latin Patristics and Church History/Historical Theology at The Catholic University of America, authored Chapter 8 as one of his many brilliant works on Augustine. This chapter examines Augustine's sermons given on the

²⁸ Anatolios 2020.

feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost. The homilies given on the Ascension highlight Augustine's Christology, particularly the Ascension as disclosing Christ's presence and the *totus Christus*. Augustine's sermons on Pentecost and its vigil emphasize the unity of the church, imaged in the speaking of tongues in Acts 2, through the giving of the Holy Spirit. The sermons on Pentecost also unpack, through the image of the new wine and drunkenness in Acts 2, the newness and continuity of Pentecost as the fulfillment of the law in the Spirit's gift of charity.

Carole Straw, a scholar renowned for her work on Augustine, Gregory the Great, and martyrdom in the early Latin Church, wrote Chapter 9 on the sermons on the feasts of the martyrs. The purpose of these sermons was to inspire believers to imitate the martyrs, who themselves imitated Christ. He is the archetype of the martyr; his voluntary suffering and self-sacrifice defeated the devil and death, expiated our sins, and restored to believers the possibility of eternal happiness, with God's grace. For Augustine, suffering and self-sacrifice is the essence of martyrdom and the imitation of Christ and is mandatory for all who would be Christian. He provides examples of this ideal behavior, such as accepting the loss of one's property with equanimity. He modifies the traditional definition of "martyr" as "witness" to make martyrdom contingent upon suffering and self-sacrifice. In turn, suffering proves that the cause for which the martyrs died is true – otherwise they would have failed their ordeals. Augustine draws on Cyprian, recognizing a literal, historical martyrdom in times of persecution, and in times of peace, a spiritual martyrdom fought daily against temptation and sin. These sermons also document the obstacles Augustine faced when preaching: not only correcting the errors of the Donatists, Manichees, and Pelagians but also accommodating the limitations of his flock. To this end, he presents an inclusive church, a concord of different levels of expertise ordered hierarchically.

Lauded for his *Nicaea and Its Legacy, Augustine and the Trinity*, and many other field-defining studies on patristic theology, Lewis Ayres begins Part III's series of chapters on Augustine's preaching themes with a focus on the Trinity.²⁹ Chapter 10 argues that Augustine preaches on the Trinity both in sermons devoted to particular trinitarian questions and throughout his homiletic corpus insofar as Augustine's understanding of creation and salvation as a whole is founded on his understanding of the inseparability and co-equality of Father, Son, and Spirit. Through these different types of sermons Augustine consistently

²⁹ Ayres 2004 and 2010a.

emphasizes both the importance of accepting in faith what has been handed on to us but which we cannot yet comprehend, and the importance of struggling to think of God in terms beyond the material and the temporal. It is noticeable that Augustine makes little use of the language of *persona* and *natura* in his preaching, preferring to define his belief through a series of Nicene principles (such as the inseparability of the divine three in their acts), and through presenting Nicene exegeses of key verses as hermeneutical keys.

Prizewinning author of studies on Augustine's *totus Christus*, Kimberly Baker contributed Chapter 11 on that theme. Augustine's account of Christ opens up a wider range than what typically falls under modern Christology.³⁰ His doctrine of the *totus Christus*, the whole Christ with Christ as Head and the Church as Body, developed within his preaching ministry. The doctrine emerges from Augustine's prosopological exegesis (the interpretation of who is speaking) in treating the Psalms and grows into a theological reflection on the enduring union of Christ and the Church that leads Augustine to say that Christ and the Church share a voice, an identity, and a life. This transforming union gives Christians a new identity as members of the Body of Christ through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. The Church reflects the love and unity of Christ in its life and action in the world. Because of its deep roots in his preaching, Augustine's doctrine of the *totus Christus* can be called a preached theology. That is, it is a theology developed within the context of preaching, both in the preparation for preaching and in the preaching itself.

An Augustinian priest teaching at Rome's Augustinianum and the author of several studies on Augustine's preaching and his theology of the sacraments, Kolawole Chabi penned Chapter 12 on the Church's sacraments. Augustine's preaching touches on numerous aspects of the theology that he also discusses in his important treatises. The sacraments of the Church are treated in his controversies with heretics but they are also very much present in his sermons where he teaches the sound doctrine of the Church and performs the Christian rites for the edification of the faithful. This chapter examines Augustine's teaching on baptism and the Eucharist in his preaching. Having considered his definition of the sacraments in general in his preached works, it presents his teaching on the sacraments in his catechesis to the candidates for baptism and to the newly baptized Christians of his congregation. The study further considers what Augustine says on baptism

³⁰ Baker 2010, 2013, and 2021.

and the Eucharist in his sermons while addressing the problems of the Donatists and Pelagians. Augustine makes difficult theological concepts understandable to his flock by adapting his language to them.

Winner of the Manfred Lautenschlaeger Award for Theological Promise for her *Augustine on the Will: A Theological Account*, Han-luen Kantzer Komline of Western Theological Seminary wrote Chapter 13 on God's grace and our willing.³¹ In his sermons, Augustine applies his more theoretical considerations of God's impact on human willing to the concrete, day-to-day challenges of his flock. As he seeks to spur his congregation on in its mundane struggles of will, Augustine develops an account of God's grace and our willing that is at once starkly realistic about human limitations and hopeful about what God can do in and for the faithful, even in this life. While Augustine frankly forecasts that ongoing wrongful desires, painful curative procedures, and inner turmoil will be the norm, he also emphasizes that love eases these burdens, enabling genuine progress and human contributions. The resulting vision carries, rather than dissipates, the energy generated by the biblical friction among such realistic and optimistic assessments of God's mercy at work in human life. In this sense, Augustine's preaching on God's grace and our willing is charged, never neutral.

Holy Cross priest Kevin Grove of the University of Notre Dame, whose *Augustine on Memory* reorients study on that topic to account for the Church's communal memory as expressed by Augustine's preaching, has offered Chapter 14 on love of neighbor.³² While the double love command permeates Augustine's oeuvre, he develops it into a consistent pedagogy in his preaching, in which he locates the concomitant growth of love of God and love of neighbor within the whole Christ (*totus Christus*). He indicates to his hearers that the double love command actually involves three objects: God, neighbor, and the self. Augustine leads his hearers through a pattern of reflection concerning these loves: an articulation of the double love command, problematizing the love of self, relocating the self within the body of Christ, and the practical demands incurred by such a location for "neighbors" in Augustine's and his hearers' midst. The chapter pays particular attention to the way in which the parables of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan form conceptual markers for Augustine's pedagogy. The result is a love of neighbor that includes family, friends, rivals, enemies, and the poor within the whole Christ.

³¹ Kantzer Komline 2020.

³² Grove 2021.

Winner of the Manfred Lautenschlaeger Award for Theological Promise for her *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation in Augustine's Thought*, Sarah Stewart-Kroecker of Princeton Theological Seminary authored Chapter 15's consideration of life as a pilgrimage.³³ Augustine's picture of the Christian life as a voyage to the heavenly homeland is central to his thought and preaching, especially prominent in his sermons on the Psalms. For Augustine, *peregrinatio* is a defining image for earthly life in itself as well as of the process by which the Christian believer seeks to travel home on the path made by Christ. Augustine's vivid imagery for this spiritual journey traverses a varied landscape, which this essay traces through a range of his sermons. Augustine's Christology is powerful in these images, for it is Christ who makes a way across the sea and over land to the homeland. Yet to be able to take this path, the believer must also be taught and inspired by the Holy Spirit to desire this homeland. Augustine's exhortations to cultivate desire and longing are thus also dominant features of his sermons on this theme.

I round out the volume's contributions with Chapter 16, "Preaching on Heaven and Its Peace." Over the time of his ministry, Augustine came more strongly to see that only in heaven will we find the fullness of peace. This chapter reviews Augustine's preaching on heaven and its peace first in the ecclesial and liturgical setting of his sermons. It then takes into consideration objections faced by his people to Christian faith in the resurrection of the dead. Next, it reviews Augustine's preaching on the face-to-face vision of God and the communal dimensions of the heavenly Jerusalem where angels and saints experience peace together. In doing so, the chapter highlights Augustine's preaching on the words "Amen" and "Alleluia" that express our whole activity in heaven's peace.

But before we go to these chapters, we do well to emphasize Augustine's insistence on the foundation of humility and its application for us as we approach his sermons.

THE FOUNDATION OF HUMILITY

"Come to me, all you who labor" (Matt 11:28): Augustine quotes, when visiting Carthage, these words of Jesus to begin s. 69. In this sermon, Augustine draws Christ's invitation to those laboring in a twofold application: "In crying out, we labor; in listening, you labor" (s. 69.1; CCSL 61Aa, 460; WSA III/3, 235, alt.). The labor is in delivering and

³³ Stewart-Kroecker 2017.

hearing this very sermon. Augustine asks “For why do we all labor, except because we are mortal human beings, fragile, weak, carrying about our clay vessels that make each other squeezed in?” Augustine here indicates that the church was at capacity. “But if the vessels of flesh are squeezed in, let the spaces of charity be expanded,” continues Augustine. Going back to the Gospel, Augustine repeats, “Therefore why does he say, *Come to me, all you who labor* except so that you may stop laboring?” He says that Christ’s promise is at hand whereby he calls laborers so that they may seek the reward promised: “And I will refresh you” (Matt 11:28) (s. 69.1; CCSL 61Aa, 460; WSA III/3, 235, alt.).

Augustine extols the Gospel by attending to Christ’s own reason for refreshing those who listen to him: “because I am meek and humble of heart.” Augustine draws out how Christ’s reason was not that he created the world, worked miracles, or raised the dead. No, it is because of his humility. Implicitly pairing the virtues of humility and magnanimity, Augustine says, “If you wish to be great, begin from what is least” (s. 69.2; CCSL 41Aa, 461; WSA III/3, 235, alt.).³⁴ He shows how this is the method for constructing a tall building. A great edifice needs a strong foundation, and our lives need the foundation of humility. If we go to the top of a tall building, we can see a great distance. In a Christian life set on humility, we will be able to see God. “For to us is promised the vision of God,” Augustine impresses upon his people, “the true God, the most high God” (s. 29.3; CCSL 41Aa, 461; WSA III/3, 236, alt.). In expounding the promised vision of God, the preacher turns the perspective around for us to realize that God already sees us: “God sees you in mercy as he calls you while you are still unworthy; with what a much more intimate look will he see you as he rewards you for being worthy?” Augustine directs our attention to Christ’s own preaching, knowing that we might just want to leave:

Listen to him saying, *Come to me, all you who labor* (Mt 11:28). There is no end to labor by running away. You prefer to run away *from* him, do you, not *to* him? Find somewhere, and run away there. But if you cannot run away from him, for the good reason that he is present everywhere, the next thing to do is to run away *to* God, who is present right where you are standing. Run away! (s. 69.4; CCSL 41Aa, 463; WSA III/3, 237, alt.)

³⁴ For Augustine on the greatness of humility, with contrasts to David Hume and Friedrich Nietzsche, see McInerney 2016, and for a comparison of Ambrose and Augustine on magnanimity in their context of classical virtue and the Roman ideal of great-souled men, see Smith 2020.

Nearing the conclusion of this sermon, Augustine emphasizes that like Nathanael seen under the fig tree (John 1:48), we too have been seen by Christ. The preacher concludes:

Prepare yourself to see sublimely by whom you were seen mercifully. But because the summit is great, think about the foundation. "What foundation?" you ask. Learn from him, since he is meek and humble of heart. Dig in yourself a foundation of humility [*fundamentum humilitatis*], and you will come to the summit of charity [*fastigium caritatis*]. (s. 69.4; CCSL 41Aa, 464; WSA III/3, 237)

After this, the manuscripts indicate Augustine's custom of concluding his homilies in prayer, "Turning to the Lord"

From presenting Augustine's preaching on Christ's own invitation to his meek and humble heart, this Introduction now considers humility as foundational for our further studies in this volume's three parts. First, we will consider how formative humility is for Augustine in his pastoral task of preaching sermons. Second, with the help of Brendan Baran, we will see how humility opens up the Scriptures that Augustine preaches on: not with keys for the locked doors of tough biblical passages, but by knocking. Third, we will find how humility supports and is interwoven within the major themes of Augustine's preaching as studied in this volume.

Humility in Augustine's Pastoral Task of Preaching Sermons

Charles Kim writes that "it is impossible to think of Augustine's theology of preaching without considering the virtue of humility."³⁵ It is a theme that as a bishop writing his *Confessions* Augustine stresses as necessary for approaching Sacred Scripture rightly. As a teenager, after reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, an exhortation to accept wisdom, Augustine tried to read the Bible, and he was repulsed. He writes about the Scriptures, upon which he was regularly expounding from his bishop's chair: "What I see in them today is something not accessible to the scrutiny of the proud nor exposed to the gaze of the immature, something lowly as one enters but lofty as one advances further, something veiled in mystery" (*conf.* 3.5.9; CCSL 27, 31; WSA I/1, 80).

In his study of the *sermo humilis*, Erich Auerbach shows that in antiquity *humilis* marks what is of inferior rank, and in non-Christian literature the pejorative sense strongly predominates. In early

³⁵ Kim 2023, p. xix.

Christianity, and particularly in Augustine, on the other hand, we find that *humilis* describes the Incarnation, the social and cultural recipients of the Gospel, and the very language of Sacred Scripture.³⁶ This has special relevance to our Augustinian study. It was his experience of Christ's humility that moved Augustine to reject pride. Later in the *Confessions*, we hear his prayer to God about the Incarnation, a prayer whose spirit imbues his preaching:

Your Word, the eternal Truth who towers above the higher spheres of your creation, raises up to himself those creatures who bow before him; but in these lower regions he has built himself a humble dwelling from our clay, and used it to cast down from their pretentious selves those who do not bow before him, and make a bridge to bring them to himself. He heals their swollen pride and nourishes their love, that they may not wander even further away through self-confidence, but rather weaken as they see before their feet the Godhead grown weak by sharing our garments of skin, and wearily fling themselves down upon him, so that he may arise and lift them up. (*conf.* 7.18.24; CCSL 27, 108; WSA I/1, 178)

Augustine's concerns for humility in the *Confessions* grounded not only his conversion, but his life as a preacher. As we will see in his sermons, humility is expressed as a receptivity to what God most wants to give us. As John Cavadini stresses, Augustine identifies himself in humility as a *condiscipulus*, a fellow disciple, with others gathered in Christ's school of the church: "Augustine is very careful not to posture himself as the teacher in this school, but as a fellow inquirer, someone who is seeking for understanding just as much as other students in the school of Scripture."³⁷ Cavadini goes on to quote Augustine's preaching to his people, "Your graces know that all of us have one teacher, and that under him we are fellow disciples, fellow pupils [*condiscipulos*]" (s. 134.1; cf. 23.2 and 16A.1).³⁸ The humility he evinces regarding his own position as a preacher shows forth his distinctive formation. Concluding his major study on humility as the foundation of the virtues in Augustine, Notker Baumann writes, "The comparison with other authors and thinkers shows this: Humility is self-knowledge, and it is original to Augustine that humility becomes the foundation of all virtues."³⁹

³⁶ Auerbach 1993, pp. 27–66.

³⁷ Cavadini 2019, p. 86.

³⁸ Cavadini 2019, p. 86.

³⁹ Baumann 2009, p. 275.

The Humility of Knocking on the Locked Doors of Scripture

Hubertus Drobner asks about Augustine's homiletic practice: "What is the subject matter of preaching?" He answers, "Nothing less than God's word."⁴⁰ Even when Augustine preaches on the Church's annual feasts or other topics, rather than on scriptural passages, he constantly goes back to the Scriptures by showing how they elucidate the celebrations of the Church and assist the people. But what happens when a preacher does not understand what the Scripture holds?

In a brilliant study on Augustine's *Sermons to the People*, Brendan Baran detects a unique aspect of this preaching that sets it apart significantly from a tradition found in such scriptural interpreters as Origen, Tyconius, and Jerome. Those authors advise readers to find keys in their reading to open the locked doors of Scripture. Yet what is another way of getting through locked doors? The Roman architecture of North African houses in Augustine's time, as Baran points out, had doors securely locked and were normally opened from one inside the house. Baran applies this to Augustine's preaching through his emphasis on humility. Rather than having keys, we must knock. Jesus says, "Knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Matt 7:7c). Baran writes: "An examination of the material culture shows how Matt. 7:7c effectively conveys Augustine's theological message that the door of scripture is locked in such a way that it can only be unlatched from inside by God, the *dominus* of the mansion, as it were." Great homes would have multiple doors that would require a sequence of knocking, which is imitated in the repeated practice of knocking in prayer. Baran also argues, "Augustine's depiction of those who knock stresses how each and every person must approach scripture with humility. He implores everyone, great or small, to knock, and in this way, he calls upon all the members of the body of Christ to knock. Everyone must knock because everyone is ultimately dependent on God who alone opens the door to scripture."⁴¹ Augustine frequently asks his people to knock with him so that he might have access to the locked mystery of Scripture to preach.

A glance at s. 145, of which a critical edition was published in 2016 in the journal *Augustiniana*, can illustrate this humility in Augustine's encounter with what he preached on.⁴² This sermon follows upon the Gospel reading, which included "Until now you have asked for nothing

⁴⁰ Drobner 2000, p. 124.

⁴¹ Baran 2023, p. 207.

⁴² Dolbeau 2016, pp. 55–62.

in my name" (John 16:24). What does that mean? Wasn't Jesus talking to the disciples whom he had sent out, giving them "power to preach the Gospel and do wonderful works"? They had returned to him and said, "Lord, behold in your name even the demons were subject to us" (Luke 10:17). Augustine says:

You will recall, you will be aware of what I have reminded you of about the gospel, truthful in every section and every statement of it, nowhere false, nowhere deceptive. So, how is this true: *Until now you have asked for nothing in my name*; and this: *Lord, behold in your name even the demons were subject to us*? Our intelligence is certainly challenged to discover the secret which will solve this problem. So let us ask, let us seek, let us knock. Let us do this in a spirit of faithful piety, not out of a worldly restlessness of character, but in a spirit of open-minded submission to the truth, so that when he sees us knocking, he may open the door to us. (s. 145.1; Dolbeau 2016, 55; WSA III/4, 435)

We can imagine a pause for prayer here, and Augustine continues, "So then, receive attentively, that is to say hungrily, whatever the Lord may give me to serve up to you" (s. 145.2; Dolbeau 2016, 55; WSA III/4, 436). Augustine proceeds to serve what had been locked away in the Lord's pantry to feed the people.

Humility as Supportive of Augustine's Major Homiletic Themes

Lastly, humility has a foundational position in Augustine's preaching that grounds the developments of his other themes. Preachers typically weave a small number of key ideas together, and their attentive listeners can hear patterns – whether they perceive such patterns to be good or bad. Augustine is no exception. He constantly returns to principal themes. If asked about this, he might very well respond that he simply preaches what he reads in Scripture. In *On Christian Teaching*, citing Proverbs 3:34, which appears in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5, he instructs: "There is, in fact, almost no page of the holy books in which it does not sound forth that *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*" (doc. Chr. 3.23.33; CCSL 32, 97; WSA I/11, 184, alt.). And so now we see in a few words how humility relates to the seven principal themes chosen for the chapters of this volume's Part III: Trinity; *totus Christus*; the Church's sacraments; God's grace and our willing; love of neighbor; the pilgrimage of life; and heaven's peace. Augustine did not write self-contained *Cambridge Companion* chapters when he

preached, and we can benefit more from his preaching when we sense how his themes fit together as we read this volume's contributions. We begin these reflections on humility by considering the Trinity.

In a sermon on the Trinity, Augustine preaches: "So what are we to say, brethren, about God? For if you have grasped [*cepisti*] what you want to say, it is not God. If you have been able to comprehend it, you have comprehended something else instead of God. If you think you have been able to comprehend, you have deceived yourself by your thinking" (s. 52.16; CCSL 41Aa, 71; WSA III/2 57, alt.; cf. s. 117.5). We must approach the mystery of the Holy Trinity from a stance of humility, realizing that God is beyond any attempt of encapsulation.

Preaching on Psalm 58, Augustine articulates his principle of the *vox totius Christi*, the voice of the whole Christ: "when we hear Christ speaking we should not think of him, our head in isolation. We must think of him as head and body, one whole perfect man [*totum integrum quondam virum*]" (en. Ps. 58.1.2; CSEL 94/1, 321; WSA III/17, 149). The *totus Christus* brings out the ramifications of God's humble Incarnation for Augustine; the Incarnation would be incomplete for Augustine without Christ's body, the Church. Later in this same sermon, he says: "the Teacher of humility became a sharer in our infirmity to give us a share in his divinity [*donans participationem suae divinitatis*]; he came down to us both to teach us the way and to become the way, and he especially deigned to commend his humility to us" (en. Ps. 58.1.7; CSEL 94/1, 329; WSA III/17, 153). Christ's humility is foundational for our ability to hear the voice of the whole Christ.

Augustine knew the Church's sacraments as only for the humble, as the proud would refuse to accept the truthfulness of baptism and would shun the lowly food offered on the altar. Preaching to the newly baptized on Easter Sunday, Augustine contrasts the way of the heretics with their own humble path to the sacraments:

And you, after those fasts, after the labors, after the humiliation and the contrition, have now at last come, in the name of Christ, into the Lord's chalice, so to say [*tamquam ad calicem domini*]; and there you are on the table, and there you are in the chalice. You are this together with us; we all take this together, all drink together, because we all live together. (s. 229.2; MiAg 1, 30; WSA III/6, 266)

Considering God's grace and our willing, we can think again of that all-important proverb for Augustine: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." In another sermon for the newly baptized,

Augustine urges them to have their wills conformed to God's grace in humility. He preaches:

It is to keep this kind of innocence that I am urging you. *For of such is the kingdom of heaven* (Mk 10:14), namely of the humble, that is to say those who are little ones spiritually. Do not despise it, do not abhor it. This littleness is proper to the great. Pride, on the other hand, is the misleading greatness of the weak; when it takes possession of the mind, it casts it down by raising it up, empties it out by puffing it up, dissipates it by stretching it out. A humble person cannot harm anyone, a proud person cannot be innocent. I am talking about the kind of humility which does not wish to excel in things that are going to pass away, but truly thinks on something eternal, which it cannot reach by its own powers, but has assistance. (s. 353.1; PL 39:1561; WSA III/10, 152–153, alt.)

When we turn to love of neighbor with Augustine, he can turn our attention in humility to that form of love of neighbor that is most difficult for us: love of enemies. Augustine asks, "Do you love your enemy?" He continues, "Perhaps you will reply, 'I cannot on account of my weakness.' But take steps to make progress, and do as you are able [*age ut possis*]; above all because you are going to pray to a judge whom nobody can deceive, who is going to try your case" (s. 386.1; PL 39:1695; WSA III/10, 393). In this same sermon, he wants his people to realize that in the Lord's Prayer they pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Because we are to be humble in the presence of God, we can in humility love even our enemies. Although Augustine does not literally use the term "humility" in this sermon, that theme implicitly forms his sermon's point.

In his pervasive theme of life on earth as a pilgrimage, Augustine emphasizes the Son of God's humble descent into the valley of our tears so that we might rise with Christ to the heavenly Jerusalem. Preaching on Psalm 121, Augustine considers the movement up to Jerusalem to acknowledge in praise God's holy name. He preaches about the Israelites: "Why do they ascend? *To confess to your name, O Lord*. Nothing more magnificent could be said. As pride makes one presumptuous, so does humility prompt confession" (*en. Ps.* 121.8; CSEL 95/3, 98; WSA III/20, 23).

Our last theme for consideration is heaven and its peace. Here we find the summit based upon humility's foundation that can be attained in Christ. Introducing his *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Augustine writes of the path from humility through charity to peace

in this way: "Where there is charity, there is peace, and where there is humility, there is charity" (*ep. Jo.* prologue; SC 75, 106; WSA I/14, 14). At last, after the humility of this life with its many sorrows, those fired by love will see God and experience lasting peace. There, as we are told in Augustine's preaching, we find humility's reward in the city of angels and saints.

Upon this Introduction's foundation of humility, we move to the chapters of our *Cambridge Companion*.⁴³

Further Reading

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⁴³ I am grateful to Sebastian White, OP, and Jonah Teller, OP, for their proofreading assistance and insights. The remaining errors and infelicities are all mine.