

***Augustine's Theology of Preaching* by Peter T. Sanlon. Fortress Press, 2014. 200pp.**

In *Augustine's Theology of Preaching*, Peter T. Sanlon seeks to redress the imbalance in Augustinian scholarship wherein most research focuses on the Bishop of Hippo Regius' more philosophical theology or commentaries on Scripture, rarely if ever applying theological scrutiny to his large corpus of sermons. Sanlon laments that, instead of looking at

Augustine as the active preacher and pastor he was, scholars continually turn to the same few works systematic or thematic theology time and again. However, Augustine was a regular preacher, a dynamic and engaging orator who was also active pastorally. Therefore, if we are to hope to fully grasp the complete range and significance of this giant of western theology, we must grasp his theology of preaching. This Sanlon sets out to do, lending balance to the scholarly scales and beginning to fill an important gap in academic approaches to Augustine.

After an Introduction discussing the goals of the project, Chapter One sets Augustine in his historical setting of late fourth- and early fifth-century Africa. However, much of the nuance of Late Roman historiography and of the ongoing tensions between change and consistency that characterise this period is absent from Sanlon's treatment. The chapter is not able to convincingly situate Roman North Africa in Late Antiquity, since Africa's entire history feels like it has been collapsed into a single moment, as if it all is of equal relevance to Augustine's Late Imperial context. This sort of historical generalisation and characterisation could be balanced by references to key work historical works on Africa in this period (e.g. Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West* [2007], or Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* [2005]). While Sanlon's wider observations that North Africa exhibited many contrasting impulses between chaos and order, Roman and non-Roman, are true, what such observations lack is the degree of nuance found in the literature of Classicist and Mediaevalist alike in the field of Late Antiquity.

This chapter also includes brief but helpful introductions to Ambrose, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Peter Chrysologus, commenting on how the first three may have influenced Augustine, and contrasting Chrysologus' preaching style to Augustine's in the next generation. These brief details on other western preachers are useful in situating Augustine in his context. However, Chrysologus could have been given a bit more analysis and Sanlon questionable states that by Chrysologus' day, 'the Roman Empire no longer held preeminence' (11). Chrysologus died in 450, and the Roman Empire, while certainly diminished from its foregoing splendour, certainly still held *preeminence* at the time, given that even the barbarian kings that had established themselves as distinct entities in former Roman territories such as Africa derived much of their power from engagement with the political, social, and economic structures of the Western Roman Empire (not to mention the still strong Eastern Roman Empire). In Chrysologus' day, this preeminence would have been especially visible in a city such as Ravenna, where the imperial court was resident throughout much of Chrysologus' tenure as bishop.

After situating Augustine in his historical context, Sanlon sets out to situate him in his *oratorical* context. Sanlon discusses the impact of Gorgias, Plato, Cicero, Quintilian, and Apuleius on Augustine; his analysis effectively demonstrates how these figures helped shape Augustine's thought by the time he was preaching in the 390s. Most importantly, Augustine had realised that simple persuasion was insufficient, and that, beyond any knowledge or personal good conduct, one needed an ultimate authority to help bring people to an acknowledgement and appreciation of the truth, to be persuaded to live by it. Despite all of his "pagan" training, the only place Augustine found the necessary authority to make oratory truly effective in persuading people and helping them find truth and live by it was in the Christian scriptures, and with these he engaged constantly in his career as a preacher.

In Chapter Three, Sanlon discusses Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* as an important piece of background for the sermons. One of the key points that emerges from this discussion is that Augustine wrote *De Doctrina* as a training manual for preachers but that he felt that his training in pagan oratory was not sufficient for such a task. Therefore, Augustine left Book Four of the work unfinished for thirty years before writing it, having only then gained the experience he thought necessary to train preachers – decades of preaching and immersion in the Bible. As noted, scripture became for Augustine the ultimate authority for effective, transformative rhetoric.

In Chapter Four, we learn about interiority and temporality, these being the hermeneutical lenses which Sanlon had promised in the Introduction to use in his analysis of Augustine. Interiority is approached through four strands of Augustine's thought: self-reflection, the inner teacher, the heart, and hierarchical ordering. Sanlon cogently argues that the revolution in Augustine's thought concerning the heart in the 390s was not the result of the *Confessions*, but, rather, of Augustine launching his career as a preacher and immersing himself in the Psalter, on which he preached extensively through the decade. Sanlon ends up defining interiority as 'the inner realm of desirous longing, evaluation and prayer' (81). Temporality is approached through the motifs of created matter, time itself, and journeying, bringing us to the definition of temporality as 'the successive flow and teleological development of God's plan for creation from beginning to consummation' (86). Having defined these two key hermeneutical principles, Sanlon engages with Coleen Hoffman Gowans, Paul Ricoeur, and Charles Taylor, and their readings of temporality and Augustine's *Sermons* before moving into his final chapters of analysis.

These final chapters are the best in the book. Sanlon moves from discussing overarching concerns and turns to actually analysing the *Sermons*. In Chapters Five through Seven, he conducts an inductive analysis of the *Sermons* concerning the issues of riches and money, death and resurrection, and relationships. Here we see interiority and temporality applied to scripture and addressed to the congregation of Hippo. Here we see a variety of Augustine's other theological insights applied to a living body of Christian people; we also see all of Sanlon's earlier discussions – order and chaos, oratory and Scripture, interiority and temporality – finally free at play in the midst of Augustine's work itself. One is tempted to wish there were more of it, but, then, perhaps we should, if stirred by these analyses, go out and read the *Sermones ad Populum* for ourselves, bringing with us the equipment provided by Sanlon.

In conclusion, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching* is an interesting and well-developed discussion that should help newcomers to the *Sermones ad Populum* enter more fully into the theological underpinnings of St. Augustine's preaching and help those already familiar with the content return to it with fresh insights and new eyes. This is one of the most important jobs performed by any scholar of any ancient literature, enabling readers to engage more fully with the ancient texts themselves. Whatever reservations this reviewer may have about some of the representations of the Later Roman Empire, Sanlon achieves this higher goal. He does so by implementing the two hermeneutical keys of interiority and temporality, formulating a discussion that brings along and touches upon other famous Augustinian concerns in the sermons, such as order, love, the heart, and friendship. Sanlon also provides the pastoral application from these sermons of Augustine's teachings on topics such as slavery, women, and predestination. Thus, not only is the reader invited to explore

American Theological Inquiry

Augustine's theology *of* preaching, he or she is also drawn into an exploration of Augustine's theology *through* preaching.

Matthew Hoskin
University of Edinburgh