

The Historical Context of Augustine's Preaching

It is not too much to say that Augustine revived the church in North Africa by reviving preaching.¹

For Augustine his Bible is primarily the Bible of a preacher.²

The concerns of this book are primarily doctrinal, in that our intent is to expose the undergirding philosophical-theological assumptions which informed Augustine's preaching. Nevertheless, doctrine is neither formulated nor promulgated in an historical vacuum. In order to give due recognition to the relevance of historical setting for doctrinal expression, this chapter offers a historical context for Augustine's preaching.

We shall proceed from a broad overview towards a narrower focus. Thus North African culture in general will be outlined first, followed by a consideration of the Church in that area. We will then study, with representative examples, North African preaching. All of this will lead to some concluding observations on Augustine's preaching style.

This contextual material cannot exhaustively represent the state of historical knowledge about fourth-century North African ecclesiastical matters. Neither can it prematurely demonstrate the doctrinal claims made in subsequent chapters. However, it is hoped that a modest link may be perceived between the historical context and our philosophical-theological interpretation of Augustine's preaching. That connection flows from a thread which runs through each of our sections of historical context – the interplay between order and passion.

1. Edmund Hill, "St. Augustine's Theory and Practice of Preaching," *Clergy Review* 45 (1960), 590.

2. Anne-Marie la Bonnardière, "Augustine: Minister of the Word of God," *Augustine and the Bible*, ed. Pamela Bright (Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1999), 245.

As doctrine cannot be formulated apart from historical context, so historical context cannot be recounted without interpretation. Our interpretive suggestion is that a tension or interplay between order and passion was a leading feature of the situation from which Augustine preached. This insight informs our presentation of material in this chapter, and lays a foundation for the doctrinal explorations taken further in following chapters.

NORTH AFRICAN CULTURE

Invasion and subjugation were repeated features of classical North African history. The Phoenicians ruled by means of their naval might until about the second century B.C.E. The Romans inaugurated the imperial age which endured until the Vandals captured Carthage in C.E. 439. At the end of C.E. 533, Emperor Justinian's forces conquered Carthage. As civil war and instability weakened the Byzantine rule of North Africa, Islamic forces spread with remarkable speed from Mecca. Egypt was conquered by the Muslims in C.E. 641, Cyrenaica in C.E. 642, and Tripoli and Eastern Fezzan in C.E. 643. Byzantine resistance paused the Islamic conquests. The city of Kairouan was founded as a permanent outpost of Islam in C.E. 669; by C.E. 700, North Africa was fully subdued by the Muslims.³

North Africa was an immensely prosperous region, and therefore attractive to invaders. However, the wealth of North Africa was not a straightforward result of it possessing plentiful resources. Capitalisation of resources was inextricably intertwined with the infrastructure imposed by conquering nations. The prosperity of North Africa was, to a great degree, the result of its flourishing under order imposed from without.

The period of history within which Augustine flourished is that of late Roman rule in North Africa. He lived in an age that inherited the legacy of Roman order and infrastructure. By the mid-third century, Roman soldiers had laid twelve thousand miles of roads. A vast network with miles demarcated by the famous Roman milestone facilitated military movement, tax collection and domestic travel. Once soldiers had conquered a region, they worked as unpaid engineers to survey land and build the desired infrastructure. Today, their fifty

3. Victor Davis Hanson, "Holding the Line: Frontier Defense and the Later Roman Empire," in *Makers of Ancient Strategy: From the Persian Wars to the Fall of Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); "Roman Africa", in Graham Shipley et al., ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Classical Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Roger le Tourneau, "North Africa to the Sixteenth Century," in P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton, Bernard Lewis, ed. *The Cambridge History of Islam: The Indian Sub-Continent, South-East Asia, Africa and the Muslim West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); David Bentley Hart, *The Story of Christianity* (London: Quercus, 2010), 108–13.

mile aqueduct still stands over the River Miliana. Usable maps were drawn up, showing the connections between towns. So effective was the marriage of Roman rule and African resources that by the middle of the second century, North West Africa produced two-thirds of the wheat needed by Rome.

City life was embraced by North Africans.⁴ By the third century there were close to six hundred cities; two hundred of these were surrounded by fertile farming land. Often they were no more than eight miles apart. Most had populations between five thousand and fifteen thousand. Carthage was probably the only city with a six figure population and included some impressive Christian buildings.⁵ The aqueduct for Caesarea could provide water for forty thousand people. Excavations have revealed that Hippo, a “typical provincial town”⁶ had a forum, baths, theatre, residential quarter and ecclesiastical area. Augustine's preaching against the games⁷ strongly suggests an (undiscovered) amphitheatre. Augustine was aware of disparity in wealth between town and country.⁸

Historians have observed the enthusiasm with which Africans took to the building program and wealth creation which Rome's infrastructure harnessed:

The inhabitants of Roman Africa eagerly followed their new masters' example: their towns were built of stone, and embellished with handsome and often grandiose temples, forums, market places and public baths.⁹

The Romans created new ways of building not only cities, but also careers. Many talented Africans developed a taste for Latin as a language of law, poetry and politics. Rich educations in Carthage appealed to those who felt the allure of Rome itself. One of the most famous examples of such men was Apuleius—lawyer, poet, student of Platonic philosophy, mystery religions and

4. Claude Lepelley, “The Survival and Fall of the Classical City in Late Roman Africa,” in ed., John Rich, , *The City in Late Antiquity*, (London: Routledge, 1992).

5. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 143; Naomi Norman, “Carthage,” in *Augustine through the Ages*, ed., Allan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 132–3; “Cities”, “Town Planning”, in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Classical Civilisation*, in ed., Shipley, et al.

6. F. Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 16.

7. s. 51.1–2. (RB 91, 23)

8. W.H.C. Friend, “Town and Countryside in Early Christianity,” in *The Church in Town and Countryside*, *Studies in Church History*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 42.

9. Susan Raven, *Rome in Africa* (London: Routledge, 1993), 103.

orator. In many respects, the path Augustine later trod through life bears striking resemblances to him. Africans who sought to make their fortunes in the Roman world were assured of their legitimacy in the Imperial world. After all, the African Septimus Severus had ascended to the supreme position of Roman emperor in c.e. 193.

Augustine, living from c.e. 354–430, experienced the latter days of this Roman North Africa. His life reveals him to be typical of the African debutant aspiring to cosmopolitan success. The love of Latin, dabbling in religious groups, Platonism and collegial friendships were typical of the passionate Africans who were, in their studious affectations, more Roman than the Romans. One study of early bishops presents the highly educated, secular, scholar-convert, as a well recognised category.¹⁰ Such Latinised African leaders were passionate and driven—by their culture, aspirations and semi-acceptance within the upper stratas of Roman society. Augustine's *Confessiones* attempted to impose order on the rich passions of an inner life, much as Roman roads navigated the fertile lands of Africa. After the production of his most famous work, the outstanding question was whether a similar order could be imposed on the passions of the turbulent African Church.

THE CHURCH IN NORTH AFRICA

Africa had a long tradition of embracing martyrdom as an expression of faithfulness to God. One of Tertullian's earliest writings, *Ad Martyras*, was a spirited encouragement to believers awaiting execution. When Augustine was received into the North African Church, he entered into a Church which remained proud of its famous martyrs; of these, none ranked higher than Cyprian (martyred in c.e. 258) and Perpetua (martyred in c.e. 203). The former represented ecclesiastical leadership and scholarly theology, sealed in blood. The latter was a reminder that women, children and anonymous African Christians made up the majority of martyrs. Remembered in liturgy, sermons and festivals, the African Church's collective memory was dominated by martyrdom.¹¹

The order of Roman rule may have led to financial prosperity for North Africa, but it also meant persecution. The Diocletian Persecution was enforced with particular ferocity in Africa, with laity as well leaders being charged and

10. Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 186.

11. Anna Leone, "Christianity and Paganism in North Africa," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Constantine to c. 600*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also François Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009).

executed. By contrast, the rulers of Gaul and Spain did not apply such strict enforcement.¹² Interestingly, one of Dioceltian's other historical achievements, alongside presiding over famously fierce persecution, was a phenomenal expansion in government workers. Under Caracella (c.e. 211–217) there were about three hundred career civil servants. This became thirty thousand to thirty-five thousand.¹³

The fortitude of the African church under persecution and the Church's honouring of martyrs speaks much of their passion for faithfulness. That same temperament, admirable in so many ways, manifested itself in Donatism—the single most influential feature of the North African Church in explaining Augustine's context.¹⁴

By c.e. 300, the burden of taxation upon North Africans was so punitive as to cause social unrest.¹⁵ Against a backdrop of such discontent and persecution, Donatism divided the Church into those who accepted repentant leaders who had denied the faith under persecution and those who would not. The Donatists were in the majority and often had the support of the poorer people.

Nevertheless, the influence of sociological factors ought not obscure the fact that substantive theological issues were at stake. Alexander gives a balanced appraisal: "schism cannot be explained in too narrowly religious terms. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the persistence of Donatism owes much to theology."¹⁶ These had a direct impact upon Augustine: "The African Church had been unable to celebrate the unity of the baptised for more than seventy years when Augustine returned to his homeland after the joy of his own baptism."¹⁷ Whenever Augustine mentions African Christianity specifically in preaching, the feature he most often highlights is Donatism and the resulting disunity.¹⁸ Disunity was a prevalent and serious feature of the Donatist

12. W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 477–535; Paul Keresztes, *Imperial Rome and the Christians: From the Severi to Constantine the Great*, vol. 2 (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), 95–113.

13. Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 83. For further details of the ways Christianity impacted government workers, see Michele Renee Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 107–37.

14. A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (2 vols.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 2:1034.

15. W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 63.

16. James Alexander, "Donatism," in *The Early Christian World*, ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 2000), 961.

17. Pamela Bright, "North African Church," in *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. Fitzgerald, 185.

18. s. 162A.10. (MA 1, 98)

controversy, which provided a crucial context for Augustine's ministry. The disunity meant that an authority had to be sought other than mere popularity and numbers. Until Augustine Donatism had attracted the "abler and more learned leadership."¹⁹ By many measures, the Donatists had good grounds to present themselves as the legitimate church. Augustine supported various strategies, at different times, for dealing with it. These included writing theological treatises, preaching sermons, supporting state repression,²⁰ calling an ecclesiastical conference and affirming repentant Donatists. In all of these endeavours, Augustine sought to impose order on a disunited Church. The order was intended to be theological, universal, ecclesial and charitable.

It may be suggested that the context of Donatism informed much of Augustine's preaching. His authority as a bishop was exercised from a "clerical monastery."²¹ One study highlights the way he increased the authority of Rome by appealing there for disciplinary and ecclesiastical guidance.²² That said, his main power came from theological teaching. He could support and turn to the state, but even then, his main role was to provide a theological rationale for such action. Donatism encouraged Augustine to emphasise the worldwide catholicity of the Christian Church, the love and acceptance Christians should offer to repentant brethren, the validity of rightly administered sacraments, and the impossibility of removing sin from the Church in this age. That these are recognisable as distinctly Augustinian theological themes serves to underline how deeply Donatism shaped his teaching. If the passion of the North African Church was a constituent element of the popularity of Donatism, then an important goal of Augustine's preaching ministry became imposing a catholic theological order upon it.

PREACHING IN NORTH AFRICA

Though we intend to focus on a few North African preachers, our intention in so doing is to amplify the historical context for Augustine's preaching. That being the case, we shall begin by briefly mentioning Ambrose (c.E. 337–397).

19. Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 227.

20. For summary of development of Augustine's views on state repression, see Maijastina Kahlos, *Forbearance and Compulsion: The Rhetoric of Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2009), 111–17, and Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (London: University of California Press, 2005), 137–50.

21. Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 76.

22. J.E. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine* (London: Yale University Press, 1997).

Though he preached in Milan, his singular impact on Augustine obliges us to reflect on his significance. The travels Augustine made outside Africa remind us that he was an educated Latin North African; his context was the imperial world, not just his homeland.

AMBROSE (C. C.E. 337–397)

The distinctive feature of Ambrose's preaching was its saturation in Scripture.²³ Form and content were together intensely scriptural. At first, Augustine was unimpressed with Scripture. He thought Cicero more elegant and he was unable to penetrate Scripture's interior: "Indeed my pride recoiled from its metre, and my wit could not penetrate its interior."²⁴ Even before conversion, Augustine recognised that Christianity was centred on the Scriptures. As he looked back, he interpreted his failure to appreciate Scripture's interior mystery as a failure in his own interiority. Scripture demanded to be approached humbly: "But I disdained to be a little one and swollen with pride saw myself as lofty."²⁵ These reflections show how Augustine saw Scripture as central to his eventual conversion. Interiority is a key hermeneutical category which arose from this engagement with Scripture.

Intrigued by his life and preaching, Augustine remarked upon Ambrose's unusual habit of reading to himself silently.²⁶ Ambrose's preaching so presented Scripture that Augustine's view of it changed. He began to rejoice in what had previously seemed childish.²⁷ In Ambrose's preaching we see the importance of Scripture in Augustine's conversion. Scripture famously takes centre stage in the garden scene where the words of Romans 13:13 resonated with Augustine's

23. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth, ed., *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 309–12; Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); D.H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Arian-Nicene Conflicts*, *Oxford Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Craig A. Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002); Steven M. Oberhelman, *Rhetoric and Homiletics in Fourth-Century Christian Literature: Prose Rhythm, Oratical Style, and Preaching in the Works of Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine*, in *American Philological Association American Classical Studies*, ed. Matthew s. Santirocco (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991); Miriam Annunciata Adams, *The Latinity of the Letters of Saint Ambrose* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2007); Boniface O.P. Ramsey, "Ambrose," in *The First Christian Theologians*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

24. "Tumor enim meus refugiebat modum eius et acies mea non penetrabat interiora eius." *conf.*3.9. (CCL 27, 31).

25. "Sed ego dedignabar esse paruulus et turgidus fastu mihi grandis uidebar." *conf.*3.9. (CCL 27, 31).

26. *conf.*6.3. (CCL 27, 75).

27. *conf.*6.6. (CCL 27, 77).

life experiences.²⁸ He reminds the reader of Ambrose by mentioning that in the garden he read the words of Paul “*silentio*”; as Ambrose had read in sermon preparation, so Augustine read in conversion.²⁹ In this way, Augustine links his stylised conversion experience not just with Scripture but also with Ambrose’s reading and preaching of Scripture. Scripture was the crucial medium through which Augustine experienced God call him into the Christian life.

When Scripture so impacted Augustine, he consciously explored the nature of that impact with his hermeneutic of interiority and temporality. Thus in place of the earlier inability to appreciate scripture, the text impacted his heart: “Suddenly at the end of this sentence, as if by a light, peace poured into my heart and all of doubt’s darkness dispersed.”³⁰ An interior change of heart had been set up as essential due to the earlier presentation of his interior pride and inability to appreciate the mystery of Scripture. Augustine has previously described himself as, “I was not yet loving and was loving to love.”³¹ Through Ambrose’s preaching, Scripture so impacted his interiority that his heart could believe and love anew.

Scholars have generally agreed with our assessment that Ambrose practised a particularly scriptural form of preaching, weaving the text of scripture around his observations on the text. Thus, for example:

The bishop’s constant recourse to Biblical quotation and paraphrase suggests what was truly distinctive about his pastoral style. For Ambrose reproduced in his sermons the texture and rhythm of the Bible itself: his preaching was nothing less than an exercise in scriptural mimesis.³²

While this interpretation is reasonable, it should be remembered that Ambrose was also able to make substantive use of secular illustrations. Perhaps his most striking recorded example being from his treatment of Luke 4. Here Ambrose offers an extended contrast between the temptations of Christ and Ulysses. Gabriel Tissot suggests this may have been added by a later editor – but it would have been well within the knowledge base of Ambrose, and reads as not inappropriate to its context.³³

28. *conf.*8.29. (CCL 27, 131).

29. The same word “*silentio*” appears in *conf.*6.3 (CCL 27, 75) and 8.29 (CCL 27, 131).

30. “Statim quippe cum fine huiusce sententiae quasi luce securitatis infusa cordi meo omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt.” *conf.*8.29. (CCL 27, 131).

31. “Nondum amabam et amare amabam.” *conf.*3.1. (CCL 27, 27).

32. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, 238.

Ambrose bequeathed to Augustine a relentless focus upon Scripture, and an enthusiasm to open its inner meaning to listeners who were deaf to its message. Augustine would develop his own style – more conversational³⁴ and on occasion more willing to prosecute the text in search of an answer to a question. Nevertheless, his indebtedness to Ambrose remains noticeable.

TERTULLIAN (C.E. 160–220)

Famous for his rigour, passion and rejection of secular philosophy, Tertullian was a highly-honored African church leader.³⁵ One would expect his opposition to paganism to drive him towards a simplicity of style in prose. Surprisingly, “Tertullian is notoriously the most difficult of all Latin prose writers”.³⁶ Others scholars concur, singling Tertullian out for his complexity:

Latin literature had a tendency to admire complicated, sometimes even contrived, diction . . . With the exception of a few early Christian writers, such as Tertullian, the Latin Fathers struggled against the current.³⁷

Tertullian's striving to state every matter fully in secular Latin diction may have been a secular counterpart of the high standards he held in Christian ethics.³⁸ It fits with the assumption that he had a legal training, and the fact that most of the material he wrote, which may be considered sermonic, is actually topical. Addresses given to deal with occasional problems of ethics or persecution may permit a level of obscurity which regular congregational preaching would expunge.

Augustine adopted in preaching a more fluid, conversational style than Tertullian. If Ambrose's style was saturated with Scripture, Tertullian's topical

33. Gabriel Tissot, ed. *Ambrose of Milan: Traité Sur L'évangile De S. Luc*, vol. 45 & 52 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1956, 1958).

34. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, 239.

35. Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian, The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2004); Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Eric Osborn, “Tertullian,” in *The First Christian Theologians*, ed. Young, Ayres, and Louth (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 133–9.

36. Tertullian, *Treatises on Penance: On Penitence and on Purity*, vol. 28 (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1959), 6.

37. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: The Patristic Age*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 366.

38. Gerald Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979).

addresses stand at the opposite extreme. Augustine integrated the two approaches; his conversational preaching probed and explored passages of Scripture in a way that both enlivened scripture and permitted a degree of topical doctrinal speaking.

CYPRIAN (C.E. 208–258)

Augustine called Cyprian³⁹ the most beautiful of teachers.⁴⁰ After analysing every Scriptural citation in Cyprian's corpus, Fahey concludes:

Cyprian was not a profound or creative theologian gifted with rich and original insights, yet this may prove to be more of an advantage than disadvantage, since Cyprian records a prevalent attitude in his contemporary Church toward Scripture rather than his own highly personalised view.⁴¹

This observation is generally true; however, some difference can be seen between Tertullian and Cyprian. For example, while the former blended Scriptural citation into the body of his own words, the latter rarely cited scripture without some kind of introductory formula. This may indicate the development of a more self-conscious submission to Scripture's authority.

The treatises written by Cyprian between c.e. 247 and his martyrdom appear originally to have been sermons or parenetic exhortations.⁴² Cyprian's style is quite distinctive; warm, assured and concise. Thus, Fahey somewhat overstates his case, saying that "Cyprian totally disregarded the miracles of Jesus and narrative passages in scripture which held no importance for him."⁴³ Cyprian may not have cited them so frequently because narrative does not lend itself to citation as readily as doctrine. He could nevertheless mention them without citation. So, for example, Cyprian warmly commends Hannah's praying for a son.⁴⁴ The stories of Cain, Esau and Saul are all referred to as examples of jealousy.⁴⁵ Such piling up of Scriptural images has a homiletic feel,

39. J. Patout Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* (London: Routledge, 2002); G. s. Murdoch Walker, *The Churchmanship of St. Cyprian* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2003); *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Young, Ayres, and Louth, 152–160.

40. *doctr. Chr.* 2.61. (SIM 162).

41. Michael Andrew Fahey, *Cyprian and the Bible: A Study in Third-Century Exegesis* (Tübingen: J. C. Mohr, 1971), 624.

42. *Ibid.*, 18.

43. *Ibid.*, 625.

44. *De Dominica Oratione*, 5. (CCL 3A, 92)

45. *De Zelo et Liuore*, 5. (CCL 3A, 77)

and suggests that there was a close relationship between Cyprian's preaching and his preserved treatises.

The moralistic tone of Tertullian continues in Cyprian. Not only is he very concerned with ethical issues, but when he speaks of them, he stresses the importance of obedience.⁴⁶ Acting Christianly takes priority over Christian contemplation. Some of this is due to the difficulties created by persecution, but part of the issue is that Cyprian's preserved writings are topical rather than expository. Sermons which move through the lectionary tend to introduce more emphasis upon the contemplative, with the demands of the text blunting the urgency of external circumstances.

Augustine managed to combine the ethical and expository in a more integrated way than his predecessors. He did indeed preach through books of Scripture – turning the sermons into commentaries when complete. As he preached he engaged with the text and the ethical concerns of listeners, exploring both and relating each to the other.

PETER CHRYSOLOGUS (C.E. 406–450)

In stark contrast to his predecessor Augustine, Peter Chrysologus ministered in an age when the Roman empire no longer held preeminence.⁴⁷ We do not know when Peter was given the honorific title “Chrysologus”; evidently somebody thought the Western Church ought to have its own Chrysostom, and Peter was given the position. We have 179 sermons from Chrysologus.⁴⁸ Unlike Cyprian, he frequently preached from the Gospels. His style has very pastoral, focused upon the needs of his congregation. A determination to uphold expository sequential treatment of books is evidenced in his method of preaching.⁴⁹ For example, consecutive sermons on Romans moved through the epistle section by section. After a break for other topical sermons, Romans was resumed at the precise point at which it had been left.

46. *De Habitu Virginum*, 2 (CSEL 3.1, 185–205).

47. William B. Palardy, “Peter Chrysologus’ Interpretation of the Raising of Lazarus,” in, *Studia Patristica*, ed., Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1991).

48. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermons and Homilies*, vol. 1, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1953); Peter Chrysologus, *Sermons and Homilies*, vol. 2, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2004); Peter Chrysologus, *Sermons and Homilies*, vol. 3, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2005). Some, such as Palardy accept 183 sermons as authentic.

49. s. 114 (CCL 24A, 694–8).

It is often suggested that Augustine's sermons were a "revolution"⁵⁰ or represented the high watermark of classical preaching.⁵¹ The sermons of preachers before and after Augustine support what at first glance appears to be a hagiographical assessment. Chrysologus was reliable in his interpretation of scripture and pastoral care. However, there is a marked decline from Augustine's warm, extemporary engagement with text and listeners. At a very basic level, this is seen in the consistent brevity of Chrysologus' preaching. Each sermon could not have taken more than ten or fifteen minutes to preach. Chrysologus was so committed to brevity that he frequently broke up Scriptural passages into separate short addresses. For example, the "Parable of the Prodigal Son" received five distinct brief sermons.⁵² Old seems to find it difficult to accept a preacher could speak for such a short length of time, and suggests that medieval scribes truncated the material due to decreased "literary facility."⁵³ But there is no evidence for this assertion.

It seems more likely that the texts have been accurately preserved, and that Chrysologus did indeed preach very short sermons. Two observations from the sermons bear this out. First, Chrysologus expressed a desire to break off his sermon out of deference to the customs and expectations of his church.⁵⁴ Second, it seems that the custom to which he referred was the practice of preaching three sermons in each church service, an approach which naturally demanded brevity. So Chrysologus mentions a threefold preaching from the Psalms, Gospels and Paul.⁵⁵ Evidence of this custom is seen in s.6, which is on a psalm and opens with reference to the previous sermon on a Gospel.⁵⁶ It appears that both sermons took place within the same service.

The brevity of Chrysologus may be due to the liturgical customs within which he operated, but whether or not this is the cause, his sermons lack Augustine's fluidity and vitality. Augustine interacted with text and listener in such a manner that he felt free to cease preaching only when he knew the congregation had either tired or else accepted his message. Augustine tried various approaches to communicate the insight he felt was his message from God. There was, in Augustine, a flexibility in presentation. Chrysologus appears

50. Ando, "Christian Literature," 405.

51. Old, *Reading and Preaching: The Patristic Age*, 344; George Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World 300 B.C.– A.D. 300* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 612–13.

52. s. 1–5 (CCL 24, 15–42).

53. Old, *Reading and Preaching: The Patristic Age*, 418.

54. s. 2 (CCL 24, 25).

55. s. 115 (CCL 24A, 699).

56. s. 6 (CCL 24, 43).

more bound by his preparation, technique and customs than Augustine, who preferred to imbibe the Scriptural text and preach it as the occasion demanded. By the time of Chrysologus, liturgical custom had largely normalised sequential sermons on Scripture, but the resultant order necessitated a decline from Augustine's vital interplay between Scripture, preacher and listeners.

AUGUSTINE'S PREACHING METHOD

By Augustine's time, only bishops were permitted to preach. Edmund Hill sees this as evidence that the North African church had "sunk into a dejected and fossilised formalism."⁵⁷ The situation was even worse than ecclesiastical order inhibiting the ministry of preaching. Many bishops were too busy to preach, or frightened of the Donatists. Bishop Valerius was himself a product of this situation, a Greek speaker unable to preach in the Latin tongue of his congregation. It is difficult to know whether Augustine's ordination as priest and assistant to Valerius was the result of the bishop's talent spotting, or his congregation's frustration. Whichever was the case, Bishop Aurelius of Carthage appreciated the potential Augustine possessed. Aurelius broke with ecclesiastical tradition and ordered the young priest to preach. After he was ordained bishop, Augustine was frenetically active, but never too busy to preach.

ARCHITECTURE AND ATTENDANCE

The historical development of preaching was intertwined with architecture. During persecutions, such as that under Decius, Christians had to meet secretly, in small groups. Preaching could not take the form of public discourse in such a restricted setting. After Constantine gave his backing to the Christian church, funds and freedom permitted the architecture within which preaching as public discourse could flourish.⁵⁸ When Augustine preached, he interacted with listeners in the assured manner of a trained orator. The unedited records of these interjections give his *Sermones* a sense of warm immediacy. The intimacy is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that Augustine spoke from the *cathedra*—an imposing seat modelled on Roman marble *cathedra* for passing judicial rulings. The irony of a Christian preacher speaking from the same kind

57. Hill, "St. Augustine's Theory and Practice of Preaching," 590.

58. Gordon Campbell, ed. *The Grove Encyclopedia of Classical Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 155; Johannes Roldanus, *The Church in the Age of Constantine: The Theological Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2006), 41.

of seat as that from which Pilate condemned Christ would not have been lost on listeners.⁵⁹

While Augustine sat in the raised position of authority, his congregation stood around him.⁶⁰ It is possible that the building Augustine preached in had Donatist origins – they were after all the majority church. It is probable that Augustine's church has been excavated. The site is difficult to visit now. In 2001, Prof. James O'Donnell⁶¹ visited and photographed the site with Serge Lancel.⁶² Examination of O'Donnell's photograph and report suggests the building could have held a maximum standing congregation of three hundred.⁶³ It is difficult to reconcile the architecture with Van der Meer's occasional attendance figure of two thousand.⁶⁴ Perhaps such numbers could gather around the buildings on festival days, for they could not have fitted inside the main church. People would have crowded around the buildings for the Easter Vigil and baptismal processions from baptistry into church. The stenographical recording of the *Sermones* is evidence that Augustine's preaching garnered a wide interest. There was demand for copies of the *Sermones*, and in all likelihood a certain amount of excitable retelling of the preached content.

It has been common to assume that Augustine's listeners were drawn from all sections of society: rich and poor, educated and barbarian. Van der Meer portrays the setting thus,⁶⁵ as does Doyle.⁶⁶ This is certainly the impression one gets from reading the *Sermones*, as they refer to slaves and the poor being present. Readers naturally assume that Paul's assessment of Corinth held true for Hippo.⁶⁷

In an important article, Ramsay MacMullen challenged this view of a mixed congregation.⁶⁸ He argued that the belief in a mixed congregation comprising diverse social strata was little more than romanticism. The limited

59. Matt 27:19.

60. s. 355.2. (SPM 1, 124)

61. Copyright is held by Prof. J. O'Donnell. He has given permission for reproduction.

62. Serge Lancel, *St Augustine* (London: SCM Press, 2002).

63. I am grateful to Prof. O'Donnell for his correspondence on the matter, and generosity in letting me reproduce his photograph as part of my PhD.

64. Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 23.

65. *Ibid.*, 389; G. Wright Doyle, "Augustine's Sermonic Method," *Westminster Theological Journal* 39 (1977), 221.

66. Doyle, "Augustine's Sermonic Method," 221.

67. "There were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble." 1 Cor 1:26. New American Standard Bible.

68. Ramsay MacMullen, "The Preacher's Audience (AD 350–400)," *Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1989), 503–11.

size of church buildings suggested to him that only the wealthy could attend. With specific reference to Augustine, MacMullen contended that the appearances of a mixed congregation were illusory. He suggests that the poor would not have been beggars but rather middle class landowners; poor only in a relative sense compared to the upper class.⁶⁹ Augustine's acceptance that almost all households have slaves suggests a genteel outlook unfamiliar to those who could not afford slaves.⁷⁰

MacMullen's thesis is a helpful corrective to an idealisation of Augustine's audience. However, his view ought not be taken too far. Maxwell does not accept his conclusions with regard to one of the other preachers MacMullen considers: Chrysostom. She points out that while laborers and artisans may not be actual beggars, they would have felt themselves to be poor in comparison to others, and in absolute terms, compared to equivalent workers today, they were indeed poor.⁷¹ Pickpockets were certainly present at Chrysostom's services, though it is difficult to know whether that was to steal or listen.⁷² In a similar manner, we can discern definite social distinctions among Augustine's congregation: children, slaves, church leaders, farmers and the poor.

It is difficult to be precise about exactly what financial means each group enjoyed. MacMullen assumes that a small building would lead to attendance being restricted to rich people who would not associate with the poor. But it could just as easily be the case that rich people would be attracted to a meeting where they can show off in front of the poor. That would fit with the sort of rebukes Augustine gave the wealthy in his preaching.⁷³ In addition it should be remembered that Augustine was involved in regular legal cases and public matters to do with property ownership, wages and slave manumission.⁷⁴ This aspect of his ministry would have brought him into frequent contact with the poor, some of whom may have subsequently attended his preaching. In summary, MacMullen offers a helpful corrective to imagining Augustine's congregation as thousands of people united in a utopia which transcended all social barriers. The reality was more modest; however, it was still a genuine inclusion of several diverse representatives of society.

69. *Ibid.*, 509.

70. *Ibid.*, 505.

71. Jaclyn L. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity: John Chrysostom and His Congregation in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006), 74.

72. *Ibid.*, 75.

73. E.g., s. 178.2–7 (PL 38, 961).

74. Joseph B. Bernardin, "St. Augustine as Pastor," in *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 74.

THE LITURGICAL SERVICE

As physical architecture imposed a certain order on Augustine's preaching, so the liturgical service also shaped the *Sermones*. Augustine's listeners had expectations that their preacher would follow accepted liturgical readings. On the occasions that Augustine departed from the normal reading, they could be upset.⁷⁵ The liturgical calendar impressed Scripture deeply upon listeners:

The Bible, solemnly read or sung each year, was recalled incessantly on numerous occasion. . . . Augustine and his congregation knew the liturgical lessons and their related Psalms by heart.⁷⁶

The order of liturgical readings was not overly restrictive to Augustine, as he could select a reading from the service to preach upon, or could use a reading to treat a topic of pastoral importance. It appears that there were two programs of readings throughout the liturgical year – one fitting with the seasons, the other with saints. *Sermones* from both of these categories are considered in our case study chapters. In addition to these, a number of the *Sermones* do not appear to fit either set of readings. These would include occasions where Augustine was travelling and addressed another congregation on some local matter, or considered a pastoral issue such as a freed slave or the forgiveness of a repentant Donatist.

It appears that though there were the aforementioned cycles of readings, and expectations were present, a liturgical calendar for readings was not fixed rigidly. Willis confirms that in Augustine's time, liturgical calendars for reading had been developed, but were not yet obeyed rigidly. He suggests that the focus on relevant passages during the liturgical seasons such as Easter and Lent was a catalyst towards fuller embracing of liturgical order.⁷⁷ Augustine's *Sermones* are consistent with this observation. Thus, there was both freedom and order in the readings. In a service of Eucharist, there were three readings, from the Old Testament, Epistles and Gospels. Additionally, there would have been a Psalm sung.

The usual days for preaching were Sunday and Saturday; however, Augustine could preach at more than one service or church on a given day. In addition to the normal Sunday pattern, several points in the liturgical calendar increased preaching responsibilities. Lent required a sermon every day; Easter demanded more than one sermon a day, in addition to baptismal preparation.

75. s. 232.1. (SC 116, 260)

76. Bonnardière, "Augustine: Minister of the Word of God," 250.

77. G.C. Willis, *St. Augustine's Lectionary* (London: Alcuin Club Collections, 1962), 6.

Augustine did not preach only at his own church. According to Verbraken's analysis,⁷⁸ 146 of the *Sermones* were preached at Hippo and 109 in Carthage. Twelve others can be traced to smaller cities, but the rest cannot be placed with any certainty.

The significance of the liturgical service and calendar will be considered further in our case studies, particularly with reference to Easter, Christmas and martyrs. At this point in our book, we merely draw attention to the important role liturgy had in ordering Augustine's preaching. The order was not rigid or restrictive; pedagogically, the liturgy helped listeners learn the Scriptures. This was not simply through repetition, but by inviting them to step into the rhythm of a year which melded with the sweep of Scriptural narrative. Augustine was conscious of the manner in which liturgical celebrations could make the passion of Christ in the past, appear in a spiritual manner in the present.⁷⁹ The congregation was empowered to feel an appropriate sense of being possessed by Scripture, and possessing Scripture. It was their Scripture, for they loved and knew it. As the Scripture was memorized by repetition, the Scriptural images and stories encroached upon the daily rhythms and seasons of life. Clearly there was a danger that familiarity and memorization could engender pride, complacency or boredom. Thus, a great part of the preacher's responsibility was to preach so as to avoid those possibilities created by the liturgical ordering.

AUGUSTINE'S STYLE OF PREACHING

Augustine's style of preaching appears on a first reading to be pedestrian and casual. His manner is more temperate than Tertullian or Cyprian, less stylised than Chrysologus and less elegant than Ambrose. Major philosophical and doctrinal themes associated with his other writings, such as predestination, are mentioned very infrequently.⁸⁰ Though one of these instances suggests a full blown doctrine of double predestination,⁸¹ this is not developed or defended as it is elsewhere in Augustine's corpus. Sermonic application of predestination

78. Pierre-Patrick Verbraken, *Etudes Critiques Sur Les Sermons Authentiques De Saint Augustin*, vol. 12, *Instrumenta Patristica* (Steenbrugis: 1976).

79. *Ep.* 98.9. (CSEL 34, 2:530)

80. s. 111 (RB 57, 112), 138.5 (PL 38, 765), 158 (PL 38, 862) and 260D.1 (MA 1, 499) contain the only mentions of predestination in the *Sermones*. 229S mentions predestination in a manner uncharacteristic of Augustine before the Pelagian controversy, suggesting it may be inauthentic. See J. Patout Burns, "From Persuasion to Predestination: Augustine on Freedom in Rational Creatures," in *In Dominico Elquio, in Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honour of Robert Louis Wilken*, ed. Paul M. Blowers, et al (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002).

81. s. 260D.1 (MA 1, 499).

is focused more on urging the predestined to prove their election by offering hospitality.⁸² As mentioned in our preface, such features as these have led to a marginalisation of Augustine's *Sermones*. Not only do they appear less impressive than other ancient preachers' efforts, they do not fit with the image people have built up of Augustine himself, on the basis of his three or four best known writings.

A small number of academics have realised that the informal style of Augustine's preaching is pregnant with theological significance. The pastoral context of congregational preaching shaped Augustine's manner of speaking:

It was Augustine's pastoral concern that so deeply engaged him with his congregation. It is the pastoral concern which saves him from making his preaching a personal display, and individualistic performance or a work of oratorical art or self expression.⁸³

It is difficult to prove Old's intriguing suggestion that the Jewish synagogue's style of teaching supplanted secular rhetoric as the dominant influence on Augustine's manner of preaching.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, something must be offered as an explanation of Augustine's approach to preaching. Augustine's description of his earlier attitudes to rhetoric show what a substantive change his beliefs had undergone. One way to measure the immensity of the revolution is to compare *De Dialectica*⁸⁵ with *De Doctrina* and the *Sermones*. The greatest influence was most likely—as we shall argue when we consider *De Doctrina*—his immersion in the Scriptures themselves.

An earlier writer who offered insightful comment on Augustine's style was Fredrick van der Meer:

82. s. 111.4. (RB 57, 116)

83. Old, *Reading and Preaching: The Patristic Age*, 365.

84. *Ibid.*, 349.

85. There is a debate about the authenticity of *De Dialectica*. A strong case for Augustinian authorship is given in B.D. Jackson, *Augustine's De Dialectica* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1975). Jackson's reconstruction of the context of the treatise, and its relationship to the Augustinian corpus is compelling. I accept his conclusion: "Complete certainty eludes us, of course, but we can say that it is more probable that it is Augustine's than that it is not his." (p. 30) As he admits, doubts arise due to the medieval manuscript traditions. We will not make further use of *De Dialectica* in our work, as the historical work has already been done ably by other scholars. The most significant thing about *De Dialectica* is that it is an unremarkable, efficient summary of some principles of ancient rhetoric. Even if Augustine was not the author, it is a good example of the kind of thing he would have used to teach his students rhetoric.

The average sermon of Augustine makes such a disorderly impression that his unpretentious manner seems almost to suggest downright carelessness... He made his sermons deliberately artless, and at the same time showed positive genius in his strict observance of all artistic rules.⁸⁶

There appear to have been two aspects of Augustine's style which merit comment: the rhetorical and the theological. On the rhetorical side, his casual manner was the mark of a man skilled and gifted enough in his profession to wear his learning lightly. He did not need to labor or draw attention to his ability in rhetoric; neither was his use of rhetorical devices formulaic.

However, that would only be a partial explanation of Augustine's style; a theological component is necessary to build a convincing case. His studied ambivalence about rhetoric and embracing of a homely, personal manner of discourse was profoundly theological. It flowed from his conviction that God loved and cared for his listeners, regardless of their status or learning. It arose from his belief that the same God who spoke to a learned preacher through the Scriptures, addressed the listener who stood to hear a sermon from a book he could never afford to purchase. Convictions such as these led Augustine to prefer keeping the Scriptural translation his listeners were familiar with, even if that necessitated not making use of scholarly advances.⁸⁷ The warm colloquial style of Augustine also flowed from his doctrinal convictions about the centrality of the desirous heart. Warm words from God intended to inculcate love naturally demand a preacher to speak with heartfelt warmth.

Thus, rhetoric and theology together shaped Augustine's preaching style. The result was an extemporaneous manner of preaching which satisfied rhetorical and theological agendas. Deferrari studied Augustine's preaching on John in depth, and concluded that we have:

The practically unrevised and unaltered longhand transcripts of shorthand verbatim reports made at the time when the sermons were delivered, the sermons themselves were spoken off-hand without much preparation.⁸⁸

86. Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 418–19.

87. Ep. 28.2 (CSEL 34, 1:105); 71.3–6 (CSEL 34, 2:250); 82:34–5 (CSEL 34, 2:385); *civ. Dei* 18.43 (CCL 48, 638).

88. Roy Joseph Deferrari, "Verbatim Reports of Augustine's Unwritten Sermons," *American Philological Association* 46 (1915), 35.

In a subsequent paper, Deferrari extended his research to cover other *Sermones*, and focused on the method of preparation Augustine utilized.⁸⁹ A compelling case is made that Augustine's habit was to meditate upon the passages of scripture which would be read in a service,⁹⁰ and then speak extemporaneously upon the passage. He would not use notes or memorization, and felt free to adapt and change his approach to fit the listeners' reactions and interjections. Since Augustine did not live long enough to edit his *Sermones*,⁹¹ the marks of improvisation and interaction are more than evident.

Quintilian had expressed dissatisfaction with speakers who relied overly upon scripts or memorisation of speeches.⁹² Augustine's preference for extemporaneous preaching meant that he utilized the methods recommended by the best secular orators. His style had rhetorical purpose:

Augustine knew that if a man truly mastered a subject, he had only to say what was in his mind with honesty and conviction; then he would have no difficulty in remaining in the popular vein and being at all times understood.⁹³

However, the theological concerns were even more important than the rhetorical agenda. Theologically, Augustine's preference for extemporary preaching which flowed from prior contemplation upon Scripture generated a concern for relationality between God, preacher and listeners. The preacher's prayers for listeners, and requests that God would enlighten his understanding, drew all parties into a spiritual union and shared journey. Augustine's method of preaching required far more than mere information transfer; it necessitated the opening of a preacher's heart to God and a subsequent outpouring of the heart's love to listeners. Van der Meer makes the connection between extemporary style and relationality when he observes that Augustine "spoke from the fullness of his heart" and was "in living contact with his audience."⁹⁴

Thus we can see that Augustine's style of preaching set him apart from other ancient preachers, and flowed from not only his rhetorical training but also his theological beliefs. If the *Sermones* have been neglected, then it is

89. Roy Joseph Deferrari, "St. Augustine's Method of Composing and Delivering Sermons," *The American Journal of Philology* 43, no. 2 (1922).

90. s. 225.3 (PL 38, 1097), 352.1. (PL 39, 1550).

91. *Retr.* 2.67. (CCL 57, 142)

92. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, 2.10.3.

93. Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 432.

94. *Ibid.*, 419.

reasonable to suggest that an important aspect of Augustine's legacy has been undervalued. A style which at first appears to be casual and pedestrian is actually the fruit of profound theological convictions.

CONCLUSION

We have considered aspects of the context within which Augustine preached, the North African culture and the North African Church. We have shown some of the commonalities and distinctives of Augustine's preaching compared to other relevant preachers. All of this has highlighted the interplay, in various ways, between order and passion. Order and passion manifested themselves in North African culture generally. These two terms have been helpful in organizing our historical study. However, our subsequent chapters will prefer to utilize the hermeneutical keys of interiority and temporality, as these terms for investigation are more nuanced theologically than passion and order. They may be viewed as developments which build upon order and passion, but make for more constructive delineation of Augustine's undergirding assumptions and convictions.

In Augustine's preaching we highlighted the ordering roles of architecture, liturgy, rhetoric and theological convictions. Passion is evident in his devotion to extemporary preaching, which allowed room for his love of God and listeners to be expressed in prayerful meditation and spontaneous interaction. A central aim of the subsequent chapters is to elucidate the supremely important role Scripture took in ordering and shaping the preaching of Augustine. Scripture enlarged the passions of Augustine for God and people. It shaped and ordered his convictions and gave him the means to urge others to experience what he enjoyed. It is well known that the *Confessiones* represented a new kind of literature which flowed from the pen of an author saturated in Scripture. Our goal is to expose some of the ways Scripture shaped and informed his preaching. In the next chapter, we shall consider another vital part of the context which informed Augustine's preaching: the heritage of pagan oratory.