

Peter Sanlon. *Augustine's Theology of Preaching*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014. 177 pages. \$24.

The influence of St. Augustine upon our current studies of preaching is hard to fully comprehend. On the one hand, Augustine's theology has filtered into the ground water of Christianity. Augustine's influence is so widespread and so deep it is nearly impossible to trace. Can there be a Chrysostom or a Luther or a Barth without Augustine? Augustine has a privileged place in the history of Christian thought and to pretend as if his thought hasn't influenced the field of homiletics as now configured is foolish. Augustine's *On Christian Teaching* is widely considered to be the church's first preaching textbook and *Confessions* has served as the headwaters for all of the spiritual memoirs that are so popular among preachers. And yet, on the other hand, within the field of homiletics scant attention has been paid to Augustine's actual preaching. When Augustine climbed those pulpit steps what did he say? How did he say it? What operative theology guided his proclamation? How did Augustine organize his sermons?

In his work, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching*, Peter T. Sanlon invites a more substantive conversation about the preaching of one of the church's most favorite sons. Sanlon's work is a deep dive into Augustine's vast corpus in the hope that one might find some helpful lenses for reading Augustine's sermons. Sanlon surfaces with two important hermeneutical keys: interiority and temporality. Augustine's preaching, Sanlon argues, was primarily concerned with using scripture to change the hearts and minds of his listeners. In a sense, Augustine sought ways to communicate the deep meanings of the scriptures in a way that met the hearts and minds of the listeners. By focusing on the themes of interiority and temporality in scripture Augustine found ways to connect with interior desires and temporal lives of his congregation.

The strength of this book is its careful attention to the underexamined places of the Augustinian canon. Sanlon does not limit his study to what Augustine said about preaching, but carefully examines Augustine's actual preaching. *The Sermons of Augustine (Sermones ad Populum)* are a ragged bunch of proclamations that are guided more by the urgencies of everyday life than by a single, consistent theological worldview. In this way, Augustine's sermons are like the corpus of most preachers in history. Undeterred by the challenges of understanding such a disparate body of work, Sanlon provides a thorough reading of Augustine's sermons. In particular, the final three chapters of this book are its best. When Sanlon finally arrives at the examinations of the sermons, the book immediately becomes more lively and interesting. The case studies that end the book give Sanlon an opportunity to stretch his legs and do the synthetic thinking that marks the best of homiletics.

It is the lack of this synthetic thinking that hinders the initial chapters of the book. The historical discussion of Augustine's preaching context is rarely tied into specific instances of Augustine's sermons. Sanlon describes the context of Augustine's preaching in order that we might begin to read the sermons, but doesn't work backwards to help us understand how the sermons might inform our understanding of context. The same problem comes from when Sanlon examines Augustine's theories of preaching as espoused in *On Christian Teaching*. Does Augustine's vision of ideal practice match his *actual* practice? In what way ought *On Christian Teaching* be amended according to the practice of Augustine's preaching? These questions are left unanswered.

Sanlon's work is full of interesting ideas and it should be commended for cracking the door for homiletics to shine more light on the influence of Augustine preaching. As an initial foray into a new conversation it is meant primarily for other scholars. The prose is at times

overly academic and prone to jargon. As such this book is probably not suited for master's level students or clergy. It would, however, be welcome reading for those interested in thinking not simply about Augustine's theories of preaching but about Augustine's practice of preaching.

Adam Hearlson, Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Center, MA