

Overflowing and Intermingling: Augustine, Preaching, Relationality, and the Spirit

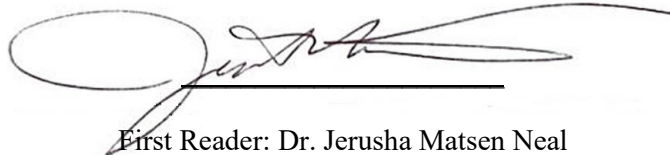
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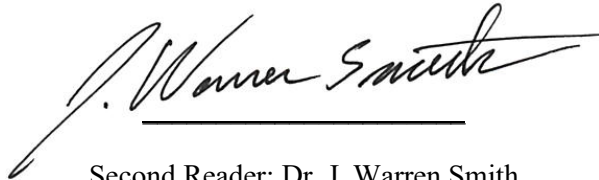
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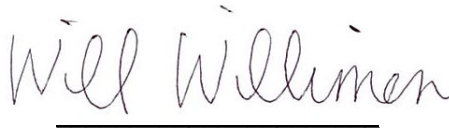
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in Duke Divinity School, Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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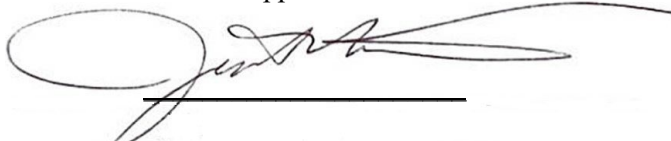
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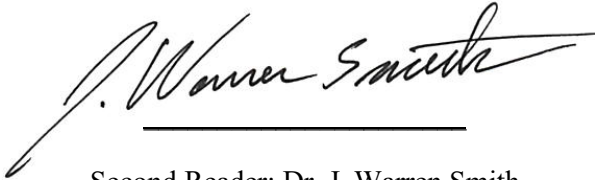
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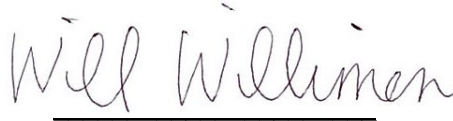
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Abstract

Some recent trends in homiletics have begun to move beyond postmodern questions to postcolonial questions. One primary concern shared among many contemporary homileticians, and especially articulated by postcolonial homileticians, is “relationality.” How can diverse peoples with diverse histories interacting through a variety of power dynamics truly relate to one another? How can those people relate to God and God’s word, especially as God’s word is proclaimed through preaching by a human being who is caught up in those power dynamics? These questions touch on the relationality of bodies, minds, and teaching; they explore anthropology, epistemology, and practical theology. However, the issues at the heart of relationality are not new. This thesis explores the homiletical theory and practice of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), with a view toward how Augustine anticipates some of the core questions of relationality raised in the 21st century. The first chapter synthesizes contemporary questions of relationality and suggests why Augustine is an apt conversation partner for these questions. The body of the thesis (chs. 2—4) focuses on a close reading of Augustine’s treatise, *De Doctrina Christiana*, and select sermons, through the lenses of the questions synthesized in ch. 1. The final chapter brings the insights gained from chs. 2—4 back into conversation with three contemporary sermons, each preached by a postcolonial homiletician. By setting Augustine’s sermons alongside contemporary sermons, this thesis seeks to show that there is much to draw on in the historic Christian tradition to help answer contemporary homiletical questions. Ultimately, it will be argued that Augustine’s way of interweaving various characteristics of bodies, minds, and teaching and his crucial reliance on the Holy Spirit to hold together the overflowing and intermingling relational dynamics of the preaching event outline a way of preaching relationally in both the 5th and the 21st centuries.

Dedication

For Brittany, who pushed and pulled me through this project in all the best ways.

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“There is so much to be grateful for, words are poor things,” prays Revd. Boughton in Marilynne Robinson’s novel *Home*. These words are but a small token of my appreciation for so many who have supported me in my calling and throughout the writing of this thesis. First, I’d like to thank my first reader and supervisor, Dr. Jerusha Matsen Neal. Her support and guidance have been extraordinary, and her insights have helped shape my thinking from start to finish. Dr. Neal’s approach to homiletics and her preaching have influenced me far beyond the citations of her work in this thesis. I am also grateful to Dr. J. Warren Smith, whose initial feedback on an early chapter provided encouragement to expand my ideas and who provided invaluable support as second reader on the project.

My friends and church family at Memorial Presbyterian Church, West Palm Beach, and Providencia WPB supported me in more ways than they know. Their love and openness helped to foster my passion for preaching. I especially want to thank the generous people of Memorial Presbyterian Church who supported me financially throughout the Duke D.Min. degree.

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Finally, I am forever grateful to my wife, Brittany, and our children, Owen and Afton, who loved me and cheered me on throughout the program and the writing of this thesis. Especially the final months of this project when many hours were spent researching and writing

daily, I'll always treasure walking Owen and Afton to school and picking them up at the end of the day. Their presence was grounding and comforting.

All glory to God the Father, Son, and Spirit, eternally intertwined and intertwining us with Godself.

Introduction

As I look out at my congregation in south Florida,¹ I am met by the eyes of people from around the world, bodies that have travelled in and out of many spaces, and minds that have wrestled with numerous ideas and processed countless experiences. There are many languages and ethnicities represented, including Africans from tribes in present-day Kenya and Uganda, second-generation immigrants from the Philippines, first-generation immigrants from the Caribbean islands and from India, children adopted from Haiti, and many variations of White people. Every generation from the Silent Generation to Generation Alpha is present. A wide range of socio-economic statuses and sexual identities is represented. There is a range of social power possessed by these people, even within the power structures of this local church, as well as a complex web of relationships between all of us, our shared faith, and God. And all of this diversity makes me wonder what kind of preaching holds together the distinct, disparate, and yet intersecting relational dynamics of this congregation? Can there be such preaching? The 21st century with its increasing polarization proves that many of these relational dynamics separate us and pull us away from one another. Is there a preached word that can be for all these contexts? Additionally, each of these individuals and the relationships they represent intersect and interact with contexts both postmodern and postcolonial. What might change about our preaching if we see its role as engaging relationally with bodies, minds, doctrine and faith? What kind of preaching provides space for all these relationships and contexts?

¹ At the time of writing, I was Teaching Pastor in two related congregations (Providencia WPB and Memorial Presbyterian Church) in West Palm Beach, FL, USA. At the time of submission, I live and work in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Perhaps this kind: I was sitting around a table with three others at a national denominational conference. One was a friend and colleague in ministry; we had worked together for just over three years as part of a church plant whose congregation was made up primarily of people under 40 years old. The other two at the table were hoping to begin a ministry to a similar age demographic in another city across the country and they were asking for any advice we might offer. As we described the slow, painstaking work of building relationships with people who either have no experience of church or have been disillusioned with (or even hurt by) a church, my colleague and I both began focusing on the necessity of patiently listening well. She spoke from her position as a licensed mental health counselor and I from my position as teaching and preaching pastor. She talked about how listening well draws us toward one another while also helping us maintain differentiation.² I picked up the theme and set it in the context of preaching to see how it fit. “There are times where this kind of listening actually happens in a Sunday service,” I said. “I can be preaching, but in the act of preaching I realize that because of the relational work we are doing, there is part of Claire³ (I pointed to my colleague) that is in me and speaking through me and there is part of me that is in her and listening. We are both still fully ourselves but also inhabited by the other, and that work is only possible because the Spirit desires precisely that kind of relationality.” The next day Claire and I shared a taxi from the airport back to our houses. We dropped Claire at her house first, and when we drove away toward my house, the driver inquired, “So, you two are brother and sister?” I thought, yes, that is the work God is doing in and

² The concept of differentiation was first introduced in the field of mental health counseling by Murray Bowen. Though its definition is often debated, it addresses the ways in which one might understand themselves within networks of relationships and simultaneously maintain healthy attachments and individuality; see “Differentiation of Self,” The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, accessed April 21, 2023, <https://www.thebowencenter.org/differentiation-of-self>. *The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family* (<https://www.thebowencenter.org/differentiation-of-self>), accessed April 21, 2023.

³ Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

through our beautiful, broken selves: drawing us toward one another in a way that changes who we are to one another. What changes about our preaching if we see it as part of this relational work?

Contemporary and Ancient Questions

As Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) looked out at his congregation, he was met with similar challenges of diversity and relationality. From his bishop's seat at the far end of the vast basilica at Hippo,⁴ he would have preached to a staggering range of people that were perhaps unlikely to be in the same room in any other social context at the time. Possidius, a friend of Augustine and Augustine's first biographer, tells us the audience included both heretics and "catholics."⁵ There were people from "all levels of society and education,"⁶ the rich and the poor,⁷ and even on some occasions fellow bishops from other parts of the Roman Empire.⁸ This diverse audience spoke multiple languages: Augustine preached in Latin, but some would have also spoken Greek, and many would have spoken North African languages such as Berber or Punic.⁹ They brought with them a mixture of religious experiences and practices.¹⁰ And they would have been packed into the basilica at Hippo, often body-to-body,¹¹ eagerly waiting to hear Augustine's word *for them*. But how could even the brilliant former professor of rhetoric preach a word for this diverse, mixed audience?

⁴ William Harmless, *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 122–23.

⁵ Quoted in Hubertus Drobner, "'I Would Rather Not Be Wearisome to You' Saint Augustine' as Preacher," *Melita Theologica* 51, no. 2 (2000): 123.

⁶ Drobner, 121.

⁷ Harmless, *Own Words*, 85, quoting Possidius.

⁸ Cf. *Sermon* 94.1. Unless otherwise noted, references to Augustine's sermons come from Saint Augustine, *Sermons*, trans. O. P. Edmund Hill, 12 vols., *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, III (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, n.d.).

⁹ Justo L. González, *The Mestizo Augustine: A Theologian Between Two Cultures* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 24–25.

¹⁰ González, 72.

¹¹ Harmless, *Own Words*, 122.

This thesis will examine such questions by bringing together in conversation *contemporary* articulations of these questions with Augustine’s *ancient* theory and practice of preaching. Some recent trends in homiletics have begun to move beyond questions of how to preach in a postmodern context to how to preach in a postcolonial context. As I view these trends, one primary concern of postcolonial homileticians is about “relationality.”¹² How can diverse peoples with diverse histories interacting through a variety of power dynamics truly relate to one another? And how can those people relate to God and God’s word, especially as God’s word is proclaimed through preaching by a human being who is caught up in those very power dynamics? However, as Augustine’s context and congregation imply, the core concerns of relationality are not new. My thesis will explore Augustine’s homiletical theory and practice with a view toward how Augustine addresses some of the relational concerns raised in the 21st century. By setting Augustine’s sermons alongside contemporary sermons, I intend to show that there is much to draw on in the historic Christian tradition to answer contemporary homiletical questions.

Commenting on the Pentecost event in Acts 2, Willie Jennings suggests that what is needed in our present day is not simply interpreters of Scripture or Spirit-driven events, but “translators, people who will allow their lives to be translated, not just once, but again and again as the Spirit gives utterance.”¹³ Such *trans-lateral* movement is precisely the kind of relationality I want to explore – the kind that might reach across boundaries between bodies, minds, preaching and doctrine, and intertwine them. This kind of translation is exemplified in Augustine’s hermeneutical-homiletical treatise *De Doctrina Christiana* and embodied in Augustine’s preaching.

¹² Cf. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching: Creating a Ripple Effect* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), whose idea of preaching as a series of interlocking, expanding concentric circles illustrates this kind of relationality.

¹³ Willie James Jennings, *Acts, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 33.

When it comes to preaching on Christian mysteries like the incarnation, Trinity, and sacraments, Augustine seems to recognize and even embrace that he cannot fully comprehend these mysteries—they cannot be tamed or domesticated, they are wholly other. They are impossible to communicate *and yet* must be communicated. Herein lies the core tension of Christian preaching. While Augustine and his listeners would have had differing understandings of terms like uncertainty, doubt, suspicion, and plurality than 21st century understandings, the context in which they lived was one that included these ideas. Justo González highlights this in *The Mestizo Augustine*¹⁴ by exploring how Augustine’s context was “mixed” or “plural” in ways that are similar to the experience of many people in the 21st century in North America: especially Latino/a people who have migrated from their home country, African-Americans whose history and current location are inherently disjointed, growing numbers of people who have migrated from countries in Asia, and any others who find themselves inhabiting a multiplicity of cultures in a globalized society. An examination of Augustine’s homiletic – especially embodied in his preaching of Christian mysteries – with contemporary questions of relationality in mind, illustrates that there are resources within the Christian tradition that contemporary preachers can draw on to fully and faithfully inhabit the messy relationality of preaching.

Overflowing and Intermingling

Two of the terms Augustine does use that touch on this idea of messy relationality are “overflowing” and “intermingling.” In the preface to *DDC* Augustine affirms that a positive and effective relationality between humans is possible in preaching with a remarkable turn of phrase. R. P. H. Green translates: “Moreover, there would be no way for love, which ties people together

¹⁴ González, *Mestizo*.

in the bonds of unity, *to make souls overflow and as it were intermingle with each other*, if human beings learned nothing from other human beings.”¹⁵ It is beautiful and dense imagery, eventually requiring four books worth of unpacking. With regard to this thesis, three things may be said that introduce key points in my larger argument; these can be articulated moving backward through the quote. First, when Augustine uses the language of learning in *DDC*, he is most often connecting that idea with ideas of communication (especially verbal), knowledge, teaching, and preaching. Humans don’t simply learn from one another through books or in a classroom, but also through the presentation of God’s truth in preaching; it is the expressed goal of *DDC* to lay out how such presentation may be made.¹⁶ Second, the idea of humans intermingling with one another provides the overarching imagery for Augustine’s way of drawing human bodies and minds together through preaching. Augustine uses several terms and I will also use a set of synonyms to describe these ideas. In this very quote Augustine speaks of intermingling, overflowing, and tying together; I will also use terms like intertwine, interweave, entangle, and others. Third, in this quote “love” is a personal and active, even personified, idea. For Augustine love is the motivator and end goal for everything including interactions with other humans, epistemology, and even spoken communication (i.e., preaching). Here, however, there is a foreshadowing of a crucial move Augustine makes in *DDC*, which is to identify the Holy Spirit as the personal and active wielder of love that ultimately holds together the messy relational dynamics in the preaching event. Though the Spirit is mentioned very sparingly throughout *DDC*, the Spirit is indispensable to Augustine’s understanding of preaching, and finally offers a way of preaching relationally in both the 5th century and the 21st.

¹⁵ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pre.13. Unless otherwise noted, all citations of *DDC* use Green’s paragraph numeration.

¹⁶ Cf. Saint Augustine, IV.1.

On Limits and Methodology

Augustine was nothing if not amazingly prolific, so a project that purports to examine any of Augustine's writings wades into deep primary source waters, not to mention the expansive volume of secondary literature on the former Bishop of Hippo's works. For purposes of feasibility, this project will be limited to Augustine's homiletics, including theoretical writings and sermons. But even this is too vast a body of work to explore within the confines of this project. Therefore, within the realm of Augustine's homiletical theory and practice, this project will be limited to examining and exploring *De Doctrina Christiana* (henceforth, *DDC*), which is Augustine's most thorough treatise on hermeneutics/homiletics, and several selected sermons Augustine preached on key biblical passages or Christian doctrines that illustrate the interweaving and intermingling understanding of preaching identified in *DDC*. While it may at times be beneficial to reference other works of Augustine, this limiting of primary sources allows for more depth of exploration into the ways Augustine might speak to the core questions of relationality presented by 21st century homileticians.

Regarding the brief survey of late-20th and 21st century homiletics in the first chapter below, the goal is not to provide an exhaustive history of contemporary homiletics. Rather it is simply to identify and re-articulate some of the core questions behind particularly postcolonial challenges to previous homiletical theories and models.

The identification and articulation of the "intermingled and overflowing" nature of a relational homiletic will come through close readings of both ancient and contemporary texts, as well as synthesizing and contributing to contemporary conversations regarding relationality among contemporary homileticians. The primary focus of close reading will be *DDC*, but there will also be need for commenting on some of Augustine's sermons and (in the final chapter) contemporary sermons. By facilitating a dialogue between these ancient and contemporary

sources, my hope is that the methodology of this project reflects its aims and conclusions, namely that bodies, voices, minds, beliefs and practices must be interwoven with one another, ultimately by the Holy Spirit, for full and faithful relationality to exist in preaching.

Structure

Chapter 1 dives deeper into both contemporary homiletics and Augustine's context in order to argue why Augustine's preaching is a fitting conversation partner for contemporary preaching. A brief survey of some contemporary homileticians and a more thorough description of two postcolonial homileticians – Sarah Travis and HyeRan Kim-Cragg – leads to a synthesizing of three relational questions that guide the rest of the chapters. Chapters 2–4 will each focus on one of these relational questions through analysis of the text of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* and primarily one exemplar sermon of Augustine's. The goal of these chapters is not to provide an extensive background for *DDC* or to provide an exhaustive exegesis of it,¹⁷ but instead to take seriously Augustine's own comments at the beginning of Book I and Book IV of *DDC* that the tasks of discovery and presentation are inseparable in the interpretive quest. Hermeneutics and homiletics are closely knit together for Augustine, and therefore all of what Augustine says in *DDC* is applicable to preaching. The second goal is to place *DDC* in conversation with Augustine's sermons. Chapter 2 explores the relationality of bodies, chapter 3 explores the relationality of minds, and chapter 4 explores the relationality of preaching and doctrine. Throughout the chapters there will be opportunities to move between contemporary homiletical scholarship and Augustine's work. My hope is that through this interweaving it will be demonstrated how Augustine's preaching provides a rich resource for addressing themes of

¹⁷ For a good and accessible treatment of these, see R. P. H. Green's introduction and textual notes to his translation of *DDC* in Saint Augustine, vii–xxiii, 147–60.

relational preaching in the 21st century. Finally, chapter 5 analyzes three contemporary sermons from postcolonial homileticians through the lens of the interweaving nature of Augustine's homiletic in which the Holy Spirit is indispensable.

Chapter 1: Why Augustine? Why Relationality? Why Now?

Introduction

At the outset of the treatise *DDC*, Augustine of Hippo introduces his subject by locating himself in a tangled web of relationships. He identifies his target audience (those who wish to learn about interpreting Scripture), the subject of inquiry (interpreting and communicating about Scripture), his potential critics (a variety of sorts), and his source of inspiration (God).¹ But he doesn't only name these as if they are a laundry list or simply normal protocol for beginning a treatise. He also identifies some of the ways in which these relationships function; he puts his finger on physical, mental, and spiritual relational dynamics operative in his project. He illustrates the openness required to begin to teach another person anything at all, and yet immediately admits the limitation of leading another person where you think they ought to go. He recognizes his own reliance on God for understanding and illumination—and indeed the reader's reliance on God as well—but even given the uncertainty and lack of guarantee of such illumination, he proceeds with the work boldly. He preempts certain critiques of his work not just to dismiss potential critics but to remove any obstacles one might have to engaging with what he has to say. For those willing to engage—willing to come into relationship with him and this particular work—he sets himself not as ultimate authority on the subject but as a human intermediary in a wholly divine initiative where any teaching, any knowledge, any truth is not his to possess and deliver but his to release so that the keen and diligent reader might, in fact, become a teacher as Augustine himself is. He is asking for fellow seekers to come along with him on a road of searching. Thus, he is both recognizing relational dynamics and seeking relational connections.

¹ Saint Augustine, pre.1-2.

This thesis proposes that this kind of posture—a *relational* posture—is needed in preaching in a 21st century, post-colonial, globalized, multi-racial and multi-cultural context. By “relational” I mean an approach to the preaching task that recognizes the multiplicity of overlapping and multi-directional relationships at play in the context of preaching. This includes, but is not limited to, relational dynamics between the preacher and congregation, between the preacher and themselves, between each congregant and themselves, between each person and the biblical text, between each person and the Triune God, and between the Triune God and the biblical text. Such a definition does not, however, consider the end goals or consequences of relationality. In other words, relationality can be used or directed toward fostering mutuality and connection between the many actors in a given context or relationality can be directed toward reinforcing existing imbalances of relationship in a given context such that domination, oppression, or even death are possible as negative consequences. So it is not relationality *per se* that I am proposing. A qualifier is needed alongside “relational:” what I will call “intermingled,” “intertwined,” or “entangled.” It is the idea that things—humans, sermon, text, even the Divine—can and must be drawn toward one another through preaching rather than pushed toward polarization, marginalization or placed under a thumb of authority or oppression. But intertwined relationality recognizes that what is drawn together cannot be collapsed, and I will argue this is *good*. When we begin to ask seriously the questions of relationality, of how bodies relate to one another (ch. 2), how minds relate to one another (ch. 3), and how preaching relates to doctrine (ch. 4), we will find that certain entanglements are necessary in order to strive for preaching that builds up rather than destroys (Eph 4.29). Furthermore, I will argue that recognition and emphasis of the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling such entanglements is indispensable for a positively relational preaching. In how bodies relate to one another, openness and particularity must be

intertwined. In how minds relate to one another, boldness and humility must be intertwined. In how preaching relates to doctrine, curiosity and conviction must be intertwined.

Though he never uses the terms relational/relationality in *DDC*, Augustine often articulates these ideas and embodies them in his sermons. This thesis will explore Augustine's homiletical theory and practice, with a view toward how he addresses some of the relational concerns identified above—concerns which have been articulated and explored by various homileticians especially over the past 50 years. By setting Augustine's homiletic alongside contemporary homiletics, I intend to show that there is much to draw on in the historic Christian tradition to begin to answer our contemporary homiletical questions. The intermingling of multiple relational dynamics in 21st century contexts has already been anticipated profoundly by Augustine some seventeen centuries ago.

Relationality in Contemporary Homiletics: A Brief Summary

The theme of relationality in preaching has been discussed under many headings in homiletical literature over the past 50 years, including the so-called New Homiletics movement,² listener-oriented homiletics,³ Other-wise homiletics,⁴ and using terms like dialogue, mutuality, conversation, and collaboration.⁵ The explicit language of relationality has been applied to

² This movement in homiletics begins in the mid-20th century and is led by, among others, Fred Craddock and David Buttrick. The seminal work scholars point to is Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979). See also, David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1987).

³ A prime example is Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1997).

⁴ The term is coined by John McClure in *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001). However, a turn toward the "other" in homiletics can be traced back further in time; see John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995). Cf. also Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

⁵ A key source exploring these terms and themes is Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, *Dialogical Preaching: Bakhtin, Otherness, and Homiletics* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

homiletics by Susan Karen Hedahl (2004)⁶ and Aimee C. Moiso (2020),⁷ and the themes and terms of relationality have been picked up by postcolonial homileticians, especially Sarah Travis (2014ff.)⁸ and HyeRan Kim-Cragg (2019ff.).⁹ A brief narrative of these trends and scholars is in order here to demonstrate the importance of relationality for contemporary homiletics.¹⁰

Beginning in the 1970's, Fred Craddock, Charles Rice, and Henry Mitchell independently but nearly simultaneously published critical responses to the dominant approach to preaching which relied on deductive, propositional, and expository logic.¹¹ The impetus for such responses, according to Craddock, was a crisis in the pulpit that had resulted from some distinctly postmodern realities, especially in the West.¹² As an alternative to deductive preaching, Craddock argues for inductive preaching: a movement in the sermon from concrete experience to abstract theological truth rather than the other way around. This approach begins to consider ways in

⁶ Susan Karen Hedahl, "Rhetoric and Proclamation: A Relational Paradigm for the New Millennium," in *To Teach, to Delight, and to Move: Theological Education in a Post-Christian World*, ed. David S. Cunningham (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 267–78.

⁷ Aimee C. Moiso, "Standing in the Breach: A Relational Homiletic for Conflicted Times" (Nashville, TN, Vanderbilt University, 2020).

⁸ See esp. Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014). Cf. also Sarah Travis, "Troubled Gospel: Postcolonial Preaching for the Colonized, Colonizer, and Everyone in Between," *Homiletic* 40 (2015): 46–54.

⁹ See esp. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching: Creating a Ripple Effect* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021). Cf. also HyeRan Kim-Cragg, "Unfinished and Unfolding Tasks of Preaching: Interdisciplinary, Intercultural, and Interreligious Approaches in the Postcolonial Context of Migration," *Homiletic* 44 (2019): 4–17.

¹⁰ It is important to note here two 21st century works that explicitly recognize a need for relational preaching, though without any reference to postcolonial preaching or to Augustine. Andrew Root (*The Relational Pastor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013) includes a chapter on story-telling, teaching, and preaching (185-202) in his book, which is dedicated to describing all the aspects of ministering/pastoring through the lens of relationships. Root helpfully articulates how as pastors, and as Christians generally, it is "in sharing in each other's lives [that] we share in God's own life through Jesus Christ" (10, emphasis original). However, the role of the Holy Spirit is undeveloped and his emphasis on story-telling in preaching exposes the tendency toward self-centeredness that Charles Campbell critiques in so-called narrative preaching (see further ch. 1 below). Greg Scharf (Greg Scharf, *Relational Preaching* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Partnership, 2013) identifies some of the messiness of the interlocking and multi-directional relationships involved in preaching in the preface of his book (1-3), but the remainder of the book is comprised of brief daily devotionals and is written in a reflective style that lacks both theoretical and practical specificity.

¹¹ See O. Wesley Allen, Jr.'s introduction for a nice summary of these three and two other pillars of the New Homiletic; O. Wesley Allen, Jr., ed., *The Renewed Homiletic* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 1–18.

¹² Craddock, *Without Authority*, 11-14.

which the audience performs a crucial role in the formation and delivery of the sermon.¹³ The New Homileticians,¹⁴ as this group of scholars and practitioners came to be known, cast a long shadow over contemporary homiletics. Within that school, there were many different emphases but each had an eye on rejecting the deductive, propositional method of preaching they had inherited. Henry Mitchell, for example, writing as a Black preacher from the perspective of the Black church in America, argued for a preaching philosophy and practice that allowed the whole person in the pulpit to engage the whole person in the pew.¹⁵ This is a prime example of a kind of relational focus that is present in the works of the New Homileticians.

In the late-20th century, critiques of New Homiletics and the “narrative preaching” that arose from that school were voiced by many, including Charles Campbell, who argued primarily that narrative preaching placed too much uncritical emphasis on individual human experience, and that narrative preaching still failed to recognize or de-center reliance on the authority and perspective of the preacher.¹⁶ Around the same time, other homileticians recognized particularly Campbell’s second critique about the weight given to the perspective of the preacher over-against the perspectives of the listeners, including John S. McClure, Lucy Atkinson Rose, and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale. McClure proposed a model for preaching that encouraged collaboration between

¹³ He goes so far as to say that the audience listening to the sermon actually “completes” the sermon, and without the audience a sermon is not, in fact, a sermon; Craddock, 64.

¹⁴ The term is coined by David J. Randolph in 1965, and it describes the progression of scholars and works through the 1970’s and beyond.

¹⁵ Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 11. It is important to note that as it was birthed and grew in the antebellum American South to the present day, Black/African-American preaching has often had a more positive relationality as I have defined it than White/Euro-American preaching has. Black preaching focuses especially on the context of the listeners and an intentional interaction between preacher and congregation. See, e.g., Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970); Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016); Cleophus J. LaRue, *I Believe I’ll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2011), esp. ch. 2, “Black Preaching and White Homiletics.” Though this thesis will primarily focus on White/Euro-American preaching in North America, there will be opportunity to lift up Black preachers who are examples of the embodied, entangled relationality for which I am arguing.

¹⁶ See esp. Part II of Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 115-86.

preacher and congregation from start to finish.¹⁷ Rose's work is similar to McClure's collaborative model, emphasizing a conversational approach that values all voices, especially the voices of those who have been disenfranchised, oppressed, or marginalized.¹⁸ Tisdale argues for the need to place more emphasis on exegeting one's preaching context, especially the context of individual congregations, alongside the need to exegete the biblical text.¹⁹ Each of these presents a new way of imagining the many relational dynamics that exist in preaching. Their work, among others, also represents a turn toward the "other," and particularly away from the hegemony of the preacher who, in the West, was predominantly male and White.²⁰ This turn toward the "other" is more specific than the broad turn toward the listener that began in earnest with the New Homileticians. McClure, Rose, and Tisdale represent an acknowledgement of the many different "others" present in a given congregation. This turn sets the stage for homiletical works that highlight or even center the experiences of particular groups that have been historically or systematically marginalized in the field.²¹

In the 21st century, David Lose and Anna Carter Florence, as well as others, explored the implications for homiletics given prevailing postmodern epistemologies and philosophies of

¹⁷ McClure, *Roundtable Pulpit*.

¹⁸ Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Tisdale.

²⁰ For McClure, these ideas coalesce in *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001); see also Ronald Allen, *Preaching and the Other: Studies of Postmodern Insights* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2009).

²¹ Representatives include broad works like, Justo L. González and Catherine G. González, *The Liberating Pulpit* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994); Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016); Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017). The field has moved from these broad examples to ones with increasing specificity, such as, Jared E. Alcántara, *Crossover Preaching: Intercultural-Improvisational Homiletics in Conversation with Gardner C. Taylor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015); Lisa L. Thompson, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018); Matthew D. Kim and Daniel L. Wong, *Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020). Recent works on postcolonial homiletics represent the significant development that began with the turn toward the "other" in McClure, Rose, and others.

language. Lose offers “confession” as a theological lens that faithfully and adequately answers the epistemological and hermeneutical challenges posed by postmodernism in the 21st century.²² His proposal of a “fideistic epistemology” is particularly relevant to my exploration of the relational question “How do minds relate to one another?” in ch. 3 below.²³ Lose builds on a Christian tradition that can be traced to Augustine that weds trust/belief with knowledge. As such, he is not divorcing trust/belief from reason or understanding; rather, he is proposing a posture toward certainty that recognizes “confession,” while not empirically provable, can still be trustworthy and foster epistemic confidence. Florence proposes “testimony” as the biblical, theological, and historical lens through which preaching is best understood in the 21st century.²⁴ She engages historical accounts of female preachers as well as interacting with postmodern theorists, biblical scholars, and feminist theorists. These homileticians begin exploring questions of relationality with regard to how each individual perspective (preacher’s and listeners’) bears on the delivery and reception of preaching. In addition, they emphasize questions of authority and power with regard to the seat and distribution of knowledge and the exclusionary nature of many homiletical categories.

Susan Karen Hedahl begins to apply the explicit language of relationality to homiletics at the beginning of the 21st century.²⁵ Hedahl proposes “relationality” as a rhetorical mode for homiletics that faithfully engages 21st century audiences. A relational homiletic is invitational, engages a God who is intimate and alien, institutional (though *porously* so), and involves a quest for equilibrium (though the equilibrium may be beyond grasp), attempting to bring together

²² David J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003).

²³ Lose, 31–62.

²⁴ Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

²⁵ Hedahl, “Rhetoric.”

preacher, message, listener, and God in the homiletical quest.²⁶ Hedahl's emphasis on equilibrium as an expression of relational mutuality begins to point toward the idea of intertwined relationality developed throughout this thesis. Aimee Moiso has recently applied the concepts and language of relationality to preaching in the particular context of social, moral, political, and theological conflict in the 21st century.²⁷ Her project is borne out of a North American context marked by increasing social and political polarization, but her questions—about how attending to the interrelatedness of humans involved in the preaching event might undergird a practice of preaching that reconciles rather than divides²⁸—are similar to those posed by postcolonial homileticians such as Sarah Travis and HyeRan Kim-Cragg.

Throughout this thesis, examples from the works of many of the scholars mentioned in this brief narrative of contemporary homiletics will be used to demonstrate how they are touching on similar relational concerns. However, for the purpose of synthesizing and articulating these relational concerns as a set of core questions, I will now turn my focus to Travis and Kim-Cragg as key conversation partners and representative examples of leading work being done at the intersection of homiletics and postcolonial contexts.

Relational Concerns in Postcolonial Homiletics

One of the great contributions of Sarah Travis' 2014 book *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* is that she makes explicit several things that are implicit in previous homiletical works up through the beginning of the 21st century, especially with regard to the intersecting relational dynamics present and affective in preaching. "Preaching," she states, "is relational; it shapes a particular community of faith and belongs to a much broader, global

²⁶ Hedahl, 277–78.

²⁷ Moiso, "Standing."

²⁸ Moiso, 166.

ecclesial discourse.”²⁹ But preaching is not the only shaper of communities of faith, and the shaping that preaching does is not always aimed at reconciliation and integration. Travis makes clear that colonial/imperial³⁰ ideologies are also relational, though they are ultimately aimed at destroying relationships between humans.³¹ Such destruction is either enacted by petrifying human relationships in their present imbalances of power and oppression *or* by diminishing difference such that all humans are collapsed into a uniformity that ultimately preserves existing oppression and marginalization as well. This colonial/imperial counter-relationality prevails upon both preacher and community of faith, and continues to infect preaching and listening such that the formational work of preaching can sometimes (even inadvertently) reinforce the destructive nature of colonial/imperial ideologies.³²

A second thing Travis makes explicit is her own place in the complex web of relationships that marks the postcolonial context. She owns up to her perspective as a “Western woman of relative privilege,” who is also “white” and who relies financially on organizations that have been complicit in some of the destructive projects of colonialism/imperialism.³³ A recognition of her own implication in the systems of colonialism/imperialism begins to open space for precisely the kind of relational reconciliation for which Travis is arguing. By identifying her own social location, those (like me) who wish to engage with her are forced to raise their awareness of their own perspective. Awareness of our own perspectives in preaching and a growing awareness of our listener’s perspectives cultivate ground that Travis calls “borderlands,” where the differences between us that are often hard boundaries become porous

²⁹ Travis, *Decolonizing*, 5.

³⁰ Throughout her book, Travis uses colonialism/imperialism as a combined term to illustrate the interconnectedness of the two individual terms. See Travis, 2. In referring to her work, I have maintained this usage.

³¹ Travis, 14.

³² Cf. Travis, 18–21.

³³ Travis, 6.

and invitational.³⁴ She concludes, “If preachers desire to respond to empire, they must do so in full awareness that they themselves stand within the imperial complex.”³⁵ Travis demonstrates her own willingness to develop such awareness, with the goal of then being able to counter the destructive impact of being caught up in the systems of colonialism/imperialism.

A third and significant contribution of *Decolonizing Preaching* is Travis’s effort to draw on the explicitly theological resources within Christianity in order to propose a way of preaching that promotes reconciliation and integration within the divisive and disintegrating context of colonialism/imperialism. Before turning to theology, though, Travis names the negative relational motivations of colonialism/imperialism, which are interlocking motivations toward maintaining power and control: domination, separation, homogeneity, and fixedness.³⁶ In order to counter these motivations, she points to the social doctrine of the Trinity as espoused primarily by Jürgen Moltmann in the 20th century.³⁷ As opposed to reinforcing domination, separation, homogeneity, and fixedness, “The social doctrine of the Trinity images God as non-hierarchical, relational, differentiated, and open to creation.”³⁸ The Trinity provides a picture of relationality built on a “currency of love” that is multi-directional.³⁹ The Social Trinity is characterized by *kenosis*—a mutual self-giving and self-emptying on behalf of the other⁴⁰—and by a “perichoretic unity” that preserves difference and plurality while remaining open.⁴¹ This picture of relationality can provide the basis for reimagining human relationships and communities. Travis quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer to summarize this point: “God’s own life therefore provides a pattern for the life of

³⁴ Travis, 83.

³⁵ Travis, 85.

³⁶ Travis, 23ff.

³⁷ Travis, 53–71.

³⁸ Travis, 55.

³⁹ Travis, 59.

⁴⁰ Travis, 60–61.

⁴¹ Travis, 62.

his creation as an intricate community of reciprocal relationships.”⁴² In a precursor to the relational questions I will synthesize below, Travis draws on trinitarian resources to instill hope that *both* physical and emotional space in postcolonial contexts can be transformed, and that preaching can be part of that transformation.⁴³ While this theological emphasis is helpful, Travis primarily relies on the overarching characteristics of Social Trinitarianism as models for preaching. She does not emphasize the specific roles of the three persons of the Trinity or indicate how they might bear on the act of preaching.

HyeRan Kim-Cragg’s book *Postcolonial Preaching: Creating a Ripple Effect* follows Travis’ work and further explores the interconnected relationships involved in the preaching event.⁴⁴ In the opening paragraph of the book, Kim-Cragg describes the context of the 21st century in which preaching is meant to speak as one that is a context marked by relational division. From the “winds of chauvinism” to “hateful words” and other “frightening forces,” the number of barriers erected to divide us from one another as humans is staggering.⁴⁵ However, alongside these barriers sits a reality of migration either forced or voluntary as a result of colonialism and globalization. The juxtaposition of these realities means that “the postcolonial world is marked by ambiguities and fractures, nuances and contradictions, messiness, and porous boundaries.”⁴⁶ Building on her own method laid out in *Interdependence: A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology*, she proposes six overlapping and interlocking principles for preaching in this postcolonial context: rehearsal, imagination, place, pattern, language, and exegesis. Together these principles open the possibility of “[envisioning] an alternative, as a way of holding a

⁴² Travis, 65.

⁴³ Travis, 71.

⁴⁴ Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial*, 11fn9, acknowledges the similarities in hers and Travis’ approach to preaching.

⁴⁵ Kim-Cragg, 1.

⁴⁶ Kim-Cragg, 5.

creative tension in contradiction, to the forces of neocolonialism,” the “deadly winds” of which threaten constantly to destroy relationships.⁴⁷

Relationality is on full display throughout *Postcolonial Preaching*. Not only are the six RIPPLE principles interrelated, but within her exploration of each principle Kim-Cragg demonstrates the complex relational dynamics at play between preacher, listener(s), text, and God. Expounding on how postcolonial preaching is a “rehearsal” or anticipation of the reign of God, she pays special attention to the ways in which the physical nature of preacher and listener(s) interact with one another while at the same time interacting with the physical space and nature of the sacrament of communion.⁴⁸ Because preaching rehearses the full and final reign of God over all things, it must also envelop right relationships with the rest of the physical world.⁴⁹ The principle of “imagination” illustrates how knowledge, memory, and emotions are drawn into relationship through postcolonial preaching. Even time itself contains a relational dynamic from the postcolonial perspective; Kim-Cragg avers, “I note how connected memory of the past is to an imagined future ... [and] how central prior and present experiences are for building up the preaching imagination.”⁵⁰ Language (most often a product of physical effort: breath and vocal chords and tongue) and scripture (a physical product of written word) are also caught up in the relationality of imagination such that those who preach become “epistemological misfits.”⁵¹ In exploring the dynamics of “place,” both physically and metaphorically, Kim-Cragg points out the ways in which the social locations of preacher and listener(s) are interrelated and mutually affecting. While these relational dynamics push and pull on preacher and listener, neither can be

⁴⁷ Kim-Cragg, 10.

⁴⁸ Kim-Cragg, 15, 22.

⁴⁹ Kim-Cragg, 22.

⁵⁰ Kim-Cragg, 30.

⁵¹ Kim-Cragg, 34, quoting Walter Brueggemann.

(*should* be) controlled by the other, either physically or intellectually.⁵² Additionally, those social locations also affect individuals' interpretations of scripture and understandings of God. She challenges us to consider the ways in which preaching must be aware of the boundaries created by our social locations, while at the same time deigning to faithfully cross those boundaries in an effort to draw together what has been artificially and destructively divided.⁵³

The principle of attending to the “patterns” or motions⁵⁴ of preaching is *prima facie* a relational concept; it describes the way different elements of the sermon interact with and affect one another. This is especially true of the ways scripture and doctrine are communicated through preaching, either expositorially/deductively or inductively or otherwise.⁵⁵ However, Kim-Cragg points out that in a context as pluralistic, hybrid, and complex as the 21st century, no single pattern can hold the relational tension that needs to be held. Instead, multiple and sometimes paradoxical patterns must be used and adapted so that the method of “drawing water” matches “the source of the water itself.”⁵⁶ Having previously demonstrated how the language we use in preaching is caught up in the relationality of imagination, Kim-Cragg extends the relational nature of “language” further by identifying the ways that language also refers to how knowledge is attained, how bodies communicate through preaching and listening, and how specific words and cultural images can divide or bring together.⁵⁷ The final principle, “exegesis,” demonstrates the relationality or “interplay” between preacher, listener(s), scripture, and God by espousing a

⁵² Kim-Cragg, 55.

⁵³ Kim-Cragg, 54.

⁵⁴ I am borrowing the use of this term from Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020), 77-96, who uses it to refer to similar kinds of abstract relational dynamics that Kim-Cragg is describing.

⁵⁵ Cf. Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial*, 69–72.

⁵⁶ Kim-Cragg, 67.

⁵⁷ Kim-Cragg, 88–93.

“contrapuntal” interpretive strategy that draws all these into conversation with one another.⁵⁸ All six of these principles “just travel out each following and relating to the other and getting energy from the other for the sake of preaching the Gospel. [They] do not build on one another in sequential fashion but work together like ripples on a lake, creating intersecting patterns and concentric circles.”⁵⁹ Kim-Cragg acknowledges the relationality between her six principles, but the depth of her imagery reaches even beyond what she explicitly states. For the imagery to work—for ripples on a lake to intersect, for ripples to continue moving outward without diminishment—there must be multiple preachers dropping their voices into the water like wishes thrown into a fountain. The multiplicity of voices relating to one another and reverberating off one another has the potential to be contradictory, messy, and cacophonous. But it is only that multiplicity that, in a postcolonial context, begins to faithfully draw preachers and listeners toward one another and toward the mystery of the divine.

Travis and Kim-Cragg helpfully articulate and interrogate the prevailing ways that human preachers are people caught up in the forces of colonialism/imperialism and the ways that the pulpit space and sermon form can also be caught up in these forces. They also effectively demonstrate the complexity of the relationships involved in preaching. Their critiques and proposals are particularly cogent on the subjects of human-to-human relationality and human-to-text relationality. Each has different ways of engaging human-to-God relationality, but neither puts much explicit emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s role in any of these relationships. After reading Travis’ and Kim-Cragg’s books, one could be left wondering how the work of holding together—intertwining—the relational dynamics of preaching is enabled. Travis, of course, appeals to the

⁵⁸ Kim-Cragg, 112.

⁵⁹ Kim-Cragg, 123.

Spirit via her engagement with Social Trinitarianism; she even suggests obliquely that a decolonized pulpit and preaching can participate in the reconciling work the Spirit does between humanity and the Triune God.⁶⁰ But we might ask further how the Spirit is involved in the actual moment of preaching? There seems to be an open question in Travis' and Kim-Cragg's homiletical works regarding whether it is human ability or effort that is relied on to do the work of decolonizing or holding together the "ripples" of postcolonial preaching. Augustine presses this question forward by being adamant that human preachers are unable to bear such work to completion aside from the Spirit. As will become clear through the rest of this thesis, it is the Spirit who is able to affect relational mutuality and reconciliation among humans and the Spirit who is able to empower humans to participate in this work through preaching.

Synthesizing Relational Questions

Throughout the above survey of some contemporary homileticians, it has been clear that questions about what I have called relationality have been a concern for decades, from at least the New Homileticians in the mid-20th century to the postcolonial homileticians of the 21st century. The various angles explored by these homileticians regarding the multiple relationships that are present and pertinent in the preaching moment can be synthesized into three questions: (1) How do bodies relate to one another? (2) How do minds relate to one another? (3) How does preaching relate to doctrine?

The first question envelopes concerns about space and place, about the ways in which movement – migration – affects both preacher and listener, about language and the way it is spoken and heard, about individuality and communal identity, and about the very artifact of

⁶⁰ Travis, *Decolonizing*, 64, 135–37.

Scripture itself and who has access to it. It is at its core an anthropological question. Human bodies are drawn toward one another biologically; Jesus takes on human flesh and, being raised up on a cross, draws all other human flesh to himself (John 12.32). What does it mean to take Jesus' body seriously in preaching, and how are both the preacher's body and the listeners' bodies drawn toward one another as they are drawn toward Jesus? How is this relationality enhanced or hindered by a sermon?

The second question summarizes concerns about interpretation and rhetoric, about instruction, delight, and movement as Augustine puts it,⁶¹ about knowledge and uncertainty, about truth and who or what determines it and who has access to it. It is at its core an epistemological question. How is it that through preaching we can either start to be conformed to the mind of Christ or be malformed into something else (cf. Phil 2.5; Rom 12.2)? Whose experience is deemed normative or authoritative? What patterns of preaching are deemed appropriate and effective? How are the relationships among the minds present in the preaching event affected by bodies?

The third question plays on the title of Augustine's treatise: *De Doctrina Christiana* or *On Christian Teaching*. The treatise is both hermeneutical and homiletical; the later addition of Book IV indicates that Augustine in some way sees preaching as necessary to complete the task of interpreting Scripture.⁶² This relationship is played out in some of Augustine's own sermons. But the question of the relationship between preaching and pedagogy⁶³ also gets at contemporary

⁶¹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.74.

⁶² Cf. Saint Augustine, IV.1.

⁶³ J. Warren Smith, in personal communication (March 2, 2024), suggests that "On Christian Pedagogy" might be a better translation of *De Doctrina Christiana*, because the treatise is focused on how Christianity is learned and taught, not what Christianity is.

concerns about imagination and mystery, about conviction and curiosity, exploration and transformation, and about the relationship between God and humans.

Synthesizing these questions does not, however, simplify them. The way the three questions are interconnected, the many themes and ideas they encompass, and their lack of self-evident answers reveals a deep complexity to these questions. Several homileticians have recently explored this complexity from perspectives often complementary with those of post-colonial homileticians like Travis and Kim-Cragg. Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen’s look at homiletics through a Bakhtinian literary-critical lens demonstrates the necessity of expanding (rather than contracting) the relational ideas of dialogue and mutuality in preaching.⁶⁴ Jerusha Matsen Neal and Luke Powery have offered nuanced *and* specific lenses for preaching that are “entirely human” *and* wholly Spirit-driven.⁶⁵ These works uncover and begin to unpack the *messiness* of taking relational questions seriously and they anticipate the kind of entanglement that fosters connection and reconciliation. Such messiness is perhaps best summarized by Charles Campbell’s most recent work, *The Scandal of the Gospel*, in which he suggests that preaching ought to be “grotesque.”⁶⁶ By this he means something beyond “folly”⁶⁷ to something “scandalous”—something open, porous, incomplete, unsettled, disrupting formal and familiar patterns, unresolved, beautiful and repulsive, contradictory, incongruous, and hybrid. I use the word “messy” because when it comes to relationships – even relationships between only two people –

⁶⁴ Lorensen, *Dialogical*.

⁶⁵ See Jerusha Matsen Neal, *The Overshadowed Preacher: Mary, the Spirit, and the Labor of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020), quote from p. 127. Luke A. Powery, *Becoming Human: The Holy Spirit and the Rhetoric of Race* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022), 8; cf. also Luke A. Powery, *Spirit Speech: Lament and Celebration in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009). These works are significant examples of taking the Spirit’s role seriously in 21st century homiletical questions as a critique and complement to the examples of Travis and Kim-Cragg.

⁶⁶ Charles L. Campbell, *The Scandal of the Gospel: Preaching and the Grotesque* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021).

⁶⁷ Cf. Charles L. Campbell and Johan Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

they are most often anything but neat, tidy, or easily defined. They are *messy*. When our scope expands to the pulpit and we recognize the many overlapping and interlocking relationships at work in the preaching moment, “messiness” seems even more appropriate. Thinking about these relationships as intertwined and interconnected can begin to draw some order amid the chaos. It will not entirely “clean up” the mess, and perhaps sometimes even contribute more mess, but striving to allow seemingly competing answers to the questions synthesized above to intermingle can be a starting point and a worthy goal. For question (1), how do bodies relate, I will argue for interweaving openness and particularity; for question (2), how do minds relate, interweaving humility and boldness; and for question (3), how does preaching relate to doctrine, interweaving curiosity and conviction.

Why Augustine?

Augustine demonstrates this kind of interweaving in *DDC* and in his sermons. But before diving into that treatise and some selected sermons, it is important to illustrate why Augustine is an appropriate figure to bring into a conversation about contemporary homiletics. Many have explored Augustine’s theology and biography and identified resonances with contemporary contexts. Two such recent examples are James K. A. Smith’s *On the Road with Saint Augustine* and Justo González’s *The Mestizo Augustine*.⁶⁸ González’s book provides a powerful argument for how Augustine’s life, teaching, and context are instructive in a 21st century global society of multi-culturalism. He identifies ways in which Augustine was influenced by both the Greco-Roman culture of his education and the African culture of his heritage, and by both the pagan religious leanings of his father and the fervent Christian faith of his mother. In this way,

⁶⁸ James K. A. Smith, *On the Road with Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019); González, *Mestizo*.

Augustine's life exhibits the theme of *mestizaje* – characteristic of Latino/a theology, *mestizaje* means “mixed,” and was historically used pejoratively until the 20th century when it was reclaimed by Mexican scholar José Vasconcelos.⁶⁹ González expounds on this theme: “To be a mestizo is to belong to two realities and at the same time not to belong to either of them.”⁷⁰ But the reality of *mestizaje* is much deeper and more expansive than being caught between two cultures, as in one who identifies as (or is identified as) Cuban-American or Mexican-American. In fact, the geographical area in which Augustine lived and ministered exhibited at least three prominent cultural influences (Berber, Punic, and Roman) and was home to at least three main languages (Latin, Punic [Semitic in origin], and Libyan).⁷¹ These cultures and languages were constantly “intermingling and sometimes in conflict.”⁷² González summarizes this complexity by stating, “Rarely is mestizaje purely bipolar, for quite often the two poles of that mestizaje have within each of them signs of their own mestizaje, thus leading a mestizo to live amid several realities, many of them clashing among themselves.”⁷³ So Augustine's own African heritage reflects a mixture of cultural influences from Berber to Punic, and his Latin education reflects influences from Greek politics to Roman imperialism to pagan mythology.

González encourages his readers to recognize in themselves and in most all of humanity this quality of mixed-ness, thereby identifying a resonance between Augustine's context and the 21st century context.⁷⁴ He also argues that “the condition of mestizaje is a fertile field for creativity and a sign pointing to the future.”⁷⁵ Thus, González's project is to look back to

⁶⁹ González, *Mestizo*, 15.

⁷⁰ González, 15.

⁷¹ González, 23.

⁷² González, 24.

⁷³ González, 17.

⁷⁴ González, 18.

⁷⁵ González, 16; cf. also p. 171: “[T]hat very mestizaje some see as a sign of shame, and some would try to forestall or to deny, may well be a sign of the future from which God is calling us”.

Augustine in order to see how Augustine's own context and words can actually be future-oriented. His methodology is a two-way street: he wants to explore Augustine through the lens of Latino/a theology and the theme of *mestizaje* while simultaneously allowing Augustine's life and words to enlighten and instruct his understanding of his 21st century context. I am proposing a similar "two-way street" approach to exploring Augustine's homiletics in conversation with contemporary (especially postcolonial) homiletics. Some of the questions, language, and categories of contemporary homiletics may help us see Augustine's homiletics afresh, while the relationality we will observe in *DDC* and Augustine's sermons may provide insight or even correction to aspects of contemporary homiletics.

Furthermore, the themes of relationality show up often in Augustine's story. For example, we may consider Augustine's early steps down the path of conversion to Christianity. After falling in with the Manichaeans in the late-4th century and then becoming disillusioned with the kind of rational certainty they purported to offer their followers, Augustine was left grappling with doubts and questions as he fulfilled his duties as Professor of Rhetoric in Milan c. 384-387 CE.⁷⁶ When Augustine reflects on his arrival in Milan, it is not the city or the position that is central in his memory, but rather a person: Ambrose, the bishop (cf. *Confessions* V.23). It is Ambrose's preaching that first opens Augustine to the reasonableness of the Christian Scriptures. James K. A. Smith neatly summarizes the relational influence Ambrose had on Augustine: "Sometimes plausibility is pegged to a person ... there is a *relationality* to plausibility."⁷⁷ He was perhaps uncommonly welcomed to Milan by Ambrose, as he reflects on Ambrose's kindness that drew him initially to the bishop.⁷⁸ In the very words Augustine uses relationality and connection

⁷⁶ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 69.

⁷⁷ Smith, *On the Road*, 150–51, emphasis original.

⁷⁸ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 72.

are emphasized: “I fell in love with him, as it were, not at first as a teacher of the truth ... but simply as a person who was kind to me (Conf 5.23 [trans. Ruden (2017)]).”⁷⁹ The openness of Ambrose to Augustine upon his arrival seems to have created space for Augustine to open up to Ambrose’s preaching. He sought to learn Ambrose’s oratorical style but was penetrated by the content, and in turn was able to join his rhetorical education to the faith his mother had always embodied for him.⁸⁰ Ambrose’s influence on Augustine is all the more remarkable considering that, by all accounts, their direct one-on-one contact was very limited due to Ambrose’s responsibilities as bishop.⁸¹ This aspect of Augustine’s journey of faith is one example of how the themes of relationality play out in his life and work. We will see through *DDC* and Augustine’s sermons how relationality operates in his homiletics.

Beginning with a Caveat

There is an inherent complexity in the space between the next two chapters—a nuance easily mentioned and dismissed. But I wish to name the complexity precisely so that I am accountable to letting it permeate both chapters, both relational questions about bodies and about minds. The bifurcation between bodies and minds is a false one; it is a dichotomy convenient (perhaps necessary?) for academic discourse and yet destructive to the preaching task. Bodies and minds cannot be separated. Augustine will remind us of this, albeit often implicitly.

Contemporary neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy also shed light on the complexity of defining or discoursing about bodies and minds in isolation from one another. In the words of Rowan Williams, whose book *Being Human* excavates the complex relationship between our

⁷⁹ The language here shows signs of an epistemology of love that pervades Augustine’s work. Cf. Smith, *On the Road*, 152: “By constantly emphasizing, ‘I believe in order to understand,’ Augustine’s more subterranean point was, ‘I love in order to know.’”

⁸⁰ González, *Mestizo*, 44.

⁸¹ Cf. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 77.

bodies, minds, and personhood, “We’re stuck before we start. And that is quite a good place to begin.”⁸² In the context of preaching, Otis Moss, III, beautifully articulates the connection—the relationship, even the intimacy and vulnerability—shared between the human body and mind of the preacher, the biblical text, and Christ: “The Word cuts and leaves scars upon our body, fissures in our minds, as we seek to handle what cannot truly be handled.”⁸³ As we explore the tension between the relational questions of body and mind, it must be clearly stated that bodies and minds, in individual persons and in communities, are inextricably intertwined. Therefore, questions of borders and boundaries, of sight and sound, of inclusion and exclusion, are inextricably bound up with questions of agency and rhetoric, of persuasion and epistemology.

⁸² Rowan Williams, *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2018), 87.

⁸³ Otis Moss III, *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World: Finding Hope in an Age of Despair* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 12.

Chapter 2: Relational Bodies: Particular *and* Open

Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on the relational question of bodies (recognizing that this question cannot be neatly isolated from the relational question of minds). This is, at its core, an anthropological question; what does it mean to be a human preacher, a human interpreter of Scripture, a human listener to Scripture, or a human listener to a sermon? But then what are the boundaries between these humans and how do those “uneasy borders” affect preaching.¹ More fundamentally, we might want to ask, What does it mean to be a human body preaching? Does the sex, ethnicity, size or sound of that body matter? And it’s not just any human body, for throughout Christian history and across Christian traditions, the one who preaches is also anointed by the Holy Spirit such that a listener might even see and hear the Word through the preached word. Even attempting a cursory answer to these questions illustrates the complexity of exploring how bodies relate to one another in the preaching moment.² Even though Christ might be present in preaching through the reading of Scripture and the movement of the Spirit, “it is the [human] body that preaches”³ and it cannot be otherwise. So what kind of relationality do we need in preaching that might foster reconciliation, flourishing, connection, and mutuality? I will argue in this chapter that a relationality that upholds and interweaves the openness and particularity of human bodies can begin to strive toward these goals.

¹ Cf. Neal, *Overshadowed*, 1–23.

² See Neal, 10–14 for a thought-provoking description of “what” it is that is preaching. Her characteristics of “particularity, permeability, and provisionality” have been formative for my exploration of the relationality of openness and particularity.

³ Powery, *Becoming*, 94.

Before turning to *DDC* and Augustine's own ways of exploring the resonance between particularity and openness, we must return briefly to the question of *what* with regard to the preacher in order to establish the inherent relationality of bodies. In other words, what is the human that inhabits the pulpit and how does that human relate to the other humans in the room? To begin to answer the question of what being human means, Rowan Williams starts with the brain and consciousness – two things that are simultaneously physical and mental/spiritual. He states that the brain, rather than being either a machine or a mistake, is in fact an organism. As such, brains "...modify what they are as well as what they do so as to maintain successful interaction with a diverse set of conditions."⁴ *Interaction* is relational language. *Successful interaction* is relational language aimed at connection, mutuality, and flourishing.

Furthermore, Williams argues that consciousness, by which he also means some sense of self, is inherently relational:

Consciousness as we normally think about it has a relational dimension. I can't think without thinking of the other. I can't even think of my body, this zero point of orientation, without understanding that it's an object to another. *I am seen*, I am heard, I am understood; and whether I am talking about myself in a general and vague sense, or talking about my body as a specific organic unit, I am bound to be imagining what is not exhausted by one solitary viewpoint. To have a point of view is to understand that the world is constructed out of diverse points of orientation.⁵

In the process of sermon preparation, I (and I imagine many other preachers) have often thought, "How will what I plan to say be heard, understood, etc.?" But is it much rarer (at least for me) to consider the question of reflexivity, "How will I be seen, heard, understood as a human, as *me*, whom God has granted this opportunity to speak?" In other words, one can, by overly focusing on the words to be said, actually diminish or neglect one's own humanity.

⁴ Williams, *Being Human*, 4.

⁵ Williams, 11.

Williams makes this point again when he turns to the notion of personhood: “What makes me a person, and what makes me *this* person rather than another, is not simply a set of facts. . . . *I* stand in the middle of a network of relations, the point where the lines cross.”⁶ But then the paradox of subject/object comes into play again; for I am not simply “the point” but also a line in an-other’s web of relations. So if we follow the imagery, we are confronted with a mass—a mess—of webs of interrelation all crisscrossing one another in the event of preaching.

One way Augustine would answer the question of what it means to be a body preaching would be by appealing to the concept of signification. I will explore Augustine’s argument in more depth below, but we may begin by noting that Augustine would identify the preaching body as a “sign:” something which is used to point to something else, and as such is a thing interpreted. But the preaching body is also an interpreter. Humans as “signs” are both interpreters and interpreted by others, and therefore must be understood in relationship to others. The preaching body is *particular*—it has boundaries, is individual, is distinct—and yet is *open* to the ways others (listeners, text, Triune God) affect it. With this in mind, let us now turn to Augustine’s treatise and his preaching to see how he navigates this relationality of particularity and openness.

Particularity in De Doctrina Christiana

As noted in ch. 1, Augustine begins *DDC* with a recognition of the particularity of humanity and the complex relational dynamics this particularity presents. It requires that one be open to being used as a teacher but also to recognize the limitations of pointing in a certain direction and leading another in that way. Even more illustrative for the purposes of exploring the

⁶ Williams, 31, emphasis added.

relationship between bodies, Augustine uses a bodily metaphor to explain some of the limitations of teaching/preaching:

Suppose [one] wanted to see the new moon, or the old one, or a star that was very faint, and I pointed it out with my finger but their eyesight was too weak to see even my finger? ... As for those who manage to learn and assimilate these rules but are still unable to see into the obscure passages of the divine scriptures, they should consider themselves as capable of seeing my finger but not the stars to which it points. ... Although I can move a part of my body so as to point to something, I cannot improve their eyesight to make them see even my pointing finger, let alone what I want to point out.⁷

Through the use of this analogy, Augustine affirms that there are boundaries between the teacher and the student, between the preacher and the listener. Extending the metaphor of embodiment, then, we may affirm that while the body of the preacher may do some thing (point a finger, for example) it cannot do any thing to guarantee a certain result. Additionally, there is an important difference between the preacher and what they strive to preach, which signifies the even more important boundary between the preached words and the Word. Here Augustine metaphorizes these as the finger and the stars. Crucially, the distance between these—Augustine’s own “finger” and the “stars” to which he attempts to point—is vast and ultimately impassable for the human preacher.⁸ The finger certainly cannot be the stars, but it also cannot ensure that it effectively points to the stars. There is particularity that must be recognized and honored between the preacher and listener, and (especially) between the preacher and Christ. This latter distinction is one which Augustine emphasizes in several different ways and to which we will return throughout this thesis. It is crucial in getting at what Augustine thinks preaching *is*.

⁷ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, pre.6.

⁸ The finger and stars images also function as precursors to Augustine’s discussion of *signum* and *res* – sign and thing. We will explore this connection more below, but it is also important to note that the way Augustine’s bodily metaphor here in the preface of *DDC* maps onto the epistemological language of signs in the rest of the treatise highlights the intimate connection between bodies and minds for our understanding of preaching that is fully human.

The idea of particularity is given a linguistic and semiotic framework throughout Books I and II of *DDC* by means of Augustine’s explanation of the distinctions between *signum* and *res* (‘sign’ and ‘thing’) and between *uti* and *frui* (‘use’ and ‘enjoyment’).⁹ According to Augustine, there are some things (the language here gets messy, but perhaps that is part of the point) that are ‘signs’ and ‘signs’ only: namely words.¹⁰ There are some things that can be both ‘sign’ and ‘thing.’¹¹ Then there is one that is ‘thing’ and ‘thing’ only—in fact, “supreme thing”—the Triune God.¹² Signs, and sometimes things, are to be ‘used’ for the end of the ‘enjoyment’ of things. But for Augustine, the proper ‘use’ of signs and things depends on one being in proper relationship to God. Whether through the language of “holding fast” or the imagery of a journey, the proper use of signs and things is relative to our nearness to God. This passage from Book I summarizes this point and reminds us that Augustine has not lost the idea of human physicality in the midst of this “high-minded” theory: “It is not the case that all things which are to be used are to be loved; but only those which exist in some kind of association with us and are related to God ... or which, being related to us, stand in need of the kindness of God received through us, *like the body*.”¹³ While this and other passages seem to indicate that use and enjoyment are only distinctions which are operative in the category of ‘thing,’ Rowan Williams creatively maps the *uti/frui* distinction onto the *signum/res* distinction in a way that highlights the relationality in Augustine’s thought. He claims, “The distinction between *frui* and *uti* is thus superimposed on the *res—signum*

⁹ Much has been written on Augustine’s theory of signification. I am here relying most on Rowan Williams, “Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine’s *De Doctrina*,” *Literature and Theology* 3, no. 2 (July 1989): 138–50; Susannah Ticciati, “The Human Being as Sign in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 55, no. 1 (2013): 20–32. For the seminal article on this subject, see R. A. Markus, “St. Augustine on Signs,” *Phronesis* 2 (1957): 60–83.

¹⁰ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.5.

¹¹ Saint Augustine, I.4.

¹² Saint Augustine, I.10: “The things which are to be enjoyed, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity that consists of them, which is a kind of single, supreme thing, shared by all who enjoy it—if indeed it is a thing and not the cause of all things, if indeed it is a cause. It is not easy to find a suitable name for suchh excellence...”

¹³ Saint Augustine, I.44, emphasis added.

distinction, and will pervade the whole of *DDC*; it is the means whereby Augustine links what he has to say about language with what he has to say about beings who 'mean' and about the fundamentally desirous nature of those beings.”¹⁴ In other words, for Augustine signification is relational; it articulates and demonstrates the longing and desire at the heart of humanity as being in the image of God. Each person as ‘thing’ is thus particularized and placed in relation to God. But, on the other hand, each person is merely ‘sign’ in relation to the Triune God, who is ‘supreme thing.’

Susannah Ticciati expands this final point about creatures signifying God in a way that complicates the notion of particularity. In conversation with contemporary semiotics, she states that Augustine’s idea of signification is “triadic,” meaning there are three entities or parties involved in the signifying relationship: creatures (especially humans) are signs of God *for* another.¹⁵ But likewise other signs, namely Scripture, must be understood in this triadic relationship; Scripture is a sign used by one *for* another. Throughout *DDC*, Augustine’s emphasis is not on humans as signs as such, but on humans as users—interpreters—of signs. Ticciati continues, “More specifically, what needs transforming is not the creature to be used or enjoyed, but the creature doing the using and enjoying; not the sign, but the user of the sign. Human beings must learn, not to become better signs of God, but to become better interpreters of their fellow creatures as signs of God - better users, better lovers.”¹⁶ This complicates the idea of particularity in Augustine’s thought in three ways. First, if Augustine’s emphasis is on teaching/preaching in order to form humans as interpreters, we must admit that the particularity of interpreters includes a multitude of contextualized characteristics such as social location, self-awareness, history,

¹⁴ Williams, “Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine’s *De Doctrina*,” 139.

¹⁵ Ticciati, “The Human Being as Sign in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” 27.

¹⁶ Ticciati, 28.

ethnicity, etc, and that these characteristics will affect how one is transformed into a “better user/lover.” Second, if Augustine is writing to interpreters who are interpreting other interpreters about how to communicate interpretations effectively, then that communication must admit and respect the particularity of each interpreter without dominating or subsuming the other.¹⁷ The relational boundaries marked by the particularity of signification are messy indeed. Third, for Augustine to hold together this inherently messy relationality of signification and interpretation, love is required as a kind of relational “glue.” Love becomes a kind of interpretive key within the relational matrix of signification.

Augustine illustrates the difficulty of the first of these complications of particularity later in Book III. He observes that when it comes to interpreting certain passages of scripture as either literal or figurative, one’s inclination is often based on one’s social location: “But since the human race is prone to judge sins not by the strength of the actual lust, but rather by the standard of its own practices, people generally regard as culpable only such actions as men of their own time and place tend to blame and condemn, and regard as commendable and praiseworthy only such actions as are acceptable within the conventions of their own society.”¹⁸ This is not just a lament regarding what we might call situational ethics, but an admission of the influential nature of particularity as it pertains to social location. In a 21st century context, HyeRan Kim-Cragg identifies several of the complicating factors of social location as “ethnicity, culture, race, and language [which] must be taken seriously as things that are inseparably intertwined with, and

¹⁷ Cf. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.46, where Augustine admits the human temptation toward the domination of others, humans specifically: “For it is the instinct of a corrupt mind to covet and claim as its due what is really due to God alone.”

¹⁸ Saint Augustine, III.35.

relevant to the discourse of the preaching place.”¹⁹ Both Augustine and Kim-Cragg are urging preachers toward self-awareness in this respect.²⁰

However, particularity is not just a complication, it is also something to be valued in the act of communication. In the section of *DDC* that is more explicitly dedicated to rhetoric, Augustine demonstrates the value of particularity using the biblical authors as examples. He states that their way of communicating was both particular to each of them *and* all the more effective—by which he means wise and eloquent—for being so.

Indeed, I venture to say that all who correctly understand what [the biblical authors] are saying realize at the same time that it would not have been right for them to express it in any other way. ... They spoke in their own particular style, and it would be inappropriate for them to have used any other style, or for others to have used theirs.²¹

In this sense, individual particularity is to be valued. Here it is possible to read Augustine as lumping together the “particular style” of the biblical authors in a way that elides their individual particularity. However, in the examples he uses throughout Book IV to illustrate this, it is clear that he does not think, for example, that Paul and Amos are communicating in the same way or even the same style, but that each communicates in his own style. There is value to these particularities. Additionally, the reference to speech reminds us of the place the human body plays in preaching, and re-connects us to Augustine’s idea of signification as it relates to preaching bodies.

Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboulic has explored the ways in which bodies “speak” in *DDC* and in Augustine’s *Confessions*. She summarizes, “In Augustine, elements related to body

¹⁹ Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial*, 48.

²⁰ Cf. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, III.45, 51-52. When he turns to discussion of Tyconius in Book III, Augustine even warns his readers not to expect the wrong things from Tyconius based on Tyconius’ own social and religious location (see III.96-97).

²¹ Saint Augustine, IV.25-26; cf. also IV.60.

language form part of a broader meditation upon signification that is at the heart of his definition of speech: ‘To speak is to give a sign by means of an articulate utterance.’”²² The same idea is echoed by Kim-Cragg: “Preaching uses human bodies, physical spaces, and symbolic objects as a way of connecting with an audience,”²³ and by Otis Moss, III: “There is embodiment to preaching and something happens. It is not just your voice. It’s your entire being.”²⁴ The engagement of one’s entire being in preaching is, through Augustine’s concept of signification, an act of relational bridge-building. Recalling the triadic nature of signification, the use of one’s words and body language—in a word, ‘performance’—draws a connection between the preacher and the listener, the one the sign/performance is *for*. Again, Bouton-Touboulic articulates this using relational language: “The movement of the body indicates the intention to convey meaning and also establishes a link between the *voice* and the *thing* one wishes to indicate. This movement of the body thus forms the first element in a relationship which, in turn, forms part of a sign, and is accompanied by many other signs that convey desire.”²⁵ Near the very end of *DDC*, Augustine makes one final connection between the engagement of the whole person and effective communication that implies that one can communicate wisely and eloquently even without using any words at all. “If [the preacher] is not even capable of [the basest level of effective communication], he should seek to live in such a way that he not only gains a reward for himself but also gives an example to others, so that his way of life becomes, in a sense, an abundant source of eloquence.”²⁶

²² Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboulic, “Body Language in Augustine’s *Confessiones* and *De Doctrina Christiana*,” *Augustinian Studies* 49, no. 1 (February 23, 2018): 2.

²³ Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial*, 15.

²⁴ Moss, *Blue Note*, 37.

²⁵ Bouton-Touboulic, “Body Language in Augustine’s *Confessiones* and *De Doctrina Christiana*,” 5.

²⁶ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.159.

For Augustine, particularity is both problematic and something to be valued. The limitations inherent to human bodies (and minds) presents a difficulty for the relationship between teachers and students and for preachers and listeners. The particularities, perhaps even idiosyncrasies, of human signification mean that there is no guarantee of effective communication across history, social locations, etc. In fact, there may be more of a guarantee that such communication is distorted or misinterpreted. Additionally, there is always a partial-ness to any understanding of or communication about God because of the crucial and particular difference between Creator and creatures. But despite the complexities presented by particularity, the uniqueness of one's person, place, and way of communicating is still to be valued. Every creature is a sign of the Creator, and every human being can be (or become) a better interpreter of those signs such that in relationship with other creatures all may be drawn toward God. Though particularity presents complicated questions about the borders or boundaries between human beings, Augustine is able to embrace particularity if and when it is accompanied by an openness that recognizes those borders as permeable.

Openness in De Doctrina Christiana

Though it might have been less obvious in Augustine's 4th century context, the danger of an over-valued and rigid understanding of human particularity can be seen clearly in the 21st century; it goes by the name of individual autonomy. In his book *Christianity's Surprise*, Kevin Rowe describes this well, even using relational language:

In brief, the story of the autonomous individual says that the "I" is self-sovereign ... an isolated individual, unconnected by any necessity to anything else at all and able to make for itself the life it chooses to make. The will of this individual is inherently free and chooses from an original position of freedom what sort of attachments and commitments it will have. Nothing can be forced upon the

autonomous self from without that it does not agree to from within. . . . The territory of the “I” is mine alone—inviolable, sovereign, free.²⁷

The autonomous individual is one whose borders and boundaries are well-guarded and impenetrable without the consent of the individual. The trouble with this idea, inherited by Western culture from the Enlightenment period, is that it is not, pragmatically, how we humans interact with the world. Jerusha Matsen Neal puts this succinctly, “We are vulnerable to others, dependent on others, implicated by others. Bodies appear to provide the possibility for action and autonomy in the world, but at the same time, they tether us to scripts, forces, and actors outside our control.”²⁸

Using different language, though still relational language, Augustine consistently holds an idea of openness alongside notions of particularity in *DDC* that implies one concept needs the other in order for us to be drawing ever nearer to God. This begins from the preface where, soon after the image of particularity involving the finger pointing to the stars (see above), he speaks of human beings being “tie[d] together in the bonds of unity” and “souls overflow[ing] and as it were intermingl[ing] with each other” through human-to-human interaction and communication.²⁹ While individuals remain individuals, they also blend and blur into one another through relationships. This is one way God uses humans to bring them (or other humans) closer to God, or to a more sound understanding of God. Augustine uses both the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) and Moses (Exod 18) as examples of humans who were open to receiving the truth

²⁷ C. Kevin Rowe, *Christianity's Surprise: A Sure and Certain Hope* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020), 85.

²⁸ Neal, *Overshadowed*, 12.

²⁹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, pre.13. The conceptual blurriness between bodies and souls in this quote reminds us again of the inseparability of human bodies from human souls or minds. Bouton-Touboulic, 9, observes, “There are two ways, according to Augustine, in which the body is considered connected with the life of the soul. The body either translates inner feelings of the soul in a mysterious manner or is deliberately used to make different affectations apparent externally.” She notes that within *DDC* and in *Confessions* Augustine illustrates the ambiguity (even impossibility, sometimes) in discerning between these two ways.

through other humans.³⁰ Rather than relying on self-sufficiency because of an over-developed sense of particularity, these characters demonstrate human dependence not just on God but also on one another.

In the context of preaching, the recognition of this dependence means preachers must open themselves—their lives—to listeners and listeners must open their lives to preachers. Anna Carter Florence gets at this idea through her description of the homiletical tradition of *testimony*. She states, “A sermon in the testimony tradition is not an autobiography but a very particular kind of proclamation: the preacher tells what she has seen and heard *in the biblical text and in life*, and then confesses what she believes about it.”³¹ Furthermore, Florence argues that this kind of preaching is far deeper and goes well beyond the fashionable idea of “sharing my story.”³² She challenges preachers to “seal our lives to our words.”³³

Additionally, preachers and listeners must open themselves to the life and story of the scriptures. Otis Moss, III, explains that an openness to the world of the scriptures both helps the preacher craft artistically an exposition that resonates with the listener and provides space to find ourselves in the world of the scriptures. This requires an openness to the full experience of

³⁰ Saint Augustine, pre.14-15.

³¹ Florence, *Testimony*, xiii.

³² Florence, 60. The ways in which the idea of sharing one’s story or sharing one’s “truth” have permeated popular culture in the second and third decades of the 21st century hint at a subtle critique of Florence’s argument for preaching as testimony, even given her caveat here. This recalls Charles Campbell’s critique of narrative preaching from the end of the 20th century (Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997]). Florence anticipates this and thus grounds her argument in rhetorical theory and biblical theology. However, she still over-emphasizes the location of authority with the one who proclaims their testimony, and so there is a neglect of the role the community plays in authorizing (cf. xxvi and 107). I am proposing that a robust relationality in preaching holds the individual (and their testimony) within the interrelations of the community by recognizing the particularity of speakers and listeners and being vulnerably open to the ways speakers and listeners might change one another in their interaction.

³³ Florence, *Testimony*, xviii. This is very close to the challenge Willie Jennings gives any who would proclaim a word from God based on his reading of the early sermons in Acts: In order for us to truly hear what the Spirit-languages in the Pentecost event mean, to get at the “heart of the Spirit’s signifying reality,” we “do not need interpreters. We need translators, people who will allow their lives to be translated, not just once but again and again as the Spirit gives utterance” (Willie James Jennings, *Acts, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017], 38).

humanity, the joy and the suffering: “The lives of the people, the world of the story, and the pain of the characters must encroach on the consciousness of the preacher and the people. . . . Our lives are swirling between the lines.”³⁴ Two images here are crucial to the idea of openness I am describing. The image of discovering something of ourselves “swirling between” the biblical words means we must embrace that the guarded boundaries of our understanding of ourselves must be opened. In such an embrace we are reminded of its opposite – a maintenance of rigid boundaries – which Sarah Travis calls *colonizing discourse*: “Colonizing discourse refers to the use of language and symbol that seeks to maintain an impenetrable boundary between center and margins.”³⁵ If we are unwilling to embrace openness, we will inevitably erect and maintain boundaries that exclude rather than welcome. But when those boundaries are opened, then Moss’s second image of allowing an-other to “encroach” on us does not have to mean violation but can in fact mean re-integration and reconciliation.

Recalling Augustine’s concept of signs, it is important to note that the very notion of human signification requires an openness to let something pass from one person to another—to communicate something. In other words, communication requires a relational openness, a permeability. Augustine elaborates on this when he discusses “given signs” early in Book II. “Given signs are those which living things give to each other, in order to show, to the best of their ability, the emotions of their minds, or anything that they have felt or learnt. There is no reason for us to signify something except to express and transmit to another’s mind what is in the mind of the person who gives the sign.”³⁶ This quote seems to take us more toward questions of the relationality of minds than bodies, unless we are paying close attention to the way in which

³⁴ Moss, *Blue Note*, 34.

³⁵ Travis, *Decolonizing*, 3.

³⁶ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.3.

Augustine portrays this kind of mind-to-mind transmission: it happens through thought clothed with sound. “When we speak, the word which we hold in our mind becomes a sound in order that what we have in our mind may pass through ears of flesh into the listener’s mind: this is called speech.”³⁷ So the openness required to engage relationally through signification is not only mental but also embodied. Moss extends this notion to the physical act of preaching to a physical audience: “Performance ... is the act of the experiential embodiment of an idea, using all sensory resources to communicate to another person.”³⁸

One of Augustine’s most explicit statements on the performative aspect of preaching comes in Book IV when he discusses how eloquence might be acquired: “Given a sharp and eager mind, eloquence is picked up more readily by those who read and listen to the words of the eloquent than by those who follow the rules of eloquence. ... [One might] be able to acquire their eloquence not through the traditional teaching but by reading and listening to the speeches of the eloquent and by imitating them within the limits of their ability?”³⁹ This demonstrates two things and raises a crucial question. First, the idea of imitation as a means of acquiring a skill or knowledge demonstrates Augustine’s inherent relational outlook. Eloquence is learned in relationships, person-to-person, much better than as a distillation of some set of rules or facts. Second, his reference to “traditional teaching” and subtle denigration of the “rules of eloquence” demonstrates his ambivalence toward the classical study of rhetoric and oratory in which he had been formed. He is, in a sense, “of two minds” about whether classical rhetorical eloquence is useful or not to the Christian preacher; or to put it another way, throughout Book IV he

³⁷ Saint Augustine, I.26. See also Tarmo Toom, *Thought Clothed with Sound: Augustine’s Christological Hermeneutics in De Doctrina Christiana*, vol. 4, International Theological Studies (Bern: P. Lang, 2002).

³⁸ Moss, *Blue Note*, 36.

³⁹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.8, 12.

interweaves the usefulness and dangers of eloquence. Finally, his appeal to “men of eloquence”⁴⁰ raises the question of who is considered eloquent and by what criteria. Augustine says, “They [men of eloquence] observe the rules because they are eloquent; they do not use them to become eloquent.”⁴¹ This idea risks restricting the definition of eloquence to men with certain social, economic, political, educational, cultural, or even racial particularities. This may rightly put *us* in “two minds” about Augustine’s exhortation to imitate the eloquent, for we find that the set of people traditionally considered eloquent excludes a great many based on these factors. Lisa L. Thompson profoundly describes this exclusionary phenomenon in her exploration of what it means to be an outsider-preacher.⁴² While she admits, “To an extent all preaching has its genesis in imitation,” she also emphasizes that such imitation must “use the familiar to transform the familiar.”⁴³ In other words, the openness required for ideas, traditions of eloquence, or traditions of preaching to pass from person to person also demands that the worthiness of the preacher’s particularities is honored. In a sense, Augustine’s entire argument in Book IV can be viewed as an attempt to “use Cicero to transform Cicero.”⁴⁴ Openness and particularity are interwoven so that the preaching body and preaching place become spaces of inclusion and reconciling relationality.

Interweaving Particularity and Openness

For Augustine, ultimately the incarnate Word embodies the interweaving of particularity and openness. The incarnation contains both an indwelling, or mutuality, and an individuality; it

⁴⁰ The exemplar *par excellence* for Augustine is Cicero. Cf. Saint Augustine, IV.74 and 96.

⁴¹ Saint Augustine, IV.11.

⁴² Thompson, *Ingenuity*, esp. 24-25.

⁴³ Thompson, 34 and 54.

⁴⁴ See John D. Schaeffer, “The Dialectic of Orality and Literacy: The Case of Book 4 of Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 111, no. 5 (October 1996): 1133–44 for a good summary of scholarly positions on how Augustine is interacting with the classical rhetorical tradition. For potent examples of this kind of subversive imitation and mimicry in contemporary postcolonial contexts, see Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial*, 53–54; Travis, *Decolonizing*, 81–82.

is a mixing but without dissolving one into the other: “The word of God became flesh in order to live in us but was unchanged.”⁴⁵ Christ’s incarnation is where the rubber meets the road regarding the foundational relational question of bodies. For, Augustine draws a line of analogy between the incarnation itself and *preaching*. In the following quote, he implies that the very coming of Christ in flesh is itself an act of proclamation, and therefore validates preaching: “What then, since [Christ, the Word] was here already, was the reason for his coming, if not that it pleased God to save those who believed through the foolishness of preaching?”⁴⁶ He then goes on to compare the paradox of particularity and indwelling with the way in which human thought is communicated through physical sound.⁴⁷ This idea of paradox actually pervades our entire understanding of God’s interaction with and redemption of human beings, such that Augustine concludes that the “basic principle of Christian healing is one of contrariety and similarity.”⁴⁸ Because preaching is analogous to Christ’s incarnation, it, too, requires an interwoven paradox of bodily particularity and openness.

Charles Campbell has engaged with the notion of paradox in the incarnation as it pertains to homiletics using the categories of *grotesqueness* and *hybridity*.

The grotesque—in art, literature, photography, architecture, life—embodies contradictions, incongruities. It engages in radical, at times shocking, *hybrid* forms that subvert dominant categories and resist resolution. . . . The grotesque trades in paradoxical anomalies that transgress binaries and cross classificatory boundaries. As a result, the grotesque usually involves *both* a subversion of the status quo *and*, in the words of Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘the potentiality of another world, another order, another way of life.’⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.26. Cf. also very similar language in *Sermon* 187.3.

⁴⁶ Saint Augustine, I.25.

⁴⁷ Saint Augustine, I.26.

⁴⁸ Saint Augustine, I.30.

⁴⁹ Campbell, *Scandal*, 6. Cf. also Lorenzen, *Dialogical*, esp. ch. 4. Lorenzen introduces the helpful idea of preaching engaging both centrifugal and centripetal forces so that there is a gathering element to preaching as well as a de-centering element (see pp. 95 and 160).

One additional descriptive phrase could be added to Campbell's explanation of the grotesque: dynamically interweaving. If the grotesque "embodies contradictions," this means it characterizes something (i.e., preaching) or someone (i.e., preacher or listener, ultimately Christ according to Campbell [cf. 41-57]) that contains within two or more ideas or characteristics that are simultaneously repelling and compelling, holding each other at bay while also being drawn to one another, *even needing one another*. This seems to me a faithful expansion on the ways Augustine characterizes particularity and openness in Christ's incarnation and in human-to-human communication, namely preaching.⁵⁰

It is the incarnation that provides the model for preaching, but only if one is willing to take seriously the paradoxicality—the *grotesqueness*—of that model. As Rowan Williams puts it, "For Augustine, the way up is the way down. That is to say, learning anything about the spirit, the spiritual realm, let alone God, involves a way down. It involves a recognition of one's own mortality and physicality."⁵¹ God has revealed Godself in the human Jesus, who died *and* rose. Embracing fully the humanity of Jesus – starting with his body, as Neal puts it – means we can fully embrace our own humanity *and* the humanity of others. We can protect particularity and surrender to vulnerability. We can resist both the seduction of escape from our humanity, as if we could *be* some disembodied spiritual soul, and the seduction of controlling others' humanity.⁵²

To put it more clearly, Augustine uses the incarnation as a model for preaching, but *only as a model*. This crucial point will be expounded and built upon in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, but the specific application to particularity and openness is worth noting at this stage.

Augustine maintains throughout *DDC* that the particularity of Word and (sermonic) words must

⁵⁰ Every time Augustine mentions the incarnation or quotes John 1, esp. v. 14, I cannot help but hear Campbell's paraphrase as a refrain: "The Word became grotesque and dwelt among us." See, e.g., Campbell, *Scandal*, 41.

⁵¹ Williams, *Being Human*, 62–63.

⁵² Cf. Williams, 63.

be respected, and that this particularity is practically unbridgeable without the loving work of the Holy Spirit. “For when you come to [Christ], you come also to the Father, because God, to whom he is equal, is recognized through his equal, *and the Spirit binds us and as it were cements us together*, so that we can abide in the supreme and unchangeable good.”⁵³ Thus, Augustine is careful not to “dissolve the borders of a preacher’s identity” or to replace Christ’s body with the preacher’s.⁵⁴ If preaching can be modeled on the particularity and openness of the incarnation, if we can interweave these two through the relational power of the Spirit, then our preaching will neither perpetuate “segregation or silos” nor dissolve bodies in violent homogeneity. Rather, the fully human performance of the preacher and the fully human engagement of listeners might become *signs* of God’s formation of an integrated, collaborative, relational community.⁵⁵

One of the most beautiful articulations of this integration, resonance, and interweaving comes from Augustine’s *De catechizandis rudibus* (*On Catechizing Beginners*), where he says about repeating the familiar basics of the faith to new believers (often children),

Let us equip ourselves with a brother’s or a father’s or a mother’s love, and by linking our hearts to theirs, those [familiar basics of faith] will again seem new to us. For so great is this feeling of compassion that when people are touched by us as we speak, and we by them as they learn, we each dwell in the other, and so it is as if they speak in us what they hear while we, in some way, learn in them what it is we teach.⁵⁶

In this quote Augustine is following the same kind of relational logic of interweaving persons that Jesus articulates in John’s gospel when he prays for all those who will believe the proclamation of the disciples: “[I pray] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17.21 NIV).”

⁵³ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.83.

⁵⁴ See Neal, *Overshadowed*, 40–46.

⁵⁵ Cf. Powery, *Becoming*, 67.

⁵⁶ Saint Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*, 12.17, translated by Harmless, *Own Words*, 145.

There is no dissolution in the embodied unity Jesus prays for; neither the disciples nor other believers can *become* God,⁵⁷ but they can be so closely related to one another and to God that there is a kind of inseparability among them, a “mutual indwelling.”⁵⁸ Using Campbell’s terms, John 17 is a biblical example of grotesque hybridity. Each person can remain particular and yet the very openness of God should also produce openness in them. The unity of the Triune God can be reflected in the interweaving of human persons, and when the openness required for this unity is embraced Jesus mysteriously inhabits human persons (John 17.26). The relationality of the Triune God implies that in preaching the Spirit desires to blur the boundaries between preacher, listener, word/text, and God *by means of* drawing all toward one another while resisting the dissolution or conflation of any one with another.

Augustinian Exemplars: Sermon 188 and Sermon 184

Having explored the relationality of Augustine’s homiletic through the interplay of the concepts of particularity and openness of bodies, we may now explore how Augustine’s theory was “fleshed out” in sermonic form. In reading Augustine’s sermons, it is important to note that something essential is lost in the fact that we are unable to see or hear Augustine’s preaching. The fully human performance of Augustine cannot be captured in the words alone, and even the words we have—taken down by a *notarius* as Augustine did not use a pre-written manuscript—are likely not exhaustive of what was preached in the moment. However, analyzing the sermons does offer an opportunity to put practice in conversation with theory.⁵⁹ *Sermon 188*, while brief by comparison to many of Augustine’s extant sermons, is illustrative of his conviction that the

⁵⁷ This is a clear emphasis in Saint Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 110.1.

⁵⁸ Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 312.

⁵⁹ See Harmless, 122–55, and J. Patout Burns, Jr. *Augustine’s Preached Theology: Living as the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2022), for extended examples of Augustine’s theory and practice in conversation.

incarnation is the model for preaching. As an extended meditation on the incarnation for a Christmas Day sermon, this exemplar highlights openness and particularity intertwined in the incarnate Christ. Rather than being lofty and abstract, *Sermon 188* is concrete and almost tangible in its imagery, implying again the necessity of embracing the full humanity of Christ in order to embrace our own humanity. *Sermon 184* is also a Christmas Day sermon and takes up the subject of the incarnation, while additionally providing an excellent example of Augustine's relational interaction with his audience.

The incarnation was a fascinating mystery for Augustine and a subject on which he often preached, especially from the opening of the Gospel of John.⁶⁰ As he does in other sermons and in *DDC*,⁶¹ Augustine begins *Sermon 188* with an acknowledgement of the limits of human communication when it comes to divine mysteries, which is an acknowledgement of particularity as I have described. He states that it is no wonder humans lack the capacity to adequately explain the Word through whom all things were made (John 1.3) or to praise the Word rightly because of the fallen human state.⁶² An interesting addition to this acknowledgement of limits, distinct from the way Augustine articulates it elsewhere (e.g., *Sermon 27*), is that he puts himself in solidarity with his audience, thereby recognizing their collective incapability to “find the words with which to speak the one Word...”⁶³ This is not the preacher's limitation only, but preacher's and congregation's together. The preacher and listeners are similarly particularized with respect to Christ. Augustine and his congregation are “fellow-learners” in this sense, as Allan Fitzgerald

⁶⁰ Harmless, *Own Words*, 128.

⁶¹ E.g., *Sermon 27* and *Sermon 52*, and Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, pre.1.

⁶² *Sermon 188.1*.

⁶³ *Sermon 188.1*.

puts it: “Not only is [Augustine] making his limitation quite plain, but ... he is proclaiming that the process of discovery, of understanding the Word, is a communal process.”⁶⁴

In light of the mysterious and inexpressible aspects of the incarnation, Augustine falls back on concrete imagery that highlights the paradoxicality and hybridity of a fully-divine, fully-human Jesus:

He loved us so much that he became man though he had made man; that he was created from a mother whom he had created, carried in arms he had fashioned, sucked breasts which he himself filled; that he lay squalling in a manger wordless in infancy, though he is the Word without whom human eloquence would be at a loss for words.⁶⁵

Brian Daley states that Augustine preferred “to speak of the mystery of Christ in concrete, rhetorically challenging phrases that let the believer savor the inherent paradox of preaching an incarnate God.”⁶⁶ It is in the use of such concrete, specific, particular language that the paradox of the incarnation is actually blown open. Campbell echoes the need for preaching to be specific because of the difficulty of describing the specific person at the center of a tangled web of relationships: “The gospel is scandalously beyond the reach of language not because it is so transcendent, but because it is so particular, so fleshy.” Sometimes as preachers we can draw near to such a scandal by the kind of concrete imagery Augustine uses here, and sometimes we draw near to that scandal in silence.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Allan Fitzgerald, “Naming the Mystery: An Augustinian Ideal,” *Religions* 6 (2015): 207. Paul R. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 295fn69, calls this a “carefully crafted mutuality” in Augustine’s preaching. Solidarity and mutuality show up in many of Augustine’s sermons, including, e.g., *Sermon 9*, “What after all am I, but someone needing to be set free with you, cured with you?” (quoted in Kolbet, 167); *Sermon 95*, “What you eat, I eat. What you live on, I live on.” (quoted in Harmless, *Own Words*, 127).

⁶⁵ *Sermon 188.2*. This is another good example of rhetorically representing what Augustine calls the principle of contrariety; see Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.28-30.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Harmless, *Own Words*, 128.

⁶⁷ Cf. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.13 where Augustine asks a question many a preacher has asked of themselves: “Have I spoken something, have I uttered something, worthy of God? No, I feel that all I have done is to wish to speak; if I did say something, it is not what I wanted to say. How do I know this? Simply because God is unspeakable. ... There is a kind of conflict between words here: if what cannot be spoken is unspeakable, then it is not

Even while continuing the use of concrete imagery to elucidate, in some small way, the mystery of the incarnation, Augustine moves from mystery to mystery in this sermon. In section four, he weaves together an extremely tight exploration of Christ's virgin birth and the Church's virginity of heart, concluding, "Hence Christ, intending to establish the Church's virginity in the heart, first preserved Mary's in the body. ... [T]he Church ... could not be a virgin unless she had found that the husband she had been given to was the son of a virgin."⁶⁸ Here the sermon ends, and the reader/listener is left with mystery—a cliff's edge meant to prompt a trust fall into further searching. This is Augustine's openness embodied in an open-endedness of sermon form. Augustine here relies on the Spirit's work of leading the listener into further searching, and therefore provides an example of what Luke Powery calls an explosive, expansive broadening, rather than a narrowing, of sermon form.⁶⁹ This kind of broadening makes room for all to be included in the pulpit space.

In *Sermon* 184, Augustine explicitly draws his listeners into the pulpit space through a series of call-outs meant to catch at least one aspect of every listener's identity. The sermon begins with rather lofty rhetoric perhaps more closely akin to Augustine's previous life as a professor of rhetoric than his more pastoral tone later in his career as bishop.⁷⁰ The concepts in part of this opening are remarkably similar to the important comparison of preaching to Christ's incarnation in *DDC* I.26: "[Christ] took to himself what he was not, while remaining what he was; and that he came to us in a man without ever departing from the Father; and that he continued to be what he is, while appearing to us as what we are; and that his divine power was

unspeakable, because it can actually be said to be unspeakable. It is better to evade this verbal conflict silently than to quell it disputatiously."

⁶⁸ *Sermon* 188.4.

⁶⁹ Powery, *Becoming*, 82.

⁷⁰ See Edmund Hill's comment in Saint Augustine, *Sermons* III/6, 19fn1.

confined in the body of an infant without being withdrawn from the whole mass of the universe.”⁷¹ Then in the middle section Augustine exhorts all who are present to rejoice at the birthday of Christ because this birth means something specific and particular for every person and group of people. He identifies men and women, holy brothers and holy sisters (those who had taken monastic vows), and then rapidly those who are just, the weak or sick, captives, slaves, free people, and “all Christians.”⁷² Remembering that he is not using a pre-written manuscript (though parts of this sermon might have been pre-prepared and memorized), it is as if Augustine is surveying the room and points out one of the characteristics of each pair of eyes he meets. We can almost imagine him pointing at groups of people as he rolls through the list. This act of identifying these groups places value on their particularity while also drawing them relationally into the sermon and the pulpit space such that their particularity is also opened to transformation. *Sermon* 184 ends neatly with the goal of such transformation; Augustine pleads, “May [Christ] make us into children of God, since for our sake he was willing to be made a child of man.”⁷³

Both sermons 184 and 188 end with a paradox, which illustrates openness by prompting further searching. The conclusions serve as invitations to “a truly Christian moment where the human effort and divine grace are both necessary” to grasp any part of this mystery of the incarnation.⁷⁴ Fitzgerald asserts that Augustine is occupying a space between two extremes: “[Augustine] *names the mystery* in a way that does not put an end to his searching but acknowledges a simple reality: there is always going to be more to know about any real mystery.”⁷⁵ Another way to put this is that Augustine is resisting closing himself or the sermon

⁷¹ *Sermon* 184.1.

⁷² *Sermon* 184.2.

⁷³ *Sermon* 184.3.

⁷⁴ Fitzgerald, “Naming,” 206.

⁷⁵ Fitzgerald, 206.

off in rigid boundaries. Augustine's homiletical posture is one which "has learned to live in the realm of time and symbol and not to 'enjoy' it as complete or final."⁷⁶ He is open to a pursuit, which itself is open-ended, of the Truth who is Jesus Christ, and that openness is invitational. His homiletical leadership comes in the form of an invitation to bring one's own particularity and perspective, and to open them to the particular and open mystery of the incarnation.

⁷⁶ Rowan Williams, *On Augustine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 49.

Chapter 3: Relational Minds: Humble *and* Bold

Introduction

Having explored the ways in which Augustine understands the ideas of particularity and openness with regard to bodies in the preaching moment being held together relationally by the dual motivation of loving God and loving one's neighbor, this chapter will focus on the relational question of minds. It is important to note again that this question cannot be separated from the question of bodies, but asking how minds relate to one another in preaching raises another set of issues: epistemology, agency, persuasion, rhetoric, certainty, and doubt, among others. How do we know and how do we communicate what we know in the pulpit? How are listeners persuaded and is persuasion a good goal for Christian rhetoric? What kind of epistemic posture is needed for a relational preaching that fosters mutuality, solidarity, and reconciliation? I will argue that Augustine's posture, which exemplifies both humility *and* boldness, interweaving them together in love, provides fertile ground for such relational preaching.

For Augustine the preacher, the awesome responsibility of preaching is undertaken with seriousness and humility. He articulates this explicitly in *Sermon 339*, "To preach, to rebuke, to correct, to build up, to feel responsible for every one of you—it's a terrible burden, a huge weight, an enormous task."¹ In preaching Augustine embodies humility and boldness in the way he holds certainty and mystery in tension, especially when addressing topics such as the Trinity or Christ's incarnation. This is possible for Augustine because of his view of knowledge – his epistemology – and how minds are relational. In this chapter, I will begin by providing an

¹ *Sermon 339.1*, trans. Harmless, *Own Words*, 79. Cf. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), I.1, where Augustine uses similar language for teaching hermeneutics/homiletics: "This is a great and arduous burden, one difficult to sustain and also, I fear, a rash one to undertake..."

overview of Augustine's epistemology before drawing out examples of his epistemology as it is applied in his discussion of preaching in *DDC*. I will then analyze an example of a sermon on the subject of the mystery of the Trinity, which will reveal how Augustine interweaves humility and boldness in practice to draw relational connections with his congregation.

A Relational Epistemology

Drawing an admittedly brief sketch of Augustine's epistemology is important both because it is reflected in his approach to theological mysteries² in his sermons and because the very language Augustine uses for "knowing" sets the foundation for identifying humility and boldness in his homiletics. James K. A. Smith summarizes the epistemology of the Augustine of *Confessions* as, "I love in order to know."³ But this is certainly not where the journey of Augustine's epistemology begins. Before he arrived at the connection between desire/love and knowledge, he was formed rhetorically through reading Cicero, trained philosophically through the Platonists, and led astray by the prideful posture of the Manichaeans, just to name some of his influences.⁴ His most explicitly epistemological writing was an apologetic *Against the Skeptics*, which he wrote just before his Christian baptism and references much later in life in *On the Trinity*.⁵ In this work, Augustine states that it is possible to know some things, but not everything, about oneself and one's experiences. He also later comes to believe that it is possible to know some things about God, but that requires a shift in epistemological language. John M. Rist offers a thorough account of Augustine's epistemological thought through the lens of his interaction

² Here I am using the word "mystery" in the sense of a complex or multifaceted concept, doctrine, or belief, which implies or entails some kind of incomprehensibility. Augustine often uses "mystery" to refer to the sacraments of the Church, and so it is necessary to clarify that I am using the more colloquial connotation. To be sure, Augustine's use and my use have significant overlap.

³ Smith, *On the Road*, 152.

⁴ Smith, 142–50 outlines this journey neatly and succinctly.

⁵ John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43.

with Skepticism and how that interaction led to a shift in conceptual language—from pursuit of ‘certainty’ to pursuit of ‘understanding,’ which leads to the “practical importance of the distinction between knowledge and belief.”⁶ Augustine begins to see knowledge as referring to facts of an empirical or propositional nature and belief as something deeper-seeded, like conviction, which is ultimately founded on relationship. This is borne out in *DDC*, as we will see below, where he implies that one can have knowledge of the Scriptures but not the wisdom or understanding of the Scriptures.⁷

The distinction between knowledge and belief begins somewhat to collapse as Augustine returns to themes of epistemology in *On Christian Belief*, specifically a book entitled *The Advantage of Believing*.⁸ There Augustine is writing to an old friend, Honoratus, with whom he had embraced the teachings of the Manichaeans and to whom he felt indebted because Honoratus was still in league with the Manichaeans.⁹ Augustine admits that he and Honoratus both embraced the teachings of the Manichaeans not because of the content of those teachings so much as the epistemic posture of those teachings—their “awesome authority,” “grand assumption[s],” and “promise of proofs.”¹⁰ Having come to the Christian faith, Augustine rejects that posture altogether, even articulating reasons to resist certainty as a necessary condition of belief, which is what he thinks constitutes knowledge: “[W]ho can say we should believe nothing that we do not know for certain? Even friendship cannot exist unless we believe some things that cannot be proved for certain.”¹¹ The thrust of this quote is to reject certainty as a pre-condition for belief.

⁶ Rist, 43; see also the whole chapter, “Certainty, belief, and understanding,” pp. 41-91.

⁷ Cf. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.19.

⁸ Saint Augustine, “The Advantage of Believing,” in *On Christian Belief*, trans. Ray Kearney, vol. 8, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, I (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005).

⁹ Saint Augustine, 1.1.

¹⁰ Saint Augustine, 1.2; cf. Smith, *On the Road*, 147.

¹¹ Saint Augustine, “The Advantage of Believing,” 10.24.

Even in a relationship as intimate as friendship, there are aspects of an-other that are unknown, uncertain, and therefore require trust. Furthermore, the reference to friendship is no mere analogy; instead, it opens the door to relationality and trust, which are inherent to belief for Augustine but also necessary for understanding and, ultimately, the kind of knowledge we humans can attain.¹² It is relationship and trust that begin to light the path to belief, understanding, and knowledge. The reference to friendship also illustrates Augustine's belief that knowledge has a communal element because human minds are simultaneously individual and communal entities.¹³ Augustine's rejection of a kind of objective certainty was in reaction to the prideful epistemic posture of the Manichaeans, but it was Ambrose's openness and humility in relationship that initially shone a light down Augustine's path to belief.¹⁴

The themes of relationality and trust lead to two other points regarding Augustine's epistemology. First, the fact that his relationship with Ambrose, though not as intimate as a close friendship, softened his heart toward belief meant that he often endeavors to affect a similar softening in his listeners at Hippo through his sermons as bishop. The ways relationality and trust influence Augustine's homiletics will be seen below especially in the ways he articulates solidarity with his readers and listeners. Second, and more importantly, there is a clear line of connection between the philosophical idea of the relationality of knowledge (Smith summarizes, "Illumination depends on trust; enlightenment is communal."¹⁵) and the dependence of humanity on the incarnation of Jesus Christ for any meaningful access to true knowledge. Jesus's incarnation means relationship to truth is possible for humanity—and, therefore, knowledge is

¹² Saint Augustine, 10.23.

¹³ Cf. John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 62.

¹⁴ Smith, *On the Road*, 150–51; I recount this part of Augustine's story in ch. 1 above.

¹⁵ Smith, 151.

possible—and the very nature of the incarnation and the access to the truth offered invites epistemic humility in one who would teach or preach incarnationally. In fact, the link between knowledge and love is clear in Book II of *DDC* as well, where Augustine claims that it is the discovery of our disordered loves and exertion toward proper love of God and neighbor that constitutes learning.¹⁶

In the nascent stages of his “faith seeking understanding,” Augustine was dumbfounded at the humility—even humiliation—of a God made man; he “saw a humility that was unparalleled in the ancient world and unthinkable to philosophers. That humility spilled over into an offer of grace and epistemic mercy that transgressed all boundaries of class and tribe.”¹⁷ If epistemic mercy is offered through Christ’s humility, then epistemic humility should be offered as a mercy to the preacher’s audience. This comes through in *Sermon* 182, where Augustine is directly contradicting the epistemic pride of his former compatriots, the Manichaeans: “You cannot be your own light; you can’t, you simply can’t. . . . We are in need of enlightenment, we are not the light. Wake up, cry out with me, ‘The Lord is my enlightenment’ (Ps 27.1).”¹⁸ Yet, as the very preaching of this sermon (and many others) indicates, humility does not preclude Augustine from preaching with boldness and conviction. Instead, because “conviction is not synonymous with dogmatism,”¹⁹ he can open the multifaceted wonders of the scriptures for his hearers so that, together, he and they might glimpse the beauty of the Word made flesh.

Before turning to how Augustine’s epistemology is applied to homiletics in *DDC*, it is helpful to note a crucial link between Augustine’s hermeneutics and epistemology. As has been

¹⁶ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.18. Cf. also I.86.

¹⁷ Smith, *On the Road*, 155.

¹⁸ *Sermon* 182.5. Unless otherwise noted, references to Augustine’s sermons come from Saint Augustine, *Sermons*. I was pointed to *Sermon* 182 by González, *Mestizo*, 93.

¹⁹ Smith, *On the Road*, 157.

well-discussed by scholars, Augustine’s interpretive methods always run through the person of Jesus Christ.²⁰ His readings of both Old and New Testaments are thoroughly Christological. Such a hermeneutical method has earned Augustine’s interpretation labels such as “spiritual,” “allegorical,” and “figural.”²¹ Though he does not abandon the pursuit of historical meaning or literal meaning, his sermons most often reflect the pursuit of spiritual meaning.²² The pursuit of spiritual meaning further opened to Augustine the wealth of meaning and application for which the scriptures can be mined. In the foreword to Burns’ book *Augustine’s Preached Theology*, J. Warren Smith elucidates the application of this pursuit even to contemporary preaching: “He [Augustine] does not see one passage of scripture as having a single, historical meaning that is confined to the author’s intent. Rather, Augustine recognizes that when the Holy Spirit speaks in and through us, whether an ancient prophet or a modern preacher, our words carry more meanings than we intend at that moment.”²³ James Andrews makes the link between hermeneutics and preaching even more explicit: “Scripture is not simply a source to be mined when attempting to find something to say; instead, scriptural interpretation - discovering God’s will in just these books - has its end in Christian preaching, and this puts a heavier weight on textual understanding than exists in [Augustine’s previously learned] rhetorical tradition.”²⁴ For Augustine to take seriously his own understanding of the way the Holy Spirit communicates

²⁰ See, e.g., Burns, *Augustine’s Preached Theology*; Harmless, *Own Words*; Edward L. Smither and Benjamin K. Forrest, “Augustine of Hippo: Agape-Driven, Christocentric Preaching,” in *A Legacy of Preaching: The Life, Theology, and Method of History’s Great Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018). Augustine’s own explanation of his interpretive method is best seen in *On Christian Teaching*, book II. The Christological hermeneutical lens also further highlights the relationality of Augustine’s epistemology discussed above. Without the revelation of the Father embodied in the Son and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, knowledge of God is impossible; therefore, we might more helpfully call his hermeneutical lens “Triune” rather than simply “Christological.”

²¹ Harmless, *Own Words*, 157–58.

²² Burns, *Augustine’s Preached Theology*, 31.

²³ Burns, 12.

²⁴ James A. Andrews, “Why Theological Hermeneutics Needs Rhetoric: Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 2 (2010): 189.

through Scripture *and* through the teacher/preacher of Scripture, humility is required. In hermeneutical terms, that humility is embodied especially in Augustine’s approach to difficult or mysterious scriptural passages: “A challenging text was intended to keep a person at the task of searching for God’s meaning and to reward the effort expended in finding it.”²⁵

Humility in De Doctrina Christiana

One of the clearest ways that Augustine demonstrates the need for humility in preaching is by consistently recognizing his own limitations and calling for his readers to do the same. The acknowledgement of limits is a reminder of the connection between minds and bodies, as I have already discussed limitations vis a vis the particularity and porous boundaries of bodies. Additionally, Augustine is quick to recognize the limitations of his own effectiveness as a teacher, the limitations of the effectiveness of rhetoric and language even in the mouth of great orators, and the limitations of each of our understanding of Scripture. The theme of limitations is found starting at the outset of Book I, where Augustine admits that the entire task of the treatise would be foolhardy “if I were trusting in my own resources.” He continues, interweaving the acknowledgement of limits with the necessity of relationality for knowledge and communication: “But since in fact my hope of completing the work is based on God, from whom I already have much relevant material through meditation, I have no need to worry that he will fail to supply the remainder when I begin to share what has been given to me.”²⁶ Here we also have the first hints of a language of boldness, for there is a kernel of courage and vulnerability merely in the preacher “beginning to share,” but this will be discussed further below. In the first place, acknowledging

²⁵ Burns, *Augustine’s Preached Theology*, 37.

²⁶ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.1. A very similar sentiment is expressed in IV.1, where Augustine re-starts his project—Books I-III were written in the 390s CE, but Book IV was written many years later when Augustine was an elder and seasoned bishop—saying that he will complete the treatise only “with the Lord’s help” (regarding dating, see Green’s introduction to *DDC* in Saint Augustine, vii).

one's dependence on God and the limits of a human preacher's knowledge of themselves and their audience means the preacher must start from a position of humility:

On any one of the subjects which must be treated in terms of faith and love there are many points to make, and many ways for those who know about these things to make them;²⁷ who can know what is expedient for us to say or our audience to hear at a particular moment but the one who sees the hearts of all? And who can ensure that we say what is right and say it in the right way but the one 'in whose hands we, and our sermons, exist' [Wisd. 7:16]?²⁸

The implication here is that God is needed to be both preacher and teacher if the (human) preacher's words are to have their desired effect.

Augustine refers also to the limits of human understanding of language, the limitations of human agency in communication, and the need to be self-aware of one's limitations in rhetorical skill. In Book III, he states that the very category of metaphor—which is a linguistic term for his concept of signification—is “too broad ... to be comprehended in its entirety by a human being.”²⁹ R. A. Markus echoes this idea when he argues for Augustine's concept of signification providing the space for Augustine to discuss the constitution and relationality of communities: “Language bridges the gulf that has opened up between fallen human beings; but words are fragile vehicles of meaning, they slip, slide, and will not stay still, and every attempt to communicate is a wholly new start, for, as Augustine wrote, ‘understanding flashes like lightning through the mind, but speech is slow and sluggish, and hopelessly inadequate.’”³⁰ Because language is limited both from the perspective of the speaker and the perspective of the listener,

²⁷ Green's translation here reminds me of a literary example of starting from a position of humility. In her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson's main character John Ames begins his memoirs to his young son with these words: “I told you you might have a very different life from mine, and from the life you've had with me, and that would be a wonderful thing, *there are many ways to live a good life.*” Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2004), 3, emphasis added.

²⁸ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.88.

²⁹ Saint Augustine, III.133.

³⁰ R. A. Markus, “Signs, Communication, and Communities in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*,” in *De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, ed. D. W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 100, quoting Saint Augustine, *De catechizandus rudibus*, 2.3.

the two (and many more than two!) need one another communally; the very act of signifying implies and constitutes a community.³¹

In Book IV, Augustine articulates the limits of human agency in teaching/communication: “So too the benefits of teaching, applied to the soul through human agency, are only beneficial when the benefit is effected by God.”³² There is an implicit recognition in this passage, and the one immediately before,³³ that the listener’s relational openness and responsiveness to God is determinative of understanding to a far greater extent than the agency of the preacher. Rowan Williams states this compellingly, “Before anything or anyone is in relation with anything or anyone else, it’s in relation to *God*. ... [So] my neighbor is also always somebody who is already in a relation with God before they’re in a relation with me. That means that there’s a very serious limit on my freedom to make of my neighbour what I choose.”³⁴ Or, for the preacher, there is a very serious limit on what I can or cannot get my listener to understand, to assent to, to believe. Recognizing such a limit ought not only to foster humility, but might also cause us to rethink the goal(s) of rhetoric altogether.

Regarding the preacher’s rhetorical skill, Augustine finally calls for self-awareness of rhetorical limitations. Having expounded on the purposes and styles of rhetorical practice for Christian preachers, Augustine in the last paragraphs of Book IV reminds his readers that many speakers cannot wed the appropriate rhetorical style to particular topics wisely, and thus those speakers would do well to abandon the goal of eloquence in favor of speaking wisely.³⁵ By

³¹ Cf. also Susannah Ticciati, “The Human Being as Sign in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 55, no. 1 (2013): 20–32.

³² Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.95.

³³ Cf. Saint Augustine, IV.94: “That is why even with the ministry of holy men ... nobody properly learns the things that appertain to a life with God, unless, through God, he becomes responsive to God.”

³⁴ Williams, *Being Human*, 37.

³⁵ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.158.

speaking wisely, he means a close adherence to the words of Scripture themselves rather than relying on one's own words.³⁶ But then he also admits that some speakers cannot achieve either eloquence or wisdom, and so might fall back on the ethical example of their life outside of teaching/preaching as an entirely different form of eloquence.³⁷

Each of these human limitations—of language, agency, rhetoric, and understanding—requires that both preacher and listener approach a sermon with humility, especially in epistemic terms. There are things we know, things we know that we don't know, and things we don't know that we don't know, and all of these apply to our knowledge of ourselves, others, and God. Kim-Cragg poses several questions that get at the complexity of these limits of knowledge. She quotes Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, who says, "in our effort to identify with listeners and to speak with and to them, we may be assuming that we know much more than we actually know," and then probes further, "But what of the responsibility of those in the pew to know the preacher? And what about the preacher's own self-knowledge?"³⁸ These insightful questions highlight the messy relationality of minds and knowledge in the context of preaching. Again, Williams summarizes this relationality in broad terms: "My consciousness is mobile, engaged, incomplete: because I can't construct the idea of any object without supposing a diversity of points of view, I know that my point of view is always partial, and to be conscious of myself is to be aware of myself as a node point in a web of information exchange, which corporately constructs the idea of objects, selves, persons."³⁹

Augustine connects his relational epistemology to homiletical wisdom using the language of understanding: "The wisdom of what a person says is in direct proportion to his progress in

³⁶ Cf. Saint Augustine, IV.21.

³⁷ Saint Augustine, IV.159.

³⁸ Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial*, 55. Cf. also Travis, *Decolonizing*, 45.

³⁹ Williams, *Being Human*, 12.

learning the holy scriptures—and I am not speaking of intensive reading or memorization, but real understanding and careful investigation of their meaning. Some people read them but neglect them; by their reading they profit in knowledge, by their neglect they forfeit understanding.”⁴⁰ It is not simply knowledge—something fact-based, objective, or empirical—that is sought by the preacher but understanding or even wisdom, and such understanding involves a *process*, “not a triumphant moment of penetration and mastery, but an extended play of invitation and exploration.”⁴¹ The notion of process highlights an additional theme that ought to lead the preacher toward an epistemic humility: the complexity of humanity and of Scripture.

As Augustine hints earlier in *DDC*, arriving at or mastering knowledge with little effort often leads to contempt for the object known or understood.⁴² This is the reason many passages of scripture are initially obscure to the reader/listener, and therefore invite the reader on a journey of discovery. He claims that it is “more rewarding to discover meanings that are won only with difficulty.”⁴³ However, this journey must be undertaken with humility, lest one fall prey to showmanship by “indulging a passion for wrangling [or] making a puerile show of skill.”⁴⁴ For Augustine, these journeys of discovery do not end definitively in this life; rather they are ongoing, and more truth can always be found as the pilgrim seeks the one who is Truth, Jesus Christ.⁴⁵ Additionally, in Book III Augustine recognizes that the complexity and ambiguity in

⁴⁰ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.19.

⁴¹ Rowan Williams, “Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine’s *De Doctrina*,” *Literature and Theology* 3, no. 2 (July 1989): 142.

⁴² Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.10.

⁴³ Saint Augustine, II.13. Cf. also IV.27.

⁴⁴ Saint Augustine, II.117.

⁴⁵ Williams, “Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine’s *De Doctrina*,” 142–43.” On the significance of the pilgrim motif throughout Augustine’s corpus, see, e.g., Sarah Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation in Augustine’s Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and as it applies to a homiletical context, see Sunggu Yang, “The Promised Land: A Postcolonial Homiletic of Promise in the Asian American Context,” in *Toward a Homiletical Theology of Promise*, ed. David Schnasa Jacobsen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 9–27.

many passages of Scripture are unresolvable or indefinite.⁴⁶ Such complexity requires “the greatest care” in discerning the meanings of words which shift over time and in different places and in interpreting and communicating ideas which may signify multiple other ideas.⁴⁷ We can recast this notion of taking great care as epistemic humility in the preacher’s posture. This does not mean throwing our hands up in a perpetual shrug of “Who knows? Who cares?,” but rather a willingness to embrace a sense of incompleteness and openness to the mystery of God and of Scripture.

When epistemic pride—manifested in a posture and articulation of certainty—is embodied in the pulpit, it reflects the preacher’s sense of having *arrived at a destination* hermeneutically and spiritually. Such a posture betrays an over-realized sense of the Christian life, which is counter to both the words of scripture and the way Augustine preaches. In fact, not only did Augustine reject such a posture in his previous colleagues the Manichaeans, but he expressly rejects this kind of certainty in *DDC* when he turns to Tyconius’ *The Book of Rules*. He says that Tyconius raised “false hopes” in his readers by stating that following his rules would “swing open all closed doors” and “[make] all obscurity be as light as day,” and therefore be completely “preserved from error.”⁴⁸ In contrast to Tyconius’ posture, Augustine embodies a humble ambivalence about the nature of oratory in the pulpit, especially with regard to speaking about the mysteries of God. This can be seen at the end of *DDC* in Book IV.88 (see fn 28 above) and at the beginning in Book I.13, where following a long paragraph on the subject of the Trinity as “supreme thing (*res*),” he says, “Have I spoken something, have I uttered something, worthy of

⁴⁶ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, III.9ff.

⁴⁷ Saint Augustine, III.76-82.

⁴⁸ Saint Augustine, III.95. Williams, *Being Human*, 91, echoes the rejection of this posture in more colloquial terms: “I would venture to guess that the people we would least like to spend a long time with [or hear preach!] are people who have answers to every question and plans for every contingency” (bracketed phrase added).

God? No, I feel that all I have done is to wish to speak.” This idea of wishing to speak leads to the other way minds relate for Augustine, which he interweaves with the way of humility: boldness.

Boldness in De Doctrina Christiana

In an important sense, given all that Augustine says about limitations, complexity, and ambivalence, the entirety of his project in *DDC* and his sermons is an act of boldness. Augustine still speaks; he still preaches. Though there are reasons, from a limited human perspective, to doubt, to be uncertain, ambivalent, even perhaps despairing, still Augustine continues the journey with boldness. His boldness is grounded first in the idea that one’s progress on the humble journey is not ultimately sourced in oneself. It is Christ who is both travelling partner on the road *and* the road itself as a person pursues relationship with the Father, which is only possible if the Spirit “binds us and cements us together.”⁴⁹ Therefore, it is possible to have the boldness and confidence that on the journey we are not detained, for it is Christ that both carries and teaches us. In fact, in the act of preaching, God is needed to be both preacher and teacher if the human preacher’s words are to have their desired effect. In *Sermon 301A*, Augustine explicitly states that as Christians we “claim Christ as Teacher,” and that even as bishop seated above his congregation, Augustine himself is merely a “fellow student.”⁵⁰

Augustine’s boldness to teach and preach also stems from the nature of the triune God and of the scriptures that point to God as inherently abundant. We cannot reach the depths of the knowledge of God or of Scripture, nor should we ever feign such accomplishment; rather we may speak boldly precisely because they are inexhaustible resources of truth and life.⁵¹ This leads to

⁴⁹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.81-83.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Harmless, *Own Words*, 161–62.

⁵¹ Cf. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.3 and 23.

an embrace of both knowing and unknowing, both understanding and misunderstanding.⁵²

Because of the profound mystery that is God, Luke Powery asserts, “both comprehension and incomprehension are gifts of the Spirit.”⁵³ He continues, “As a finite human being, I am limited in my knowledge about the Holy Spirit and race, but this does not prevent my attempt to be constructive to assist the church to move forward in helpful and holy ways.”⁵⁴ In other words, the humility of recognizing limits in agency and understanding does not preclude the boldness of speaking.

But boldness also has a potential shadow side. When it is borne out of trust in Christ as teacher and God as inherently abundant, boldness is intertwined with humility. However, absent that humility, the human mind tends toward exercising sovereignty over itself and its body, and then “thinks it has achieved something great if it can also dominate its peers, by which I mean other [humans].”⁵⁵ Such “intolerable arrogance,” as Augustine calls it, leaves a series of broken relationships in its wake. Boldness divorced from humility is anti-relational. This idea is reflected clearly in the effects of modern colonialism on minds and knowledge. Sarah Travis avers, “Colonial/imperial powers also attempt to control the production of knowledge about colonized peoples. ... The narrative of colonial power has left little room for the oppressed to speak: ‘they exist only as they are constructed within the colonial imagination, a function of the empire’s will to power.’”⁵⁶ On the other hand, Kim-Cragg imagines a way in which role-reversals between

⁵² Susan Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don’t Know Where You’re Going: Leading in a Liminal Season* (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield Publishing, 2019), 37ff., advocates for this kind of posture in leaders of organizations, especially churches. She states, using language similar to Augustine, that a posture of “unknowing” is “a destination at which we never fully arrive. Being cognizant of our own unknowing means, in fact, that we are still knowing ... [and able to] suspend judgment and to hold competing thoughts and values in tension.”

⁵³ Powery, *Becoming*, 126.

⁵⁴ Powery, 125.

⁵⁵ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.45-46.

⁵⁶ Travis, *Decolonizing*, 25.

voices historically centered and voices historically marginalized might become cross-culturally reconciling: “An important shift in [power dynamics] takes place when people from cultures that are not dominant become teachers, and the people from Anglo cultures become learners.”⁵⁷

A boldness interwoven with humility fosters communal formation through mutual dialogue. Williams says self-confidence ought to mean “having the courage to engage, to venture out, to be confident enough to *exchange* perspectives, truths, insights, to move into a particular kind of conversation or dialogue.”⁵⁸ The fact that Augustine ties homiletics to hermeneutics so closely implies this kind of confident engagement with others.⁵⁹ Interpretation cannot be self-focused for knowledge’s sake, but must be other-oriented. Augustine emphasizes this communal element of bold and humble preaching in his insistence that knowledge is not a possession to be hoarded but something to be grasped and released, passed on to any others who would boldly learn.⁶⁰ Marlene Ringaard Lorensen echoes this idea of communal formation using the language of interaction and role-reversals: “Insight cannot be transferred as if it is a package being sent from one who knows to someone who does not know. Understanding happens in interaction where teacher and learner, speaker and listener, preacher and congregation switch roles continually in order to get at a deeper understanding.”⁶¹ Lorensen explores this idea of role-reversal through the concepts of dialogicity and the carnivalesque in the philosophy of Mikhail Bakhtin with compelling conclusions. Though Augustine does not speak of role reversals in the

⁵⁷ Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial*, 94.

⁵⁸ Williams, *Being Human*, 40.

⁵⁹ Cf. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.1.

⁶⁰ Cf. Saint Augustine, Pre.11, 17-18. In Pre.17, Augustine even turns the idea of possession on its head when he says, “Yet nobody should regard anything as his own, except perhaps a lie.”

⁶¹ Lorensen, *Dialogical*, 142.

same way, his emphasis on the interweaving and relationality of speakers and listeners is complementary to the interplay emphasized by Lorenzen.⁶²

Finally, the boldness to speak—especially the boldness to relate one’s mind to one’s listeners—must be undergirded and always guided by love. This notion echoes Augustine’s epistemology summarized by James K. A. Smith above as “I love in order to know.” For Augustine, boldness intermingled with humility and guided by love means even the complex or ambiguous signs in Scripture can be tackled by the preacher.⁶³ He even goes so far as to imply that in our communication of the mysteries of Scripture, erring in love is not really erring at all: “If [the preacher] is misled by an idea of the kind that builds up love, which is the end of the commandment, [they] are misled in the same way as a walker who leaves his path by mistake but reaches the destination to which the path leads by going through a field.”⁶⁴ Though the one misled should be gently corrected, the error made in love that leads to love is not an error in the way we normally think. This commends to us all the more the need for both humility and boldness in the way our ideas relate to our listeners.

Interweaving Humility and Boldness

As he interweaves humility and boldness in engaging with a multiplicity of minds through preaching, Augustine demonstrates a way of navigating epistemological extremes that still prove alluring in the 21st century. Commenting on Augustine’s hermeneutics, Christopher Beeley endorses Augustine’s way of navigating a temptation to extremes: “Spiritual interpretation stands against both fundamentalism and nihilism, as Augustine stressed. [This] is a distinctively

⁶² We are reminded here of Augustine’s comment in *De catechizandis rudibus* about speakers who hear from the perspective of listeners and listeners who speak in the words of the preacher. See p. XX above (in ch. 2).

⁶³ See Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, III.42, 54.

⁶⁴ Saint Augustine, I.88.

Christian way of reading [and preaching] the Bible, one that has been formed through the experience of actual church communities since the first century.”⁶⁵ Perhaps 21st century preachers and listeners, having inherited the battle between modernism’s objective fundamentalism and postmodernism’s subjective relativism, should look to a premodern preacher like Augustine, who intertwines belief and assuredness.

When Augustine knits together humility and boldness, it opens space for the communication of complexity in a way that is authentic and attractive—in a way that instructs, delights, and moves.⁶⁶ Such space is opened by the scriptures themselves, which draws human minds on the journey toward the home that is the Triune God.⁶⁷ While the preacher can and should aim for clarity, such a goal cannot reduce the mysteries of faith to impossible simplicity: “There are some things which are not understood, or barely understood, in themselves, no matter how carefully they are expressed or how many times they are repeated by even the plainest of speakers.”⁶⁸ A similar embrace of complexity is advocated by Travis in the 21st century context of postcolonialism: “Postcolonial preaching is a homiletic perspective that must remain open and flexible, accepting ambiguity and contradiction. . . . We cannot ever fully know divine or human others. The other remains somewhat a mystery, and it is important to honor that mystery.”⁶⁹ Augustine demonstrates the necessity of embracing limitations of understanding and

⁶⁵ Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God’s People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 83.

⁶⁶ Cf. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.74ff.

⁶⁷ Saint Augustine, IV.27.

⁶⁸ Saint Augustine, IV.63. In this section of Book IV, Augustine makes clear that human preachers who are not the biblical authors should not aim to imitate the biblical authors where they have demonstrated a “healthy and helpful obscurity.” Augustine walks a fine line here between rejecting an intentional obscurity and upholding the mysterious and complex nature of the parts of Scripture and Christian faith that have their source in God who is other than humanity and therefore somewhat incomprehensible. I will explore this further in the following chapter on the relationship between preaching and doctrine. For now, it is remarkable that Augustine argues that silence is an acceptable option for the one who wants to explore such mysteries: “These things should seldom be put to a popular audience, and then only if there is a pressing need, or arguably never at all.”

⁶⁹ Travis, *Decolonizing*, 108.

communication that leads to further trust and love, to a deeper relationship with other humans *and* with Christ as ultimate teacher/preacher.

Augustine's preaching does not offer easy answers, but instead engages listeners with a boldness drawn from the fact that God has designed humans for relational communication. But boldness divorced from humility, evidenced by an epistemic pride or combative certainty, denies the inherent relationality of minds. This kind of certainty mirrors what Travis calls the colonial/imperial impulse to untangle and homogenize the complexity of postcolonial life.⁷⁰ But that impulse runs directly counter to the intellectual humility that the life of Jesus and the writings of the New Testament are meant to form in people of faith. Grant Macaskill has examined the ways in which the New Testament shapes intellectual humility in its readers, focusing particularly on the way Jesus' "humility of mind" is characterized in passages like Philippians 2.5-11.⁷¹ Jesus' humility, especially in this passage, "is not associated with limitation or deficiency, far less with sin, but rather with 'selflessness', a particular attitude to one's own interests (including one's status) that is prepared to make sacrifices out of a desire for the flourishing of others, adopting the role of 'servant'."⁷² While I have emphasized that Augustine focuses frequently on epistemic limitations from a human perspective, he also advocates for Macaskill's notion of selflessness identified in the NT account of Jesus' life and death. For example, in Book IV.64, he argues that there are times when the speaker must, based on the needs of the audience, alter the style or content of communication at the expense of the speaker's own reputation of eloquence. Indeed, Augustine's whole project in *DDC* is one of service to his readers and by implication he also views preaching as an act of service to his congregation.⁷³

⁷⁰ Travis, 89.

⁷¹ Grant Macaskill, *The New Testament and Intellectual Humility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), chap. 5.

⁷² Macaskill, 24.

⁷³ See Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.1 and IV.1.

However, viewing preaching as the use of one's mind and body in service to another does not mean dehumanizing the preacher or devaluing the preacher's particular perspective and voice. Likewise, embracing mystery, complexity, ambiguity, and limitations with epistemic humility cannot lead to an apathy or despair about preaching. Aaron Edwards explores this point compellingly through the lens of dialectical theology, particularly evidenced in the sometimes messy or seemingly contradictory multivocality of Scripture.⁷⁴ He argues that even given the dynamic tensions present in the scriptural witness, the preacher should exhibit "heraldic confidence."⁷⁵ Echoing Augustine in Book I of *DDC*, he avers, "[T]he preacher's confidence is grounded in their *inability* to speak of God in the midst of [God's] commission for them to do so."⁷⁶ There is simultaneously an impossibility and a possibility about the preaching task, which means that "preacherly humility" is equally essential to "heraldic confidence" in carrying out God's commission to preach.⁷⁷

The way these essentials are manifested in *DDC* is through a kind of ambivalence, especially with regard to the efficacy of rhetoric. Augustine observes that God has created humans such that their minds can be bridged through words; we relate to one another through signification, communication, and for the preacher, rhetoric.⁷⁸ But then even admitting this, Augustine's relationship with the rhetorical tradition he learned as a student is fraught. He is pulled toward it and enveloped by it, recognizing that it is in use by all who would speak in any context in his world, so why shouldn't preachers use it, too: "Oratorical ability, so effective a

⁷⁴ Aaron P. Edwards, *A Theology of Preaching and Dialectic: Scriptural Tension, Heraldic Proclamation, and the Pneumatological Moment* (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

⁷⁵ Edwards, chap. 3. Edwards' book is often in conversation with Barth on the subjects of dialectics and homiletics. His conclusions about confidence and boldness are supported in more accessible terms by Will Willimon, who also draws extensively on Barth: Will Willimon, *Preachers Dare: Speaking for God* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020).

⁷⁶ Edwards, *Theology of Preaching and Dialectic*, 109, emphasis added.

⁷⁷ Edwards, 141–46.

⁷⁸ Cf. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 1.25-26.

resource to commend either right or wrong, is available to both sides; why then is it not acquired by good and zealous Christians to fight for the truth, if the wicked employ it ... to achieve their perverse and futile purposes?"⁷⁹ At the same time, he is repelled by it, refusing to teach the rules and skills of the classical tradition himself, and even going so far as to imply that through the Spirit's empowerment and a life well-lived for God, "eloquence" is achievable without the use of words altogether.⁸⁰ When it comes to the relationality of minds and the usefulness of rhetoric in that relationality, Augustine displays an ambivalence similar to the way the concept is used by postcolonial scholars. Travis summarizes, "'Ambivalence' ... refers to a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and its opposite, a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from a person, action, or object."⁸¹ This definition characterizes well the relationship Augustine has with Cicero, especially in Book IV.⁸² I submit that in his "continual fluctuation," Augustine finds a way to interweave epistemic humility and epistemic boldness, such that the Christian preacher *can*, in fact, participate in the connecting relationality of minds, but only insofar as the preacher recognizes that the connection is only made by the Spirit's power and cannot be owned or controlled by the preacher. This interweaving is on full display in Augustine's *Sermon 52*, to which I will now turn.

An Augustinian Exemplar: Sermon 52

In *Sermon 52*, Augustine tackles the inseparability of the Trinity from the text of Matthew 3, Jesus's baptism by John in the Jordan River. This is precisely the kind of topic Augustine would want to avoid in sermons because of the difficulty of clearly and concisely

⁷⁹ Saint Augustine, IV.5.

⁸⁰ Saint Augustine, IV.159.

⁸¹ Travis, *Decolonizing*, 81.

⁸² See Schaeffer, "Dialectic of Orality and Literacy" for examples of the ways scholars have variously interpreted Augustine's relationship to Cicero as acceptance, rejection, or something in between.

elucidating it.⁸³ However, he boldly proceeds because the Catholic faith “insists” on a defense of the inseparability of the Trinity.⁸⁴ At a very early stage of the sermon, Augustine explicitly connects faith to epistemology: “This is what we know, this is what we believe; this, even if we don’t see it with our eyes, nor even with our hearts as long as we are being purified by faith.”⁸⁵ The connection between knowledge and belief supports the notion that Augustine has no illusions about possessing or communicating some objectively certain facts. In asserting that the Trinity is both “inseparable and ineffable,” he is acknowledging a certain incomprehensibility.⁸⁶ Here he is resisting what Williams calls a temptation toward reductionism that stems from the human desire to understand, clarify, and simplify.⁸⁷ Augustine further demonstrates epistemic humility in this introduction by reiterating his own limitations. His mind and soul are “entangled and weighed down” such that he prays, “May [God] help me, may he lift [my soul] up with me, because I am rather too weak for it, and it is rather too heavy for me.”⁸⁸

However, as the first half of the sermon unfolds, Augustine seems to abandon humility for boldness. He certainly exhibits what Edwards calls “decisiveness.”⁸⁹ He uses phrases like “it is simply impossible” and “unthinkable” that any faithful and reasonable person would disagree with what he has set before them;⁹⁰ and in the end he has “proved [his] propositions with the strongest documentary evidence.”⁹¹ This language seems the opposite of epistemic humility, but

⁸³ See Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.63.

⁸⁴ *Sermon 52.2*.

⁸⁵ *Sermon 52.2*.

⁸⁶ See Paul van Geest, *The Incomprehensibility of God: Augustine as a Negative Theologian* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 130ff.

⁸⁷ Williams, *Being Human*, 20–21.

⁸⁸ *Sermon 52.3*.

⁸⁹ See Edwards, *Theology of Preaching and Dialectic*, chap. IV.

⁹⁰ *Sermon 52.5*.

⁹¹ *Sermon 52.14*.

as soon as Augustine seems certain of his argument, he intertwines complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty with his assuredness. He reminds himself and his audience:

The godhead is quite beyond material localization. . . . Who can see this, who can grasp it? Let us be modest in our aims; let us remember who we are that are talking and what we are talking about. This and that, whatever it is that God is, must be believed with piety, reflected on in a holy manner, and as far as is possible, as much as is granted us, it must be understood in a way beyond telling. Let words be stilled, the tongue cease from wagging; let the heart be stirred, the heart be lifted up to the mystery.⁹²

Even granting the best and clearest evidence from scripture, Augustine is still careful to name the mystery of the Trinity as a mystery.⁹³ As Otis Moss, III, reminds us, “We cannot encounter the Holy with easy definitions; nor can we engage people with words and images with a singular meaning.”⁹⁴ Even if one were to glimpse the mystery in an apocalyptic visionary moment, that one would find themselves unable to take hold of it—unable to “adjust the lens of [their] mind to the light of God’s wisdom. . . . For if you have fully grasped [it], it isn’t God.”⁹⁵ The otherness of mysteries like the Trinity is too much for us to encompass in mere human words. And yet, these words are all we preachers have.

Recognizing the limits of human understanding and language does not lead Augustine to throw up his hands in nihilistic resignation regarding the pursuit of knowledge of God. Instead, he boldly turns inward, stating that an exploration of the human being as being made in the image of God is a way of beginning to comprehend the incomprehensible.⁹⁶ By the end of the sermon, Augustine characterizes this inward turn as what I have called epistemic humility, though he calls it “gentleness;” it is a withdrawal that includes reflection, contemplation, and silence, not in self-

⁹² *Sermon* 52.15.

⁹³ Cf. Fitzgerald, “Naming.”

⁹⁴ Moss, *Blue Note*, 26.

⁹⁵ *Sermon* 52.16.

⁹⁶ *Sermon* 52.17ff. Cf. van Geest, *Incomprehensibility*, 132–33.

centered or self-sufficient way, but as a way of submitting to the Spirit's movement through the word toward understanding.

I can't tell you [every aspect of the mystery of the Trinity], I can't explain. Let's leave something as well to people's reflections, let's generously allow something also to silence. Return to yourself, withdraw from all the din. Look inside yourself and see if you have there any pleasant private nook in your consciousness where you don't make a row, where you don't go to law, where you don't prepare your case, where you don't brood on pigheaded quarrels. *Be gentle in hearing the word, in order to understand.*⁹⁷

Remarkably, in epistemic terms, Augustine implies that gentleness, or humility, precedes and makes possible human understanding of divine mysteries.⁹⁸ And in homiletical terms, even to understand partly one aspect of the mystery of the Trinity is “enough for now.”⁹⁹ It is a sufficient basis on which to dare to speak. One of the things that makes Augustine such “a brilliant example”¹⁰⁰ to contemporary preachers is the way he is able to interweave the epistemic confidence to preach on the most complex and debated topics of faith *and* epistemic humility to communicate his own limitations and leave space for the Holy Spirit's work in the hearts of his listeners.¹⁰¹ This interweaving upholds while also illuminating the sheer complexity of how human minds relate to one another, especially within the complexity and destabilization of the context of 21st century. As Travis concludes, preaching that addresses this kind of reality will be “messier, less certain, more humble, [and] more participatory.”¹⁰²

⁹⁷ *Sermon 52.22*, emphasis added.

⁹⁸ Though van Geest, *Incomprehensibility*, 144, is not commenting directly on this passage from *Sermon 52*, he summarizes the point well: “It was clear for Augustine that the essence of God could be approached to the extent that human beings practiced humility as the most exalted form of self-development.”

⁹⁹ *Sermon 52.23*.

¹⁰⁰ I am borrowing this phrase from a chapter title: Daniel Cardó, “A Brilliant Example: St. Augustine and Some Lessons for Today's Preaching,” in *The Art of Preaching: A Theological and Practical Primer*, by Daniel Cardó and Timothy Gallagher (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 99–109.

¹⁰¹ van Geest, *Incomprehensibility*, 134, notes a similar tension Augustine holds theologically regarding incomprehensibility in *Sermon 52*, though he does not relate it specifically to Augustine's homiletics.

¹⁰² Travis, *Decolonizing*, 141.

Chapter 4: Relational Teaching: Curious *and* Convictional

Introduction

Sometime early in the 5th century CE, Augustine stood as a veteran preacher before a group of newly baptized young people and delivered a brief sermon on the importance of the sacrament of communion. In the middle of that sermon, Augustine tells the *infantes*, “We here are your books.”¹ It is a curious statement, uncommented on and unexplained. It is curious because it is unclear to whom “we” refers; it could be all the baptized Christians present or the Church writ large, but more likely refers to himself and other clergy. Additionally, it is unclear what he means by “books.” I think it most plausible that Augustine is recognizing the fact that among a largely illiterate population that also lacked written copies of the scriptures, access to the scriptures was primarily (perhaps exclusively, for many) through the liturgy of the worship service and the sermon.² In other words, the primary source of learning the life of faith in Augustine’s context was through liturgy and preaching. Augustine’s acknowledgement of this brings us to the final relational question synthesized and summarized in ch. 1: How does preaching relate to doctrine? The answer I will argue from *DDC* and Augustine’s sermons is, *through a relational understanding of teaching that interweaves curiosity and conviction*. This chapter is a culmination of a progression I have explored through Augustine’s understanding of the relationality of bodies and minds, and it plays on the very title of Augustine’s treatise: *De Doctrina Christiana*. An easy translation of Augustine’s Latin title into English is “On Christian

¹ *Sermon 227.1*. Unless otherwise noted, references to Augustine’s sermons come from Saint Augustine, *Sermons*.

² On the other hand, this does not mean that Augustine’s congregants did not know the scriptures; in fact, Augustine remarks that some knew large portions of the scriptures even better than he did, even memorizing them. See *Sermon 374.19* (*Dolbeau 23.19*).

Doctrine,” and many have done so.³ However, considering that the connotation of “doctrine” in the 21st century is much more closely associated with dogmatics, creeds, or confessions, it is a misleading translation for the contemporary reader. While Augustine does interact with this connotation of doctrine, a better translation is “On Christian Teaching,” which is faithful to the Latin root (cf. the Latin *doctor*, meaning “teacher”) and helpfully orients a contemporary reader to Augustine’s project in *DDC*.

The conclusions of this chapter build on the observations from the previous two chapters in important ways. The event of the sermon—for Augustine, an interaction between bodies and minds—is aimed at instruction, delight, and movement.⁴ By these, Augustine means instruction in factual or propositional knowledge of Scripture, delight and inspiration toward belief in the Christ of Scripture, and movement toward right ethical action. While these three do not map perfectly onto the relationality of bodies, minds, and teaching, it is crucial to see that propositional facts, belief, and ethics encompass the concern of Augustine’s whole project in *DDC*, which could be summarized in the frame of “teaching.” And teaching itself, for Augustine, encompasses both preaching and doctrine (doctrine in the sense of theological dogmatics and orthodox tradition). Relational teaching, then, in which Augustine interweaves curiosity and conviction, joins the strands of relational bodies (openness and particularity) and relational minds (humility and boldness) to form a tapestry that, ultimately by the power of God, is effective and distinctly Christian communication. While teaching itself remains a “temporal and corporeal thing,” it can help us to attain “eternal and spiritual value” and to reach our homeland and resting place.⁵

³ For example, this is true of J. F. Shaw’s translation from the late 19th c., D. W. Robertson, Jr.’s translation from the mid-20th c., and even Timothy George’s edited volume published in 2022.

⁴ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.74ff.

⁵ Cf. Saint Augustine, I.9.

Curiositas and Curiosity

Before exploring the theme of curiosity in *DDC*, it is helpful to remark briefly on the particular kind of curiosity I am identifying. Augustine himself reflects on this theme in his writings, e.g., *Confessions*, but he invariably labels *curiositas* a vice. It is even among the top three vices for Augustine alongside lust and pride.⁶ *Curiositas*, for Augustine, denotes a desire for and fixation on an excessive gathering of knowledge, particularly any knowledge that is novel or unusual, for the purpose of one's own advantage or even the disadvantage of others.⁷ As a result, the person enslaved by *curiositas* has their moral gaze turned away from God, isolates themselves, and alienates themselves from others.⁸ This kind of curiosity is “a kind of quest for knowledge that doesn't know what it's for—a knowing for knowing's sake,” which “fetishiz[es] something as ‘truth’ in order to serve [one's] own interests or ends,” and results in a “frenetic anxiety ... and the anxious burden of having to always be clever.”⁹ It is fundamentally disordered and based on disordered love and desire.

So why use this word to characterize Augustine's teaching? One alternative would be to use *studiositas*, which has a long and rich history of being considered a Christian virtue, dating to St. Thomas Aquinas. However, in the same way that “curiosity” in the 21st century does not (normally) connote anything like what Augustine refers to as *curiositas*, the English translation “studiousness” does not translate well in the 21st century for what Christian tradition has known

⁶ Craig A Boyd, “Augustine, Aquinas, & Tolkien: Three Catholic Views on Curiositas,” *Heythrop Journal* 61, no. 2 (2020): 223.

⁷ Boyd, 223.

⁸ Boyd, 222.

⁹ Smith, *On the Road*, 144–45.

as *studiositas*. “Studiosness” is almost inextricably linked to the intellect in a way that is limiting for the way Augustine is speaking about teaching in *DDC*. “Curiosity,” on the other hand, can be demonstrated in mental, emotional, spiritual, or physical ways. So when I use “curiosity” throughout this section and this chapter, it is more closely in line with the way Trevor Cooling, Professor Emeritus of Christian Education and Chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, uses it: a quality that motivates a pursuit of truth, recognizes subjectivity in human interpretation (and thereby fallibility and incompleteness of knowledge), and is open to the complexity and ambiguity of both reality in the 21st century and the Triune God.¹⁰ What I am calling curiosity in *DDC* is open to the unending exploration of divine mysteries that draws whole persons toward God, including their physical, emotional, and spiritual selves.

It’s also important to note that Augustine himself is interweaving curiosity with conviction, thereby providing his own guardrails against *curiositas* as he understands it. This will be explored further below, so for now it is sufficient to highlight the necessity of curiosity and conviction providing both a balance for one another and a mutually reinforcing relationship. One cannot search or journey curiously simply for the sake of searching; one needs a path and destination that comes from conviction. On the other hand, an emphasis on conviction without curiosity assumes the mystery of God is both graspable and exhaustible. Augustine espouses neither of these.

Furthermore, curiosity is a key quality that is shut down and discouraged within what Travis and Kim-Cragg identify as colonized preaching and discourse. The effects of colonization have been to concretize a status quo, to prohibit exploration of forgotten facts or ignored

¹⁰ Trevor Cooling, “Curiosity: Vice or Virtue for the Christian Teacher? Promoting Faithfulness to Scripture in Teacher Formation,” *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 9, no. 2 (2005): 87–103.

perspectives, and to aim for homogenized interpretations of reality. These are essentially anti-curious effects. Instead, curiosity allows for more voices, more perspectives, more readings and interpretations, and therefore further exploration into the mystery of the Triune God. Both Augustine and these postcolonial homileticians encourage this kind of further exploration.

Curiosity in De Doctrina Christiana

The theme of curiosity within Augustine's project of outlining a distinctly Christian form of teaching is manifested most clearly through journey imagery and the idea of divine mysteries engaging and expanding our human imaginations. We have seen previously how Augustine uses journey or pilgrimage imagery in ways that encourage and develop intellectual humility in preaching. Rowan Williams summarizes this helpfully:

Obscurity in the words of revelation is one of the things that anchors us in our temporal condition; the search for instant clarity and transparency is like the Platonist's search for 'unattended moments' of ecstasy. ... A language which indefinitely postpones fulfillment or enjoyment is appropriate to the Christian discipline of spiritual homelessness, to the character of the believing life as pilgrimage.¹¹

Curiosity is part and parcel of anchoring Christians on a journey rather than falling into an illusion of having reached a destination that is unreachable in merely human terms. This language of searching, journey, and pilgrimage shows up often in *DDC*.

From the very opening of the treatise, Augustine identifies those who want to study and interpret the scriptures as fellow-searchers on a path toward "finding illumination."¹² This sentiment is present in his sermons themselves also. For example, in *Sermon 301A* he identifies himself and his listeners as fellow-learners from Christ the Teacher,¹³ and in *Sermon 27* he

¹¹ Rowan Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's *De Doctrina*," *Literature and Theology* 3, no. 2 (July 1989): 142–43. See above ch. 3, fn 45.

¹² Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, Pre.1.

¹³ *Sermon 301A.2*.

identifies himself and his listeners as fellow-travelers on a journey home.¹⁴ In fact, Augustine uses journey as a metaphor for the whole of interpretation, which ties into his theory of signification, especially the “use” or “enjoyment” of things (see ch. 2 above). We might imagine ourselves as “travelers who could live happily only in our homeland,” and so because we realize we are not there must travel there. But we cannot be distracted by any fleeting pleasures of the journey itself and so continue journeying for its own sake: “So in this mortal life we are like travelers away from our Lord [2 Cor. 5:6]: if we wish to return to the homeland where we can be happy we must use this world, not enjoy it, in order to discern ... eternal and spiritual [things].”¹⁵ In addition to the journey imagery demonstrated here, Augustine’s admission that in this life we are constantly distracted from the journey’s end of reaching our “homeland” is both an invitation to return repeatedly to the pursuit of our homeland and to be curious about those distractions such that we might avoid them at future stages of the journey.

Even the process of avoiding and removing such distractions is itself characterized as “a trek, or a voyage.”¹⁶ But any progress on the journey is impossible on human effort alone. He clarifies, “This [progress] we would be unable to [make], if wisdom itself had not deigned to adapt itself to our great weakness and offered us a pattern for living; and it has actually done so in human form because we too are human.”¹⁷ This passage is the beginning of the section that ends with Augustine’s articulation of preaching as incarnational.¹⁸ Before he gets to that crucial metaphor, he admits that every part of this journey toward Truth—whether positive pursuit or negative purification—is dependent on Christ’s incarnation. This is a marriage of the journey

¹⁴ *Sermon 27.6-7.*

¹⁵ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.8-9.

¹⁶ Saint Augustine, I.22.

¹⁷ Saint Augustine, I.23.

¹⁸ See my discussion of this in ch. 2 above.

imagery and relationality. It is also a precursor to the argument he will make briefly but beautifully regarding the effectiveness of preaching, which I will explore at the end of this chapter. Christ's incarnation makes possible progress on the journey precisely because Christ is himself the *res* (thing) being pursued and the road by which we pursue.¹⁹ Augustine quotes John 14 to reiterate that Christ is both "the way" we walk and "the truth and life" we seek, so that (here is the precursory hint at what comes later in Book IV) "the Spirit binds us and as it were cements us together, so that we can abide in the supreme and unchangeable good."²⁰

If one is reliant on Christ for guidance on this journey, the possibilities opened by curiosity may be perused widely. It is relationship with Christ that allows Augustine to encourage his readers to pursue truth "wherever it is found," even in so-called pagan literature or institutions.²¹ Here is where Augustine comes closest to admitting some benefit to *curiositas*, the wide and meandering pursuit of whatever knowledge piques the learner's interest. However, in a similar passage later in Book II, he warns that those who have taken too much delight in their own learnedness (those who have exercised *curiositas*) often become stagnate on their "journey" by neglecting or refusing to ask crucial "why" questions. "Some people take such delight in all this that they like to boast among the unlearned instead of asking why the things which they simply perceive to be true actually are true, or why things that are not only true but also unchangeable (as they have understood them to be) actually are unchangeable."²² Probing "why" questions are a hallmark of healthy and properly ordered curiosity because this kind of

¹⁹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.82.

²⁰ Saint Augustine, I.83.

²¹ Saint Augustine, II.72.

²² Saint Augustine, II.138.

inquisitiveness ultimately “relate[s] all these things to the praise and love of God, realizing that it is from [God] that all things have their existence.”²³

The theme of curiosity is also demonstrated through Augustine’s emphasis on divine mysteries engaging and expanding human imaginations. As with the journey imagery, the idea of divine mysteries being manifold is emphasized early in Book I of *DDC*. Articulating his reliance on God to write about the things of God, and referencing the miracle of Jesus feeding the 5000, he says, “So just like the bread, which increased as it was broken, the material which God has already supplied to me for starting this work will be multiplied, through his [*sic*] own provision, when discussion of it begins. So in this act of service I will not only experience no shortage of material, but in fact enjoy an astonishing abundance of it.”²⁴ Knowledge of God and of the scriptures is not a scarce resource. It need not be hoarded or greedily gathered; it is abundant and abundantly available to all who seek it. In this abundance is an invitation to curiosity because for Augustine, “Christ ... is the content of all Scripture, [therefore] Scripture possesses a surplus of meaning that is infinite and inexhaustible.”²⁵

Augustine finds that this inexhaustibility allows him to explore even difficult or ambiguous passages of Scripture for imagination-expanding imagery and meaning. He does this provocatively in Book II, commenting on a passage from Song of Songs, in order to explain that “it is much more pleasant to learn lessons presented through imagery, and much more rewarding to discover meanings that are won only with difficulty.”²⁶ Without a healthy and well-directed curiosity one would not know the delight of glimpsing difficult or complex mysteries. And, as Augustine will articulate in Book IV, the reason to value such delight or pleasure is because it

²³ Saint Augustine, II.138.

²⁴ Saint Augustine, I.3.

²⁵ J. Warren Smith, “Foreword,” in Burns, *Augustine’s Preached Theology*, 12.

²⁶ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.13.

motivates movement toward being formed into Christ's likeness.²⁷ "Augustine's objective in preaching was to move his hearers as much as to instruct them."²⁸

However, the curiosity that facilitates the exploration of scriptural mysteries and the expansion of human imaginations must always be governed and directed by love, which holds all these relational binaries together. When it comes especially to interpretations of Scripture like the example from Song of Songs above, which are figural interpretations that expand imagination, Augustine implores, "Such mysteries are to be elucidated in terms of the need to nourish love."²⁹ Hinting at the idea of conviction being interwoven with curiosity, he even goes so far as to set this as a "rule:" whether interpreted literally or figurally, "the passage being read should be studied with careful consideration until its interpretation can be connected with the realm of love."³⁰

Augustine recognizes that sometimes the biblical authors themselves, inspired by the Holy Spirit, demonstrate a kind of written communication that "stretches our understanding."³¹ In other words, there may be passages and mysteries that are intentionally aimed at piquing curiosity such that an expanded imagination might glimpse something beyond normal human understanding. In a sermon, the preacher may engage curiosity with the aim of glorifying God and loving their listeners with the hope that the same Spirit that inspired the "stretching" in the biblical authors will stretch the imaginations of those present so that doctrinal mysteries like the Trinity, the incarnation, or the sacraments might be glimpsed in their beauty. Augustine's return to certain passages and scriptural themes over and over again in his sermons demonstrates his

²⁷ Cf. Saint Augustine, IV.75.

²⁸ Burns, *Augustine's Preached Theology*, 49.

²⁹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, III.42.

³⁰ Saint Augustine, III.54.

³¹ Saint Augustine, III.114. Cf. also IV.27.

deeply-held belief that a healthy curiosity about divine mysteries can lead to a fruitful stretching of the imagination.

Curiosity that stems from the pursuit of understanding divine mysteries by way of an expanded imagination is intimately connected to our understanding of the relationality of bodies and of minds discussed in the previous chapters. Anna Carter Florence reminds us that this emphasis on imagination and mystery is not divorced from physicality in preaching. The interweaving of openness and particularity in and among bodies is foundational for opening the imagination to the interweaving of curiosity and conviction. Florence says, “[Imagination] is a muscle you develop, and it doesn’t happen overnight. ... You have to work at it, exercise it, to get in the habit of using it, living by it, seeing through it, every day. ... [Imagination] *does* take sweat and discipline and a commitment to routine.”³² Imagination happens in the body and is communicated by the body. Walter Brueggemann reminds us that expanding our imagination with the prophetic words of Scripture is tied to our understanding of knowledge and what we know about the world. The interweaving of humility and boldness in the way minds relate to one another through preaching makes space for curiosity about an alternative, divinely-ordained reality, which makes us “epistemological misfits” in our current reality.³³ So imagination happens in the mind and is communicated through the mind as well. As Kim-Cragg puts it, “Through the preaching imagination, people can almost grasp an untouchable, unseen, and inaudible reality.”³⁴

³² Anna Carter Florence, “Preaching Imagination,” in *Teaching Preaching as Christian Practice*, ed. Thomas Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 123–24, emphasis original.

³³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipating Word* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 7.

³⁴ Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial*, 35.

Conviction in De Doctrina Christiana

Curiosity, as expansive as it can be, cannot be left to its own desires apart from the grounding of conviction. Otherwise, curiosity quite easily becomes the *curiositas* Augustine so despises, and can lead to what he calls superstitious or altogether wrong interpretations, or to a shallow and self-serving wrangling over intellectual minutia. His conviction about the need for the kind of project that *DDC* illustrates this point; and, somewhat ironically, it begins with the Holy Spirit.³⁵ In the preface to *DDC*, Augustine admits that there are some people who have gained a knowledge and understanding of Scripture quite apart from any human instruction, but simply and profoundly through the Holy Spirit. They may be boastful of such a blessing and therefore think the project of teaching interpretation and proclamation of Scripture a waste of time.³⁶ But Augustine turns this argument on its head, stating that precisely because the Holy Spirit has been given to all Christians who seek to interpret and proclaim Christ through Scripture, all “[can and] should learn, without any pride, what has to be learned from a human teacher.”³⁷

Augustine’s conviction is also grounded in the otherness of God. This is a recurring theme in *DDC* (God’s status as “supreme thing [*res*]” has already been discussed above in ch. 2), but one example comes in his discussion of “use” and “enjoyment” in Book I, wherein he states that God’s use of things (especially humans) is wholly other than human use of things. Furthermore, he argues that both the existence and potential goodness of any thing, including

³⁵ I say this is ironic because throughout *DDC* Augustine has very little to say about the Holy Spirit, and particularly the Holy Spirit’s role in preaching. There is one crucial and indispensable reference in Book IV, which will be explored below, but otherwise his references to the Holy Spirit besides the one referenced immediately here are to the Holy Spirit as inspiration/source for Scripture and the biblical authors.

³⁶ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, Pre.9.

³⁷ Saint Augustine, Pre.11.

humans, is entirely related to God's being other: "We exist because [God] is good, and we are good to the extent that we exist. ... God exists in the supreme sense, and the original sense, of the word. He is altogether unchangeable ... so it is true of other things which exist that they could not exist except by him [*sic*], and that they are good to the extent that they have received their existence from him [*sic*]."³⁸ Therefore, because our goodness—and, for Augustine, goodness is summarized by the double-command to love God and neighbor—is drawn from God's otherness, his conviction is also grounded in love as a governing boundary for interpretation and for preaching. He claims, "So anyone who thinks that he has understood the divine scriptures or any part of them, but cannot by his understanding build up this double love of God and neighbour, has not yet succeeded in understanding them."³⁹ This appeal to love as a boundary or rule for interpretation and preaching is what allows Augustine to interweave a curious and persistent search for truth and a conviction that relationship to God makes such a search fruitful.

Finally, Augustine's conviction is grounded in the authority and trustworthiness of the Scriptures. As Philip Porter succinctly states, for Augustine, "The word of God is a sign of the will of God."⁴⁰ Although Scripture requires interpretation as does any other sign, it is a thoroughly reliable sign even when human interpretation or understanding is limited or errant. Drawing on the themes of searching or journey observed above, in Book II Augustine expounds his conviction about Scripture as part of describing a progression toward God through seven steps: fear, holiness, knowledge, fortitude, resolve of compassion, purity of sight, and wisdom.⁴¹ Thus, he is articulating a path from "the fear of the Lord" to "the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm

³⁸ Saint Augustine, I.75.

³⁹ Saint Augustine, I.86.

⁴⁰ Philip Porter, "Liberated by Doctrine: Augustine's Approach to Scripture in *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Pro Ecclesia* 26, no. 2 (2017): 220.

⁴¹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.16-23.

111.10). On this path, his conviction about Scripture is focused on the first three steps, particularly holiness and knowledge. He implores his readers who are on this path to accept and heed Scripture whether they understand it or not yet. But rather than with passive resignation, Augustine exhorts his readers to continue “pondering” and “believing” that there is more insight in Scripture than can even be gleaned by humans, *and* to continue “exerting themselves” in search of that insight.⁴²

This is necessary because mere interpretation, or “discovery” as Augustine puts it, is incomplete without preaching, or “presentation.”⁴³ Because of his rejection of *curiositas*, Scripture cannot only be a deep and inexhaustible well from which to draw out knowledge. It must also be a source from which knowledge is drawn out *for others*. Therefore, though the preacher will not present every bit of insight to their congregation on a given passage, the interpreter cannot hoard the discovery of insight for themselves. James Andrews observes this in his argument for why hermeneutics needs rhetoric: “Scripture is not simply a source to be mined when attempting to find something to say; instead, scriptural interpretation - discovering God's will in just these books - has its end in Christian preaching, and this puts a heavier weight on textual understanding than exists in ... [Augustine's inherited] rhetorical tradition.”⁴⁴ So knowledge of God and God's will—a theology, a doctrine worth passing on—is able to be pursued through perseverance in Scripture. Porter helpfully summarizes Augustine's conviction about Scripture in terms that interweave the idea of curiosity: “Guided by the dual commandment of love, Augustine gives license for a delightful freedom of thought that remains soundly rooted in orthodoxy and community.”⁴⁵

⁴² Saint Augustine, II.17-18.

⁴³ See Saint Augustine, IV.1.

⁴⁴ Andrews, “Why Theological Hermeneutics Needs Rhetoric,” 189.

⁴⁵ Porter, “Liberated by Doctrine,” 219.

Interweaving Curiosity and Conviction

It is the grounding of conviction regarding who the Triune God is, the Holy Spirit's presence among those who seek God, and the depth and breadth of riches found in Scripture that allows Augustine to freely and curiously pursue the path of learning and teaching divine mysteries. By interweaving curiosity and conviction, Augustine is able to undertake the project of teaching, to preach and to teach preaching, and to engage in theological production in real time through his sermons. Thus, he holds together the relationship of preaching to doctrine (both in the sense of "teaching" and in the sense of "theological dogmatics") precisely because curiosity and conviction are intertwined.

Let us first consider how these two are interwoven in the very undertaking of Augustine's project in *DDC*. Early in Book I, after spending a long paragraph articulating numerous aspects of the Trinity, he falls back on the sheer mystery of the Trinity as something "unspeakable" but nonetheless spoken of by him. He then nearly entreats himself to silence: "It is better to evade this verbal conflict silently than to quell it disputatiously."⁴⁶ This is at once an acknowledgement of the otherness of God and a recognition of some inherent desire to pursue an explanation of that otherness. Then immediately he returns to a conviction of God's own sanctioning of this human curiosity and pursuit: "Yet although nothing can be spoken in a way worthy of God, he [*sic*] has sanctioned the homage of the human voice, and chosen that we should derive pleasure from our words in praise of him [*sic*]."⁴⁷ A similar sentiment is expressed by Dostoevsky's ridiculous man: "After my dream I lost the knack of putting things into words. At least, into the most necessary and most important words. But never mind, I shall go on and I shall keep on talking ..."⁴⁸ For

⁴⁶ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.13.

⁴⁷ Saint Augustine, I.14.

⁴⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," quoted in Campbell, *Scandal*, 56.

Augustine, though, merely continuing to talk could easily lead one to error because of worldly desire and humans' inherently disordered love.

Instead, Augustine's speech—his very homiletic—is modeled on Christ's incarnation (I.25-26), and it is only in preaching incarnationally that “the Spirit binds us and as it were cements us together, so that we can abide in the supreme and unchangeable good.”⁴⁹ The relationality of preaching and doctrine is dependent on the Spirit's holding them together, not simply the preacher's curiosity and conviction. J. Patout Burns observes this well, “Only the divine grace made preaching effective in instructing and motivating congregations. The words of the preacher sounded in the ears of his hearers but would bear fruit only as God operated within them to enlighten and inspire understanding and action.”⁵⁰ However, this illustrates the very interweaving of curiosity to persevere in teaching and preaching and conviction that God is the ultimate teacher and preacher.

This idea comes to full fruition in the middle of Book IV where Augustine finally returns to the Spirit's role in making preaching effective. The section begins with an articulation of the concern that arises if one speaks from a merely human perspective: “What is the use of correct speech [according to rules of grammar, eloquence, etc.] if it does not meet with the listener's understanding? There is no point in speaking at all if our words are not understood by the people to whose understanding our words are directed.”⁵¹ He then encourages a strenuous pursuit – again the curiosity theme is illustrated through journey language – of clarity and intelligibility on the part of the human preacher, which requires both openness toward and curiosity about the preacher's audience. Here we may briefly note the way Augustine's understanding of the

⁴⁹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.83.

⁵⁰ Burns, *Augustine's Preached Theology*, 261.

⁵¹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.66.

relationality of bodies is interwoven with and builds toward his understanding of the relationality of teaching. In the context of a sermon where the preacher speaks and the listeners only sporadically and briefly respond audibly, “The speaker’s sensitivity must come to the aid of the silent listener. A crowd that is eager to learn tends to show by its movements whether it has understood.”⁵² Thus, the preacher must not only be aware of their own body language but also be attentive to the body language of the congregation.

This is not merely a skill of attention and listening that a preacher can develop (though it is certainly that for Augustine), it is also a sensitivity to the Spirit’s movement in illuminating Christ within the listener’s body and mind. William Harmless describes this phenomenon well in analyzing what is perhaps Augustine’s most improvised extant sermon. After the reader for the day inadvertently read the wrong psalm for the lectionary, Augustine was faced with a choice to preach on the psalm he had prepared to preach on or to change direction mid-stride and preach on the psalm just read.⁵³ He chooses to improvise on the “wrong” psalm.⁵⁴ At one point in the middle of this sermon, the audience erupts in applause, which causes Augustine to comment on their reaction as he sometimes does in sermons.⁵⁵ Harmless explains,

According to Augustine’s reading, the audience’s applause springs from their delight in theological discovery. One suspects that they were applauding Augustine’s ingenious intertextual play, letting the Psalm interweave with the Genesis theme, the Johannine prologue, the parable of Jesus, the combined images of light and dark, of imperial coins and terracotta lamps. This is quite a ‘mash-up’ of disparate biblical and cultural melodies, a discovery of a harmonious coalescing of the unexpected. Augustine reads the audience’s applause as a moment of theological awakening. It was not his words, not the verbal within the theology that mattered here. It was his hearers’ self-discovery of Christ within, an inner delight that, in turn, had evoked their vocal but non-verbal joy.⁵⁶

⁵² Saint Augustine, IV.67-68.

⁵³ William Harmless, “A Love Supreme: Augustine’s ‘Jazz’ of Theology,” *Augustinian Studies* 43 (2012): 153.

⁵⁴ This sermon can be found in Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. 20, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, III (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 256–82.

⁵⁵ See Harmless, *Own Words*, 133.

⁵⁶ Harmless, “Love Supreme,” 161.

Taking nothing away from Augustine's own interpretation of this moment in his sermon on Psalm 138 (or Harmless's analysis of it), there is also present in the audience's response an affirmation of Augustine's own improvisation in which he could not have been confident himself.

Considering his prayerfully extemporaneous approach to preaching and his own articulations of his rhetorical and epistemological limitations (see ch. 3 above), the audience's exuberant response to such an audacious bit of intertextual theology, through the Spirit's illumination, actually functions as confirmation of the truth of the theological construction. There is a kind of "theological awakening" in Augustine's listeners and in himself in this moment of sensitivity to the listeners' reaction.

Augustine's posture of curious listening extends also to his preparation for preaching, which consists of prayer and study but not of writing notes or a manuscript from which to preach.⁵⁷ But this reliance on prayer and study stems from the conviction that in listening well to the divine voice, his preaching may have the effect he seeks. Harmless summarizes,

Thus, what Augustine judges most urgent is openness to divine providence, recognizing that God has things that he wants to be said to the congregation and that it is the preacher's task to be attuned to that divine will, to let himself be an instrument whose improvised words are ones God inspires so that they may touch hearts in the way God wills. Augustine thus locates his theological excursions as events within a broader experience of prayer.⁵⁸

In his own words Augustine rests on the conviction that prayer, as an act of submission to the Holy Spirit, is the preacher's only way to fulfill the aim of "[being] listened to with understanding, with pleasure, and with obedience." He continues,

[The preacher] should be in no doubt that any ability he [*sic*] has and however much he has derives more from his devotion to prayer than his dedication to oratory; and so, by praying for himself and for those he is about to address, he must

⁵⁷ Harmless, *Own Words*, 124. Cf. also Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.68, 87.

⁵⁸ Harmless, "Love Supreme," 153.

become a man of prayer before becoming a man of words. As the hour of his address approaches, before he opens his thrusting lips he should lift his thirsting soul to God so that he may utter what he has drunk in and pour out what has filled him.⁵⁹

The role of the Holy Spirit is made explicit at the end of this crucial paragraph. He admits there is no way for the human preacher to know with certainty that they have communicated the right things or in the right way, for “who can know what is expedient for us to say or our audience to hear at a particular moment but the one who sees the hearts of all? And who can ensure that we say what is right and say it in the right way but the one ‘in whose hands we, and our sermons, exist’ [Wisd. 7:16]?”⁶⁰ He then invokes the law court context of persecution in Matthew 10.19-20 as advice for the preacher as the time to preach is upon them: “Do not worry what to say ... for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit ... speaks within you.” Augustine concludes, “If the Holy Spirit speaks in those who are delivered to their persecutors for Christ’s sake, why should [the Spirit] not also speak in those who deliver Christ to their pupils?”⁶¹ In the end, the efficacy of the preacher, which draws together the relationality of bodies, minds, and teaching, is dependent on the relational movement of the Holy Spirit. Burns summarizes this well: “[Augustine] insisted that only these divine operations actually made the preaching ministry effective by leading its recipients to a fuller understanding and practice of the message of Christ. God would not move their hearts to follow bad teaching and advice.”⁶²

Here we have examples of the implicit ways Augustine appeals to the Holy Spirit to counter or re-appropriate his inherited rhetorical tradition. His invocation of the law court context of Matthew 10 (along with some martial rhetorical imagery in IV.148) and his reliance on prayer and study as preparation for an ultimately extemporaneous and improvised sermon both

⁵⁹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.87.

⁶⁰ Saint Augustine, IV.88.

⁶¹ Saint Augustine, IV.89.

⁶² Burns, *Augustine’s Preached Theology*, 256.

contribute to the re-appropriation. As Andrews avers, “In contrast to the rhetorical tradition - which found its social location primarily within law courts and politics - *De doctrina* belongs within the Christian community.”⁶³ It is the recognition of human limitations and therefore the need to rely on the Holy Spirit for preaching to be effective that makes Augustine’s project distinctly Christian and distinctly different from the rhetorical tradition he inherited. But he hasn’t abandoned or rejected rhetoric altogether, he has reoriented it toward service, worship, and love of God rather than the elevation of the orator. Andrews goes on to state that for Augustine, a distinctly Christian rhetoric “is defined by what precedes it - biblical understanding - as well as by the audience of the delivery, the ecclesial community.”⁶⁴ This is precisely why Augustine spent three books outlining his hermeneutic of signification before proceeding to his homiletic in Book IV, but Andrews’ insight also helps to explain why there was such a large gap in time between the writing of the first three books and the writing of the fourth. It was time, experience, wisdom, and relationship with his listeners through years of preaching in the ecclesial community that helps form the deep well out of which Augustine writes Book IV. Andrews’ conclusion nicely summarizes this process in a way that highlights the relationality of Augustine’s approach to preaching:

Augustine builds a chain: God seeks to bring humanity to himself; one of the ways [God] does so is by inspiring humans to communicate [God’s] will through written words; an interpreter approaches this text and seeks to understand it through human means of interpretation coupled with prayer; finally, this interpreter-preacher turns to a congregation and tells them what the will of God is.⁶⁵

⁶³ Andrews, “Why Theological Hermeneutics Needs Rhetoric,” 189.

⁶⁴ Andrews, 190.

⁶⁵ Andrews, 199.

The preacher, the listeners, and the Triune God are interwoven throughout this process, and through this interweaving, a relational teaching is born that brings preaching and doctrine together with curiosity and conviction.

Augustinian Exemplars: Sermons 117-120

There were many passages of Scripture that Augustine revisited over his sermons, but none more often than the prologue of the Gospel of John.⁶⁶ He was particularly fond of exploring this text at Christmas (as in *Sermon* 188 analyzed in ch. 2 above) and Easter. Sermons 117-120 each explore facets of the Johannine prologue, and, as translator and commentator Edmund Hill notes, likely three of the four were preached in different years on Easter.⁶⁷ Many of Augustine's characteristics already observed are demonstrated in these sermons as well. For example, there are several admissions of Augustine's own limitations in 117.3, 5, 119.7, and 120.2. There are also two mentions of the necessity of trust or faith as a precursor to understanding in 117.17 and 118.1. Furthermore, *Sermon* 118 is remarkably similar to *Sermon* 117 though significantly more concise and therefore dense rhetorically. And sermons 119 and 120 share many ideas and images, including a somewhat humorous introductory image of the evangelist "belching" forth the opening words of John 1. Together these sermons serve as a demonstration of the way Augustine improvises on a familiar subject with both curiosity and conviction, such that he and his audience are able to glimpse a new facet of Christ's incarnation in John's prologue or have a previously glimpsed facet recalled to their memory in a delightful and moving way.

⁶⁶ Harmless, *Own Words*, 128.

⁶⁷ Saint Augustine, *Sermons* III/4, 209–33.

Harmless discusses Augustine's ability to "rework stock themes" the way jazz musicians often do with familiar jazz tunes, or "standards."⁶⁸ This kind of tinkering and tweaking of well-worn images, themes, and motifs allows Augustine the space and time for two things. First, he can hold up to the light the rare and multifaceted jewel of, for example, Christ's incarnation and by focusing on one aspect, discover whether that aspect resonates with his audience. Perhaps they are already well-familiar with that aspect and so he moves on to another, or perhaps they respond with some kind of puzzlement or inquisitiveness and so he expounds further. Riffing on familiar themes provides Augustine the space to find words that are effective and instructive for the given moment. Second, this kind of improvisation allows him to construct—or re-construct—his theological understanding of a given theme or text from Scripture in real time. Augustine has a knack, says Harmless, for "rehearsing the unknown within the well-known, of applying an expected theology to open unexpected mysteries."⁶⁹

Sermon 117 is by far the longest of these four sermons and therefore probably not delivered on Easter. It is also the most explicitly polemical, directly addressing Arian ideas and hypothetical interlocutors.⁷⁰ The polemical motivation means Augustine is engaged directly in theological exposition in this sermon, and yet the intention of putting this before his listeners is not to *explain* the mystery of the incarnation that it might be fully grasped, but simply to offer a line of reasoning that refutes the Arians: "We must of course safeguard the ineffableness, the unutterable quality of the divine greatness, and nobody should suppose, when we offer some comparisons in arguing with [the Arians], that we have already attained to what can be neither

⁶⁸ Harmless, "Love Supreme," 162ff. This phenomenon is easily seen in reading these four sermons together, as common imagery, analogies, and even phraseology are repeated multiple times as Augustine explores the Johannine prologue.

⁶⁹ Harmless, 170.

⁷⁰ *Sermon* 117.6ff.

uttered nor thought by the little ones ... Still, for all that, we too must provide some comparisons against them, for them to be refuted by, not for the mystery to be grasped by.”⁷¹ In other words, it is conviction grounded in the otherness of the incarnation as well as conviction grounded in the orthodox beliefs of the church that give rise to the curiosity needed to see one part of a mystery like the incarnation, to turn it over curiously in order to try to grasp its wholeness, though this is ultimately impossible for humans.

To this point, Augustine’s improvisational curiosity is on full display in this sermon. He begins with a familiar kind of theological sentiment—“as a result of [what John says in the opening of his gospel], we have come to accept our Lord Jesus Christ as the maker of the entire creation in virtue of his divinity, and as the restorer of the fallen creation in virtue of his divinity”—but then launches into a bewildering analogy of buying and selling wherein he almost contradicts himself several times.

In the gospel itself we can discover what sort of man and how great a man John was, and thus from the merit of the retailer we can form some estimate of the price of the Word which could be uttered by such a man; or rather how that which surpasses all things can have no price. When a thing is put up for sale, it is either equal in value to the price, or it is less than it’s worth, or it exceeds its value. ... Now nothing can be equated with the Word of God, nor can anything fall beneath it at exchange, nor can anything exceed it. Well, of course, all things can be put beneath the Word of God ... however, they are not beneath it as though they were a good price for the Word. ... Still, [you] can say that the price for buying the Word is you, the buyer, when you give yourself in exchange for yourself to this Word.⁷²

Edmund Hill observes that Augustine jumps from tangled construction to tangled construction in service of this obscure analogy.⁷³ Hill even surmises that possibly this is simply Augustine “not exactly at his best as a preacher,” and it is certainly possible that this is an example of

⁷¹ *Sermon* 117.8.

⁷² *Sermon* 117.1.

⁷³ Saint Augustine, *Sermons* III/4, 221fn3.

improvisation that has gone awry and resulted in confusion. However, two things are worthy of comment: first, Augustine seems in a couple of places (section 1 early on in the sermon and again in section 15 near the end) to realize his own obscurity and the difficult rhetorical position in which he has put himself; and second, recognition of the obscurity, along with the admission of the mysteriousness of the subject of the incarnation, leads him to pursue several different analogies to try to illustrate the truth he wishes to communicate. Augustine's admission of his obscure and difficult communication also leads to an articulation of the role of God in the relationality of preaching that echoes his statement regarding the Holy Spirit in *DDC IV.89*: "I am quite unable to express the thanks I owe to the Lord our God, because he [*sic*] has been kind enough, in answer to your prayers, to deliver my feeble self from this extremely jagged and toilsome place. Above all, however, never forget this: whatever we have been able to gather from creatures, whether through the body's senses or the mind's reflections, is inexpressibly surpassed by the creator."⁷⁴ Additionally, this is a sort of culminating statement of Augustine's relational understanding of preaching where bodies and minds are relative to one another in communication but that ultimately the effectiveness of the sermon—the way preaching becomes effective teaching—comes down to the Spirit's role in drawing all these relationships together.

Marlene Ringaard Lorensen's exploration of Bahktinian dialogicity in preaching culminates in similar observations that helpfully reinforce the relational play between curiosity and conviction. She speaks of a "fruitfully disturbing otherness" that is possible in divine-human relationships as well as inter-human relationships, thus revealing a sense of double-otherness in preaching.⁷⁵ For Lorensen, especially when it comes to the incarnation, "the crucial point is that

⁷⁴ *Sermon* 117.15.

⁷⁵ Lorensen, *Dialogical*, chap. 9.

this proximity between God and humans cannot be initiated, captured, or preached through human efforts. All human attempts to produce this unique relationship remain ‘after all a dream, an uncertain imagination.’”⁷⁶ Augustine says as much in *Sermon* 117.15 above, and therefore in a critical way is meeting Lorensen’s central “challenge of preaching:” “honouring the otherness and difference of both God and humans so that they are neither kept apart in a static grip nor forced together in an undistinguished mass.”⁷⁷ Powery’s adage, preaching that is Spirit-filled *and* entirely human results in “an expansion, an explosion, a broadening, not a narrowing” of sermon form, is borne out in Augustine’s sermon.⁷⁸ While his analogies and line of thinking are somewhat convoluted, his relentless curiosity about the incarnation as it is convictionally held by the church yields a sermon that does, in fact, result in the listeners’ understanding.⁷⁹

Sermon 119 further demonstrates Augustine’s understanding of relational otherness in preaching. It begins with imagery sure to make most 21st century readers blush: that in writing the first verses of his gospel, John the evangelist “belched forth this beginning of the gospel, because he had drunk it in from the Lord’s own breast.”⁸⁰ But he goes on to call John’s prologue itself “preaching.”⁸¹ The implication here further complicates what preaching *is* for Augustine. It is still incarnational, as he expounds throughout *DDC*, especially I.25-26. This is strengthened by the connection to John 1.1-14 here in *Sermon* 119. However, the entangled relationality between the Word, the words of Scripture (John’s words), and the words of the preacher—all of which are

⁷⁶ Lorensen, 163, quoting Kierkegaard in *Sickness Unto Death*.

⁷⁷ Lorensen, 165.

⁷⁸ Powery, *Becoming*, 82.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Sermon* 117.11, where Augustine twice acknowledges body language or oral signs of understanding from the congregation.

⁸⁰ *Sermon* 119.1.

⁸¹ *Sermon* 119.2.

identified as “preaching”—can be confusing. It is no wonder many preachers and homileticians have unhelpfully tended toward the conflation of Word, Scripture, and sermonic words.⁸²

Augustine resists this conflation, both in his invocation of the Spirit in Book IV of *DDC* and in this sermon. Using language of imagination and curiosity, he exhorts his listeners to “stretch your minds” that they might hear “what I [Augustine] am able to say” and to think “what I am not able to say.”⁸³ Harmless expounds on this notion in his observations of another of Augustine’s sermons: “Augustine’s emphasis is clear; disciples of Christ must be listeners. Listening is the first step: listening to others’ voices, to the many voices of Christ within the scriptures read aloud, within the congregation’s singing, as well as within his own preached words spoken aloud.”⁸⁴ While Christ may speak through many voices, none of those human voices or means of communication are themselves Christ the Word. This conviction about the otherness of the Word is summarized near the end of this sermon using remarkably similar language and analogies to *DDC* I.26:

I’m driving at something about the Word; and perhaps a human word can do something similar. Although it’s no match at all, very very different, in no way comparable, still it can suggest to you a certain similarity. Here you are then, here’s the word which I now am speaking to you; I had it first in my mind. It went out to you, and didn’t go away from me. It began to be in you, because it wasn’t in you before. It stayed with me, when it went out to you. So just as my word was presented to your perception, and didn’t depart from my mind, so that Word was presented to our perception, and didn’t depart from his Father. My word was with me, and went out into the sound of my voice; the Word of God was with the Father, and went out into the flesh. But I can hardly do with my voice, can I, what he did with his flesh?⁸⁵

In this paragraph we can see again the way Augustine’s understanding of relational bodies, minds, and teaching all build together and become intertwined. The words of the preacher are not

⁸² See Neal, *Overshadowed*, 40–46, for examples of this conflation.

⁸³ *Sermon* 119.3.

⁸⁴ Harmless, “Love Supreme,” 154.

⁸⁵ *Sermon* 119.7. Cf. also *Sermon* 120.3, with similar language and intention.

the Word, and neither is Scripture the Word, but the Word through the Holy Spirit holds and knits all these together so that the preacher may, with conviction and curiosity, return often to familiar passages and mysterious doctrines in search of even further illumination.

Chapter 5: Relational Sermons: Contemporary Examples

Introduction

Having extensively explored Augustine's homiletic through *DDC* and selected sermons, I will now return to contemporary preaching and examine three contemporary sermons with Augustine's homiletic in mind. The relational questions synthesized in chapter one have provided a kind of lens through which to view Augustine's preaching, and now I will take what has been observed about Augustine's relational-interweaving approach and use that as a lens through which to see these contemporary sermons. First, sermons from the primary postcolonial homileticians reviewed in chapter one will be analyzed: one each from HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Sarah Travis. To these one more exemplar will be added from Pablo A. Jiménez.¹ All of these sermons were written with postcolonial concerns and themes in mind. The purpose of analyzing these contemporary sermons is simply to open an avenue of conversation between contemporary preaching and Augustine's preaching as they address the relational questions of bodies, minds, and teaching outlined in the previous three chapters. The point is not to find every one of Augustine's interwoven themes in each of these sermons. Nor is the point to compare these sermons on the basis of quality of exegesis, effectiveness of communication, or sermon form. If, as I have tried to demonstrate, Augustine's homiletic has some important things to teach us in how we preach in our contemporary context, then examining these contemporary sermons ought to illuminate how those lessons might be heeded or undervalued by contemporary preachers.

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HyeRan Kim-Cragg, “A Bound Family Vine”²

One of the outstanding features of Kim-Cragg’s book *Postcolonial Preaching* is the inclusion of sermon examples. The simple fact is that a great many homiletical works do not include such examples. This is probably due to reasonable practical concerns for scholars and publishers, but it can leave one wondering, “This homiletician has some really good ideas, but I struggle to know how they might be practiced.” Kim-Cragg includes a sermon or sermon extract at the conclusion of each of her main chapters, accompanying the six RIPPLE themes (see ch 1 above for a summary of these). All but one of these exemplars are sermons written and delivered by her. The one that accompanies “Language” is one of these, entitled “A Bound Family Vine,” and draws on Psalm 66.13-15 and John 14.15-21. It was delivered via Zoom to a congregation based in Toronto in May 2020 on the occasion of Asian Heritage Month.³

The themes and content of this sermon are particularly resonant with the idea of interweaving that I have explored in Augustine’s *DDC* and sermons. This is clear in the title and controlling metaphor of the sermon: a vine of different strands that is bound together as a family might be. But it is also clear in the way Kim-Cragg highlights different aspects of language and culture throughout the sermon. She begins with a few facts highlighting the diversity of Asia and of the different cultures and peoples there. But as soon as she has recognized that diversity, she turns to a concept that she says “binds Asians together”: family.⁴ At this very early stage of the sermon is an example of interweaving particularity and openness. Though the particularities of place, culture, and language are important and not to be disregarded, there are also ways that those places, cultures, and languages can remain open to one another such that they might be

² The full text of this sermon can be found in Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial*, 99–102.

³ Kim-Cragg, 99.

⁴ Kim-Cragg, 100.

bound together. Kim-Cragg's value for the particularity of languages is especially emphasized in the use of no less than five languages in this single sermon: Korean, Chinese, Cree (a North American indigenous language), Greek, and English. But rather than confusing the listener or building rhetorical boundaries between these languages, all the uses of these individual languages are in service of a relational goal. Kim-Cragg is using the occasion of a month dedicated to learning about and appreciating Asian heritage to proclaim, "We intertwine. We are glued to each other."⁵ The overall goal of this sermon is to intertwine a number of ideas, cultures, and languages to illustrate that human beings, in body and mind, can be drawn together and bound to one another.

Her attention to the particularity and openness of human bodies includes an interesting re-imagining of Paul's body of Christ imagery (cf. Rom 12.3-9; 1 Cor 12.12-31). Though she does not mention Paul or his argument explicitly, it seems likely to be in the background as she speaks about essential workers in Canada in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Their work and courage are the lifeblood that courses through our veins and helps us to carry on. We must not stop that lifeblood from circulating back to them. Through this crisis and afterward, our hearts must continue to pump blood to them...After all, their branches are bound with ours." Kim-Cragg has intertwined Paul's idea in Romans 12.5 that each member of the body of Christ "belongs to the others," and John's idea in John chs. 14—15 of branches abiding and remaining in the vine of Jesus Christ. This is a brilliant and provocative relationality of ideas that, in quite an Augustinian way, is aimed at relationally binding people together.

Kim-Cragg's sermon also touches on the themes of relational minds by humbly but explicitly admitting the unknowns of life in light of a global pandemic. And yet, the response she

⁵ Kim-Cragg, 102.

upholds as exemplary is one of boldness: those who risk and sacrifice out of necessity as well as for the well-being of others.⁶ She also encourages curiosity implicitly through demonstrating the homiletical benefit of interreligious dialogue. She admits the influence of Confucian teachings on some Asian cultures, but she does so by positively connecting a Confucian teaching (“there is no peace in the world without peace in the family”) with the familial vine/branches imagery from John’s gospel.⁷

All of these divergent and seemingly incongruent images, stories, and references beg for an explanation of how they might become a “bound family vine,” and Kim-Cragg points to an answer in the biblical crux of the sermon. After briefly identifying love as the quality that binds the gospel writer John’s ideas of vines and branches together (much to Augustine’s delight), she quickly reverses tone to describe the present global context as one of “isolation,” where “the very cords binding us to life have been severed,” and “survival seems like a distant and fading hope.”⁸ Similar to the forces of colonialism that she describes with these kinds of anti-relational phrases throughout the book, here she is describing the indiscriminate and ubiquitous forces of division that are the result of the global pandemic. It is in that dire context of separation that she appeals to the Holy Spirit as the one who can in fact surpass the imposition of any isolationist forces and instead bind us to one another and to God: “The Advocate-Spirit of God evokes the bonds of family connecting us to a mother, to a home, to a community. It is the spiritual tie that binds us, one to the other, all our relations, *kahkiyaw niwâhkômâkanitik*.”⁹ Kim-Cragg appeals to the Holy Spirit as the relational glue that intertwines humans in their bodies and minds as well as

⁶ Kim-Cragg, 102.

⁷ Kim-Cragg, 100.

⁸ Kim-Cragg, 101.

⁹ Kim-Cragg, 101; the final phrase is from the Cree language, meaning something like “all my relations.” Kim-Cragg uses it earlier in the sermon and so recalls it here in a powerful way.

intertwining humans with scriptural ideas and, ultimately, God. For the purposes of the present analysis, it is most interesting to note that throughout *Postcolonial Preaching* Kim-Cragg makes little mention of the Holy Spirit in her exploration of the RIPPLE themes. Similar to what I have observed in Augustine's *DDC*, she appeals to the Spirit in a brief but crucial way to demonstrate the conviction that interweaving the relational aspects of preaching is, in fact, possible.

***Sarah Travis, "Waiting for Good News"*¹⁰**

Sarah Travis currently serves as the minister at Norval Presbyterian Church in Norval, Ontario, Canada, and so is engaged in regular preaching alongside her writing and teaching on homiletics at Knox College, University of Toronto.¹¹ Her sermon "Waiting for Good News" draws on Isaiah 61.1-11 and Luke 4.14-30. It was preached in June 2016 at Knox Presbyterian Church, Oakville, Ontario, Canada. This sermon is a prime illustration of interweaving curiosity and conviction in a contemporary context, and (like Kim-Cragg's sermon above) includes an appeal to the Holy Spirit as the effective power to hold these ideas together. Travis illustrates a willingness to explore, to be curious about a conviction that could perhaps be taken for granted by the listener, and in this way exemplifies the kind of relational teaching observed in *DDC* in ch. 4 above.¹²

Travis begins with an affirmation of conviction at the outset of the sermon. "God is good. All the time." She pauses between the sentences to ensure each phrase sinks in because this conviction is the driving force of a sermon that variously undermines the conviction and

¹⁰ Full video of this sermon can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1089362334470099> (accessed 14 December 2023).

¹¹ See biographical information at <https://knox.utoronto.ca/faculty-and-staff/rev-dr-sarah-travis/> and <https://sarahtravis.ca>.

¹² It is worth noting that this sermon thematically and practically reflects the theoretical argument Travis makes in Travis, "Troubled Gospel."

eventually re-affirms it. She then grounds that conviction in propositional doctrine – “because that is God’s nature” and “the Christian faith insists” – and in communal experience – “we learned that affirmation from friends in Malawi ... as a mealtime [prayer]” and “the affirmation ... is shared by people all over the world.” But quickly in the first sentences of the sermon Travis admits that claiming “God is good all the time” is difficult in light of the suffering and oppression and grief that “plague human life.” The humility of these admissions, however, is met with the boldness that the claim “transcends this and every moment of sorrow and trouble.” She also demonstrates humility by admitting her own limitations, especially those related to her own social location as a “white, wealthy, educated woman” who is “quite utterly captive to the powers of empire.” This echoes a more extended admission and ownership of social location that Travis includes at the beginning of her book *Decolonizing Preaching*.¹³ She is practicing her own theory.

The invocation of social location also provides an opportunity to highlight the particularity of the different people represented in the congregation. Travis poses the question, “What does [Jesus’ good news in Luke 4] mean for us?” Then she qualifies the use of the term “us” because the congregation is not monolithic and cannot be summed up in any concise set of characteristics: “I say ‘us’ carefully because I realize we come from a variety of places, we were born in different places and are different ages, we have different expectations, we have different levels of wealth and privilege.” This illustrates the complexity and difficulty of preaching relationally, and yet if all those particular individuals are open to being made “whole by the wholeness of others,” as she puts it later in the sermon, then they can work toward a positive

¹³ Travis, *Decolonizing*, 6.

relationality. She is embodying preaching that is “a place of re-creation, reconciliation, and reorientation of power.”¹⁴

After recognizing the particularity and openness needed for individuals to gather together around Jesus’ good news, Travis commences a condensed vacillation between curiosity and conviction that lands on the simple observation that the good news “is possibly more complex than it sounds.” She claims boldly that she is “somehow supposed to be an agent of mercy to those who don’t have what [she] has,” but then immediately admits, “But really that sounds like a lot of hard work.” With almost an air of resignation she continues, “And quite impossible when I look at the magnitude of need in the world.” This is followed by a seemingly counter-convictional statement: “So really Jesus’ good news sounds a bit like bad news for me and people like me—those of us who find our power and privilege threatened by the promise of a new ordering of human life.” But Travis refuses to stay in that counter-convictional space; she appeals to the listeners, trusting them by assuming the best in them. “I’m quite sure that all of us here long for a world of justice and we desperately want to claim the hope of [the Luke 4 passage], this hope that Jesus offers us.” So the landing point of this vacillation that becomes an interweaving is a sense of mystery: “the good news is more complex than it sounds.”

The question of the complexity and mystery that pervades this sermon, even with its guiding conviction that “God is good all the time,” is answered by an invocation of the Holy Spirit. Similar to Kim-Cragg’s sermon above, which appeals to the Spirit as the one binding humans to one another and humanity to God, Travis invokes the Spirit in order to ground her conviction that the good news is in fact *good*. In the first description of the Luke 4 passage, Travis picks up on the gospel writer’s characterization of Jesus as he enters the wilderness to be

¹⁴ Travis, 5.

tempted and then later returns to Jerusalem and the synagogue; she glosses, “Jesus ... was filled to the brim with the Holy Spirit.” She returns to this pneumatological idea in the conclusion of the sermon to reiterate that the same Spirit animates and enables human participation in God’s mission of good news. Even though fully one third of the sermon is dedicated to describing why it is difficult for anyone like her, who benefits from and participates in systems that oppress and marginalize, to hear the gospel as good news, she concludes with an affirmation that “the same Holy Spirit that overflowed within Jesus takes good news that sounds like bad news and makes it good news again.”

As with my analysis of Kim-Cragg’s sermon, it is crucial to note that Travis’ invocation of the Spirit is slightly surprising considering *Decolonizing Preaching* does not emphasize the specific role of the Spirit in preaching. To be sure, Travis’ homiletic rests on her exploration and application of Social Trinitarianism as a way to combat the negative relational forces of colonization/imperialism. In this sense, the Holy Spirit plays an indispensable role for her alongside Jesus as Son and God as Creator.¹⁵ The final lines of this sermon reflect that commitment and take a kind of trinitarian shape when she refers to the “good news of Jesus Christ,” the “mission of God,” and the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit’s role of empowerment, transformation, and holding together curiosity and conviction in mystery is underdeveloped in her homiletical work even while it shines through in this sermon. The implied, though unstated, question that underlies Travis’ sermon is, “How can a ‘white, wealthy, educated’ person preach in the 21st century in a way that is positively relational?”;¹⁶ her answer, more explicit than the question but nevertheless implied, is *only by the Holy Spirit*.

¹⁵ See Travis, chap. 3; see p. 56 for Travis’ explanation of using “Creator” instead of “Father” to name the first person of the Trinity.

¹⁶ This question is posed more explicitly in Travis’ article Travis, “Troubled Gospel,” 48–49.

Pablo A. Jiménez, “Another Place: A Hispanic Sermon in a Postcolonial Key”¹⁷

This sermon from Pablo Jiménez is included here for a few reasons. It is an example of a sermon explicitly from a postcolonial perspective that was written and delivered much less recently than any of the other sermons analyzed in this chapter. “Otro Lugar” (the original Spanish title for this sermon) was written in 2002, and this is made clear by references early in the sermon to the not-so-distance memory of the frenzy of Y2K and to the tragedy of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. I include it to demonstrate that some homileticians and practitioners have been preaching from a postcolonial perspective for decades now, approaching relational questions and how ideas like particularity, humility, curiosity, and conviction might draw people closer to one another and closer to God through a sermon. Jiménez’s sermon is also an example of a different cultural and ideological angle on postcolonialism. Jiménez was raised in Puerto Rico and carries a postcolonial perspective informed especially by Latin American liberation theology. The sermon itself was written and delivered in Spanish. It draws on John 14.1-3 and was preached at the Biennial Assembly of the *Association for Hispanic Theological Education* held at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.¹⁸

Jiménez opens his sermon with an indictment of the extremes of individualism that plague contemporary Western culture and thinking. He avers, “The rampant individualism of the Modern Era has given birth to a Postmodern society obsessed with the search for pleasure and personal prosperity, motivated by a radical sense of individual freedom.”¹⁹ This kind of

¹⁷ The full text of the sermon can be found in Pablo A. Jiménez, “Otro Lugar: Un Sermón Hispano En Clave Postcolonial,” *Apuntes* 24, no. 3 (2004): 101–8; I am working from an English translation of this sermon, though my competency in reading Spanish is such that I can check the original manuscript when needed.

¹⁸ Jiménez, 101.

¹⁹ Jiménez, 101–2.

individualism results from an overvalued particularity that valorizes or even idolizes individual autonomy, a critique that resonates with Kavin Rowe's mentioned above.²⁰ The opening of the sermon also includes an identification of the potential and real dangers of a relationality predicated on power and self-interest and embedded in what Jiménez calls "post-colonial movements" and "neo-colonial policies." His statement is brief and dense: "Suffice it to say that the people who masterminded the crimes of September 11, 2001, were originally trained by U.S. security and intelligence agencies. Radical Islamic movements have revolted against the United States in response to our nation's neo-colonial policies in the Middle East."²¹ This isn't to excuse the actions of the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, but rather to identify that the negative relationality of "neo-colonialism" has been met by a negative relationality from "postcolonialism." There is an epistemic humility in naming this considering that Jiménez is preaching from an explicitly postcolonial perspective; even the movement he himself identifies with is not immune to a relationality that separates and destroys. At the same time, the dense complexity of this sermon introduction, even with its humility, has the potential to leave the listener in apprehension about what direction this sermon might take.

However, Jiménez aims to bring listeners along with him through the sermon. He uses fellow-searcher language similar to Augustine's in order to affect this; when he turns to the chosen passage of Scripture, he says "we turn to a text" and "I invite you to meditate" with me on these verses from John 14.²² In expounding on John 14.1-3, he observes, "Jesus' words of encouragement sound strange; they are not like the phrases you and I use to comfort our friends and family. No. Jesus does not deny his departure or minimize its impact. ... Jesus affirms that he

²⁰ See ch. 2, fn 27.

²¹ Jiménez, "Otro Lugar," 102.

²² Jiménez, 102-3, emphasis added.

has to leave, for his departure is an integral part of his mission.”²³ In this way, Jiménez aims to mimic Jesus in the structure of this sermon, being willing to look unflinchingly at reality without minimizing its impact, while maintaining a conviction that there is hope in “another place.”

The middle section of the sermon is devoted to an exploration of the important postcolonial conception of “place.” Jiménez identifies the negative forces of colonialism that result in “dislocation [of] subjugated peoples,” the making of “maps that change known borders,” and “[minimization of] the importance of our social places.”²⁴ In these ways, colonialism actually means the particularity of individuals and peoples is not respected precisely because particulars are not fixed from a colonial/imperial perspective. A person can be moved from here to there (dislocated), a person can be defined as this or that (citizen vs. “foreigner”). In this brief exposition of “place,” Jiménez implicitly affirms that the interweaving of particularity and openness is necessary for people to positively relate to one another. An overvalued particularity (autonomous individualism) *or* a denial of particularity (displacement and shifting status) is detrimental to human flourishing.

In response to the complexity of current conceptions of place, Jiménez expresses curiosity about whether a tension can be held, whether seemingly competing conceptions can be intertwined, or whether we need a different approach. This curiosity comes in the form of a concern about the contexts of the people listening, who are “in leadership positions today, here and in this place.”²⁵ The question and concern are left unanswered and open-ended even in the conclusion of the sermon. The curiosity about whether those who enjoy such position can also be “eager to go with Jesus to that high place he is preparing for us” is intermingled with the stated

²³ Jiménez, 104.

²⁴ Jiménez, 104.

²⁵ Jiménez, 106.

conviction of “one of the cornerstones of the Christian faith: Jesus will return to take us to the ‘other place.’” The way one responds to the question is, for Jiménez, a matter of imagination. “To visualize that place, we have to use the prophetic and apocalyptic imagination.”²⁶ “To proclaim the reality of the coming kingdom we must first imagine it.”²⁷ Imagination is a theme emphasized throughout the sermon; is one willing to consider, to imagine, that “another place” is where one actually belongs? Is one willing to imagine that that “other place” is where *everyone* belongs?

Notably, as Jiménez explores the complexity of placed-ness in the 21st century and exhorts his listeners to incline their imaginations toward “another place,” references to the Holy Spirit are not to be found. However, the keen listener may find the necessity of the Spirit’s power resting just beneath the surface in answer to the question of how one lives within the tensions and entanglements of life in “this place,” i.e., one’s current context in the world. Jiménez appeals to the vision of Revelation 21 as an example from the early church for the contemporary church of how to imagine God’s coming kingdom. He states, “If we follow this pattern, then, Hispanic communities must use our prophetic and apocalyptic imagination to envision “a new heaven and a new earth” free of poverty, illegal drugs, gangs, police brutality, prostitution, AIDS, and the repression of *‘la migra.’*”²⁸ But, with John of Patmos so with Latino/a populations and all who live in a contemporary postcolonial context, following this pattern of imagination requires the undergirding and dynamic work of the Spirit. Additionally, while Jiménez focuses his reflection on the first three verses of John 14 in order to emphasize the promise and necessity of “another place,” the curious listener may continue to explore the rest of Jesus’ farewell discourse. Just a few verses after Jiménez’s passage of focus, Jesus goes on to promise the sending of the Holy

²⁶ Jiménez, 105.

²⁷ Jiménez, 106.

²⁸ Jiménez, 106.

Spirit as his continuing presence with his disciples and the empowering force for them to continue to follow him after he departs from them. When Jiménez leaves open the question of how to live in the tensions of contemporary life, at least one of the answers only a few steps further down the trail of thought he has laid is that the Holy Spirit is the helper and advocate for living a life of active waiting for “another place.”

Concluding Observations

Each of these sermons exhibits significant resonances with the themes I have identified in Augustine’s homiletic: the interweaving of particularity and openness, humility and boldness, and curiosity and conviction. Kim-Cragg’s sermon “A Bound Family Vine” gives special attention to the particularity and openness of bodies in a 21st century postcolonial context, and demonstrates how the intertwining of these two ideas allows people across places, cultures, and languages to be “bound” together. Travis’s sermon “Waiting for Good News” is a wonderful example of interweaving curiosity and conviction around a central tenet of the Christian faith: God is good. It includes the humility to admit that our epistemological perspectives about what is “good news” can sometimes contradict Jesus’ message, but that we can and should continue to affirm that message even when it may seem to work against our self-interest in terms of worldly power or position. Jiménez’s sermon “Another Place” is unflinching in its description of the complexity of the conception of place in contemporary postcolonial contexts. It includes an honest assessment of the negative relational forces that can operate within postcolonialism itself, and then emphasizes that an imagination attuned to God’s action in the world can hold the seemingly impossible tension between living in “this place” and longing for “another place.”

All three of these preachers also have resonances with Augustine’s brief but profound explanation of the Holy Spirit’s role in enabling and holding together a positive relationality between bodies, minds, and preaching. Kim-Cragg and Travis both include short but crucial

references to the Spirit's work in their sermons, while Jiménez's appeal is hidden just beneath the surface of the explicit content of his sermon. Without the empowering presence of the Spirit, Kim-Cragg's "bound vine" starts to fray and Jiménez's imagination fails. Without the Spirit overflowing the rim of our cup, Travis is hopeless to preach subversively against the power and privilege she enjoys as "white, wealthy, and educated."

However, unlike Augustine, these three preachers/homileticians leave the Spirit's role implicit in their theories of preaching. Whereas I have argued Augustine's homiletic hinges on *DDC* IV.89 – "If the Holy Spirit speaks in those who are delivered to their persecutors for Christ's sake (Matt. 10:19-20), why should he [sic] not also speak in those who deliver Christ to their pupils?" – these contemporary figures scarcely engage explicitly with the Spirit's work in their primary homiletical works.²⁹ This is not to disparage or overly critique Kim-Cragg, Travis, or Jiménez; their emphases lie in other crucial aspects of preaching in postcolonial contexts. It is all the more interesting, then, that in these example sermons the Spirit's role is pinpointed as invaluable to the relational goals expounded (explicitly in Kim-Cragg's and Travis' and implicitly in Jiménez's). For Kim-Cragg and Travis especially, the *practice* of preaching seems to bring out explicit pneumatological emphases that are more implicit in their theoretical work. Travis' sermon is perhaps the most obvious example of this because the content of her sermon "Waiting for Good News" thematically and ideologically echoes her published article "Troubled Gospel."³⁰ In that article, she is posing a question which is one of the central questions of this thesis: Travis asks how one who is caught up in the machinations and benefits of colonialism/imperialism can

²⁹ Travis's engagement with the Spirit through Social Trinitarianism has been noted in ch. 1. She refers explicitly to the work of the Spirit drawing together human life and the life of the Triune God and enabling humans to be transformed into the image of the Triune God. The implication in the context of her wider project, is that preachers can also participate in this work of drawing together and enabling, but the role of the Spirit in making this possible is left to the reader to infer. Cf. Travis, *Decolonizing*, 64, 135–37.

³⁰ Travis, "Troubled Gospel", esp. pp. 51ff.

possibly preach in a relationally positive way. In her sermon she puts it more personally: how can a “white, wealthy, educated woman” preach in light of the implications of being such?³¹ In the article, the answers to the question are limited to the theoretical, albeit still relational, but in the sermon Travis appeals to the Spirit as the enabling force for such preaching, which she generalizes to “participation in the mission of God.”³² In this way, Travis illustrates what is also implied in Kim-Cragg’s and Jiménez’s work, that the Spirit is needed in order for the messy, intermingling, and overflowing relational dynamics of humans, preaching, and God to be held together. The fact that explicit appeals to the Spirit appear in these contemporary sermon examples underscores Augustine’s brief but crucial explicit appeals to the Spirit in the theoretical work of *DDC*. Perhaps it is in practice that the insightful theoretical arguments of these contemporary homileticians become “more relational *and* more pneumatological,” because reconciling and life-giving relationality is impossible through human effort alone.³³ It requires the work of the Spirit.

³¹ Notably, Jiménez poses a similar question from the perspective of the colonized in Pablo A. Jiménez, “Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic: Justo L. González’s Contributions to Hispanic Preaching,” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. González*, ed. et al Alvin Padilla (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 167: “Can the Hispanic subaltern preach?”

³² *Waiting for Good News* (Oakville, Ontario, 2016), <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1089362334470099>.

³³ Jerusha Matsen Neal, personal correspondence, 11 February 2024.

Conclusion

For Augustine, it is finally and fortunately (because we humans are fallible) God who holds preacher, sermon, and listener in a loving and sustaining embrace. He reminds his readers of this conviction in the final lines of *DDC*, quoting for the second time a portion of Wisdom 7.16, which says God is the one “whose hands hold us and our sermons alike.”¹ The second half of this verse Augustine would also undoubtedly endorse for preachers: “...also all wisdom and knowledge of workmanship” (Wisd 7.16b KJV). In other words, Augustine would affirm that not only are preacher, sermon, and listener held by God, but also the content of what is to be communicated (wisdom) and the way such communication should be crafted (knowledge of workmanship). In the crucial first reference to Wisd 7.16a in *DDC*, Augustine expounds and specifies his meaning by quoting Matthew 10.19-20, which says, “When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (NRSV).² Though throughout *DDC* Augustine makes little explicit mention of the Holy Spirit, here he affirms that it is the Spirit who does this work of holding together preacher, listener, sermon content and craft.

It is the Spirit’s relational power that allows for human bodies and voices, though individual and particular, to be open to one another and therefore intertwined through verbal and bodily communication. It is the Spirit that enables the entanglement of humans as “signs interpreting other signs.”³ The presence of the Spirit, itself relationally particular and open, draws

¹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.165; cf. IV.88.

² Saint Augustine, IV.88.

³ Ticciati, “The Human Being as Sign in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” 28.

human bodies together in the resurrected body of Jesus. Luke Powery demonstrates, through exposition of the story of Pentecost, how this Spirit-drenched understanding of preaching embraces individuality and commonality, particularity and openness. It starts with a “‘natural’ pneumatology” – a recognition that the presence of breath in every human is a gift of God.⁴ Add to this the common gift of speech and understanding; in other words, every human is given the gift to communicate.⁵ In Augustine’s terms, every human has the ability to use signs and symbols to relate to one another. In the Pentecost event (Acts 1.11ff.) both these common gifts are present and poured out. But such commonality does not preclude particularity. In fact, Powery argues, “Pentecost represents the preservation and goodness of human diversity, particularly as that applies to God’s community. The Spirit does not dehumanize but embraces the particularities of every human being.”⁶ In Augustine’s context, the binding and cementing work of the Spirit meant that he could entrust his own interpretation of signs and communication/signification to an Other, therefore placing the agency of effectiveness on God.⁷ The result is that Augustine’s “mestizo” culture and the mixed and multifaceted cultures of his listeners could be bridged and brought toward one another.⁸ In a 21st century context, entrusting our human particularity and openness to the binding work of the Spirit means a similar bridging is possible.

Similarly, the Spirit’s role of holding and sustaining preacher, preaching, and listening creates the context in which Augustine can remain ambivalent about the power of rhetoric to bring human minds together. Instead of viewing the act of preaching as solely an act of persuasive power – a view more in line with Cicero and classical understandings of rhetoric – he

⁴ Powery, *Becoming*, 55–57.

⁵ Powery, 57–59.

⁶ Powery, 62.

⁷ Cf. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I.83.

⁸ See González, *Mestizo*.

relies on the Spirit to use words and ideas to move listeners. Therefore Augustine's understanding of rhetoric requires the preacher to interweave humility and boldness, especially in epistemic terms. Though he would use quite different language, Augustine would likely support Sarah Travis when she says, "Language and the production of knowledge are not closed systems: they are continually open to new meaning and negotiation. Systems claiming to encompass all known reality ... cannot account for the novelty, variety, and ambiguity at the heart of reality."⁹ "But," we can imagine Augustine continuing, "what systems *cannot* do, the Spirit *can*."

This understanding of the Spirit's role and power culminates in what I've called relational teaching, which is Augustine's way of relating preaching and doctrine to one another. Relational teaching – the only truly effective and affective way of preaching – starts and ends with submission to the Spirit. In preparing to preach, Augustine begins with the conviction that he must submit to the authority of the Scriptures. James Andrews observes that for Augustine, "Scripture is not simply a source to be mined when attempting to find something to say; instead, scriptural interpretation ... has its end in Christian preaching, and this puts a heavier weight on textual understanding than exists in ... the earlier rhetorical tradition."¹⁰ But this conviction, along with his confidence that the Spirit illuminates the Scriptures for the open and humble interpreter, allows for a relentless curiosity to be fostered in sermon preparation. Then in sermon delivery, Augustine finishes the task of preaching with submission to the Spirit through prayer. He preaches using neither a manuscript nor notes as an embodiment of his conviction that the Spirit holds the sermon and is faithful to supply it to him in the moment.¹¹ He exhorts other preachers to do the same in that crucial section of Book IV: "[The preacher] should be in no

⁹ Travis, *Decolonizing*, 79.

¹⁰ Andrews, "Why Theological Hermeneutics Needs Rhetoric," 189.

¹¹ On Augustine's extemporaneous form, see the classic study of Roy J. Deferrari, "St. Augustine's Method of Composing and Delivering Sermons," *The American Journal of Philology* 43, no. 2 (1922): 97–123.

doubt that any ability he [*sic*] has and however much he has derives more from his devotion to prayer than his dedication to oratory; and so, by praying for himself and for those he is about to address, he must become a man of prayer before becoming a man of words.”¹² Preaching, for Augustine, begins and ends with the preacher’s submission to the Spirit.

Augustine embodies what historian Clair Wills calls a “follower,” using the metaphor of a couple dancing:

A follower is all antennae. She, or he, must cultivate a kind of active uncertainty, a positive doubt. She must be relaxed enough to feel the slightest of cues from her partner, and yet sufficiently poised, mentally and physically, to be able to play—to respond, to hold back, to make form out of commitment, interruption, and hesitation. Her weight must be finely balanced so that she can answer the call to step or turn this way or that, as though she had anticipated it, yet without having known what was coming.¹³

This is what Augustine is doing in the pulpit. Through preparation and prayer, Augustine puts himself in the “relaxed” position of readiness to respond to the Spirit’s movements. Sometimes such responses are dramatic (e.g., his sermon on Psalm 138) and sometimes they are subtle (e.g., wondering why the congregation clapped). Thus Augustine, contrary to the thrust of the rhetorical tradition he inherited, puts the preacher in a posture of submission. His improvisations on the words and themes of Scripture—his delivery in general—become a kind of prayer-in-action under the influence of the Spirit. With this posture Augustine is able to intertwine the bodies and minds present in the preaching event with a view of teaching that means all can be relationally held together and directed toward their ultimate end: the Triune God. He is also able to interweave the seeming contradictory qualities of bodies and minds, the openness and particularity, boldness and humility. But all these relationships are dependent on the certain and powerful movement of the

¹² Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.87.

¹³ Clair Wills, “Stepping Out,” *New York Review of Books*, August 20, 2020, quoted in James K. A. Smith, *How to Inhabit Time: Understanding the Past, Facing the Future, Living Faithfully Now* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022), 94.

Spirit, without which the individual bodies or minds or sermons simply come untethered and drift undirected, meaningless, and ineffective. Without the Spirit, over-emphasis on particularity drifts into narcissistic individualism and the potential of embodied openness is directed toward hegemony and homogeneity. Without the Spirit, epistemic humility can leave the preacher in silence, unable to make any claims at all, and unmitigated boldness can use certainty to manipulate or even exploit. Without the Spirit, curiosity becomes an aimless academic exercise and conviction becomes a dogmatic club used to oppress or exclude. But Augustine helps us see how an interwoven, Spirit-led preaching avoids these dangers. It is the Spirit's loving work of binding, knitting, and interweaving these relational strands that makes preaching worth doing at all. The Spirit uses this kind of relational preaching to overflow one soul into another and mingle them together for the glory and love of God.

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