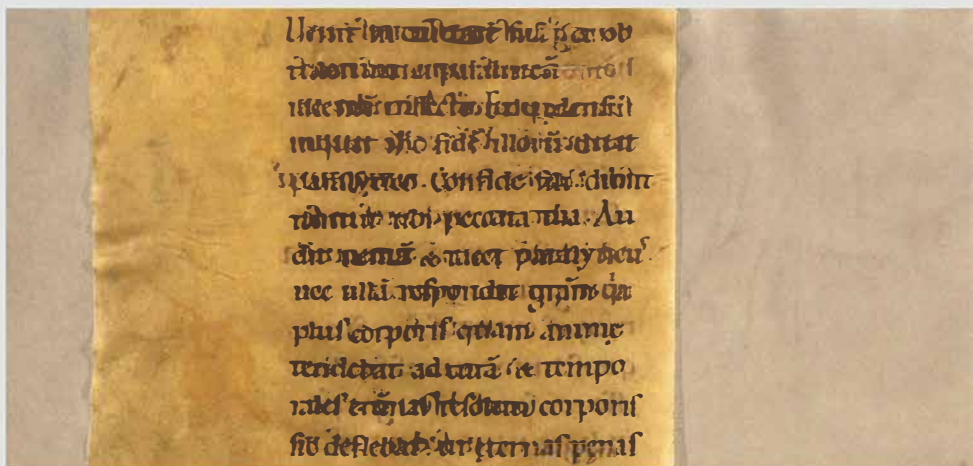


Preaching the Christian Life and Faith

Communication of Religious Education in Late Antique Latin Sermons

Edited by
Nicolás Anders, Peter Gemeinhardt,
and Lina Hantel



Studies in Education and Religion in Ancient and Pre-Modern History in the Mediterranean and Its Environs 25

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Foreword

When it comes to the question of how educational processes were communicated and received in late antique Christian societies, sources such as sermons play a prominent role. This question was addressed by a research project at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Göttingen “Preaching as a Process of Religious Education in Late Antique Christianity” (2020–2024, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). At this project’s invitation, an international group of scholars gathered from October 10th to 12th, 2022 at the Ländliche Heimvolkshochschule Mariaspring to delve more deeply into these educational processes and scrutinise the material in a comparative way. The content of the lectures was the examination of Latin sermons by well-known and lesser-known bishops and clerics of Late Antiquity. Essentially, the conference focussed on four topics: First, how biblical themes and texts were presented in the sermons. Secondly, what role martyrs played in them and thirdly, what ethical ideas were addressed to the audience. The last section asked how Christian identity was shaped through dogmatic issues. A final section is formed by cross-cutting contributions which discussed Augustine’s influence on late antique preaching and pondered what future the study of patristic sermons may hold.

The present volume is based on the papers given at the conference. The contributions have been reworked in view of the discussions at Mariaspring and sometimes substantially enlarged. The rationale of the conference, an outline of the volume and some conclusions for research into late antique sermons are given in the introduction. The editors are convinced that such research—which has started roughly three and a half decades ago—yields many further insights, by an in-depth analysis of individual sermons as well as by investigating the composition, rewriting and transmission of whole corpora. It goes without saying that also comparisons between texts from different source languages will be fruitful. The concentration on Latin sermons might be reckoned as a limitation of the present volume, yet this focus made it possible to bring together papers on nearly all major collections of Latin sermons from the 4th to the 6th century. Much remains to be done, and we hope that this volume may help to trigger further research.

As the editors of this volume, we are extremely grateful to the contributors who accepted our invitation, presented papers and engaged in discussion, and finally submitted their contributions to this volume. We would also like to thank the editors of the series SERAPHIM for accepting the manuscript for publication and the staff members of Mohr Siebeck for their invaluable help with prepar-

ing the texts for printing; here we want to mention especially Markus Kirchner, Susanne Mang, and Tobias Stäbler. The conference as well as the publication were made possible by the generous funding by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft in the framework of the research project mentioned above. Finally, we are most grateful to the student assistants Alea Nzayihorana and Vinzent Wiedemann who did the copy-editing and prepared the indexes.

Kassel, Göttingen, and Lüneburg, July 2024

Nicolás Anders,
Peter Gemeinhardt, and
Lina Hantel

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Abbreviations

AAAd	Antichità altoadriatiche
ACR	Australasian Catholic Record
ACSt	American Classical Studies
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
Adam.	Adamantius
AKG	Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte
AnGr	Analecta Gregoriana
Aug.	Augustinianum
Aug(L)	Augustiniana. Tijdschrift voor de studie van Sint Augustinus en de Augustijnenorde. Louvain
Aug(M)	Augustinus. Revista trimestral publ. por los Padres Agustinos Recoletos. Madrid
AugL	Augustinus-Lexikon
AugStud	Augustinian Studies
BAug	Bibliothèque augustinienne
BEFAR	Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome
Bess.	Bessarione
BHer	Biblioteca Herder
BiInS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BLE	Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique
BKV	Bibliothek der Kirchenväter
BMon	Bibliotheca Montisfani
BPat	Biblioteca patristica
BSCH	Brill's Series in Church History
BThSt	Biblisch-theologische Studien
BVC	Bible et vie chrétienne
BzA	Beiträge zur Altertumskunde
BZNW	Beiträge zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBLa	Collectanea biblica latina
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio mediaevalis
CCL	Code of canon law
CEAug	Collection des études augustinienes
ChH	Church History

CHR	Catholic Historical Review
CJAn	Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity
CleR	Clergy Review
CQR	Church Quarterly Review
CSCP	Cornell Studies in Classical Philology
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CUFr	Collection des universités de France
Dialog	Dialog. A Journal of Theology
DNP	Der Neue Pauly
EMEu	Early Medieval Europe
FaCh	Fathers of the Church
FC	Fontes Christiani
FKDG	Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte
FMSt	Frühmittelalterliche Studien
FThSt	Freiburger theologische Studien
GBSNT	Guides to Biblical Scholarship: NT
GNI	Gallerie nazionale italiana
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
IJST	International Journal of Systematic Theology
Interp.	Interpretation. A Journal of Bible and Theology
IP	Instrumenta patristica
IPM	Instrumenta patristica et mediaevalia
JbAC.E	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum. Ergänzungsband
J ECS	Journal of Early Christian Studies
JEH	Journal of Ecclesiastical History
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period
JThS	Journal of Theological Studies
JThS n.s.	Journal of Theological Studies. New Series
KGA	Kirchengeschichtliche Abhandlungen
KuD	Kerygma und Dogma

LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
MGH.Ep	Monumenta Germaniae historica. Epistolae
MGH.SRL	Monumenta Germaniae historica. Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum s. VI–IX
MGH.SRM	Monumenta Germaniae historica. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum
MnS	Mnemosyne: Supplement
Mouseion	Mouseion. Journal of the Classical Association of Canada
NBAG	Nuova biblioteca agostiniana
NPNF	A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene (Christian) Fathers
NRTh	Nouvelle revue théologique
NTP	Novum testamentum patristicum
NV	Nova et vetera
NV(E)	Nova et vetera. English Edition
Par.	Paradosis
PatMS	Patristic Monograph Series
PatSt	Patristic Studies
PCBE	Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire
Phoe.	Phoenix
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca
PH	Paedagogica historica
PL	Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
ProEc	Pro Ecclesia
RAC	Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum
RBen	Revue bénédictine de critique, d'histoire et de littérature religieuses
REAugP	Revue d'études augustinienes et patristiques
RechAug	Recherches augustinienes
RHE	Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique
RomBarb	Romanobarbarica
RomF	Romanische Forschungen
RSC	Rivista di studi classici
RSR	Recherches de science religieuse

SAEMO	Sancti Ambrosii episcopi Mediolanensis opera
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SCA	Studies in Christian Antiquity
SDM	Scripta et documenta. Abadía de Montserrat
SE	Sacris erudiri
SEAug	Studia ephemerides Augustinianum
SERAPHIM	Studies in Education and Religion in Ancient and Pre-Modern History in the Mediterranean and Its Environs
SGKA	Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums
SHCT	Studies in the History of Christian Thought / Studies in the History of Christian Traditions
SHG	Subsidia hagiographica
Spec.	Speculum
SSAC	Sussidi allo studio delle antichità cristiane
SST	Studies in Sacred Theology
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
StMon	Studia monastica
StPatr	Studia patristica
StRav	Studia Ravennatensia
StRR	Studies in Rhetoric and Religion
StT	Studi e testi
SVigChr	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
ThPh	Theologie und Philosophie
TLL	Thesaurus linguae latinae
TRE	Theologische Realenzyklopädie
TS	Theological studies. Theological Faculties of the Society of Jesus in the United States
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
VetChr	Vetera Christianorum
VigChr	Vigiliae Christianae
ZAC	Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum
ZKG	Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte

Introduction

Nicolás Anders, Peter Gemeinhardt and Lina Hantel

1. Preaching as Communication of Education: State of the Art and Guiding Questions

1.1 Sermons in Late Antiquity: Perspectives and Challenges

Preaching was a characteristic feature of nascent Christianity.¹ Since apostolic times, Christian communities spread all over the inhabited world. Preaching was instrumental in this process, in the beginning as missionary preaching (amply attested in the canonical and apocryphal *Acts of the Apostles*) but soon also as proclamation of the Gospel in Sunday worship. Justin Martyr (d. 165 CE) already reported that in Christian services the Bible was read, followed by an oral instruction given by the leader of the community.² Following this account, the main objectives of preaching were instruction (νοουθεσία, διδασκαλία) and paraenesis (πρόκλησις, παραίνεσις), in other words: to teach the audience faith and ethics and to exhort them to live a Christian life. Whether teaching the faith was possible for human beings (even if they were ordained bishop or presbyter) was sometimes called into question: Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 387) declared in his prebaptismal lecture series that “dogmatic” faith, the “assent to some truth”, can well be taught by the person who conducts the catechetical instruction, while there is also faith which is given as a gift by God that exceeds human teaching capacities. However, as Cyril concludes, both kinds of faith are open to “learning and professing”³. Also for Augustine (d. 430), religion can be taught only because God himself is the teacher. Religious education means learning in a dialogical

¹ For some parts of this introduction, we have made use of the conference report written by Elske-Ellen Schirrmeister (<https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/fdkn-134065>) which we gratefully acknowledge.—This contribution was written in connection to the research project “Predigt als Vorgang religiöser Bildung im spätantiken Christentum” (2020–2024) at the University of Göttingen, funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (project no. 441781853), for which we are equally grateful.

² Justin Martyr, *1 Apologia* 67.3–4.

³ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses baptismales* 5.10: Ἔστι μὲν γὰρ ἓν εἶδος τῆς πίστεως, τὸ δογματικὸν, συγκατάθεσιν ψυχῆς ἔχον περὶ τοῦδὲ τινος. Ibid. 5.11: Δεύτερον δὲ ἔστιν εἶδος πίστεως, τὸ ἐν χάριτος μέρει παρὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ δωρούμενον. Ibid. 5.12: Πίστιν δὲ ἐν

manner vis-à-vis God, in the introductory catechesis⁴ and in the worship for the parish. Augustine stated that every Sunday, the faithful participated in the “school of Christ”, for only at face-value it was the bishop who speaks: “Christ is teaching, his reading desk is in heaven... but his school is on earth, and his school is his body. The head is teaching his limbs.”⁵

Although the impact of preaching on the formation and stabilization of Christianity is beyond doubt, this genre has been described as “the hidden iceberg of Christian discourse”⁶. This is not least due to the fact that the documentation for preaching in the 2nd and 3rd centuries is meagre (with the notable exception of Origen’s homilies).⁷ Additionally, preaching became a means for catechetical instruction. Several collections of pre-baptismal and mystagogical homilies are extant, the earliest of them presented in 350 CE by Cyril of Jerusalem. In the second half of the 4th century, the first collections of sermons are attested in Greek (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom) and Latin (Zeno of Verona, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome) as well as in Syriac (Ephrem’s homiletic poetry); more collections emerged in the 5th century, among them the huge mass of sermons given by (or ascribed to) Augustine. Preaching was and remained a hotspot of Christian text production as well as of communal practice: the sermon was a constitutive element of any worship on Sundays and feast days. Sermons varied greatly in length, rhetorical quality, and theological depth, but one thing is sure: preaching was the best way for bishops and clerics to address their flock, which meant in a Sunday worship: people of all ages, genders, and social standing. Preaching was, so to speak, inclusive. Thus, the ‘sermons to the people’ (*sermones ad populum*)⁸ are particularly interesting because of this diversity of the audience who should be taught and admonished to live a true Christian life.

Whoever wants to study sermons faces particular challenges, due to the material and its transmission. A minor problem is terminological: The notions of ‘homily’ (ὁμιλία, loanword in Latin) and ‘sermon’ (λόγος, *sermo*) are used interchangeably in the sources. The distinction between the former notion as denoting ‘exegetical’ and the latter ‘thematic’ argumentations is not warranted by the

μαθήσει καὶ ἀπαγγελίᾳ κτῆσαι καὶ τήρῃσιν μόνῃν. For Cyril’s understanding of faith and teaching see Lorgeoux 2023, 141–144.

⁴ Cf. Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus* 12.17.

⁵ Augustine, *De disciplina christiana* 15: *Christus est qui docet; cathedram in caelo habet ... schola ipsius in terra est, et schola ipsius corpus ipsius est. caput docet membra sua.*

⁶ Cameron 1991, 79.

⁷ Origen’s homilies are mostly preserved, if at all, in Latin translation by Jerome and Rufinus. For early developments of Christian Preaching see Stewart-Sykes 2001.

⁸ This title derives from the Maurist edition of Augustine’s sermons in order to distinguish sermons given to the parish from exegetical homilies (see also below, note 11). In this introduction (and throughout the present volume), we use the expression as a title for the genre of Sunday sermons as such.

extant source material.⁹ Augustine acknowledged the equivalence of both terms: “sermons which we deliver to the people are termed ‘homilies’ by the Greeks.”¹⁰ After all, ὁμιλία (derived from ὁμιλεῖν, “to talk intimately”) is close to *sermo* (“conversation”), and sermons have thus been conceptualized as the preacher ‘talking’ to his audience.¹¹ Interestingly, the Practical Theologian Ernst Lange (1927–1974) defined preaching nearly in the same way: “Preaching means: I talk to the listener about his life.”¹²

A more pressing problem lies with the relationship of oral delivery and written transmission of sermons.¹³ Some of them were taken down by stenographers so that their textual form resembles more or less the spoken word.¹⁴ Not rarely they were ‘published’, that is, circulated in other parishes of the same region or even beyond, and for this purpose revised or polished.¹⁵ Augustine requested from other preachers “written and corrected sermons”¹⁶, that is, they should not remain in the form of their original delivery. Other preachers—like Ambrose—were eager to purify their sermons from all traces of orality before they let them circulate (in this case they were presented no longer as sermons but as letters).¹⁷ Later, a preacher like Caesarius of Arles (d. 542) adapted sermons of Origen, Ambrose or Augustine as material for his own sermons which then became transmitted under his or Augustine’s name.¹⁸ The result were in many cases “patchwork sermons”¹⁹. Collections began to circulate in the 5th century in order to provide model sermons for preachers who lacked textual resources or sufficient exegetical or rhetorical capabilities; as Augustine argued, they should

⁹ Sachot 1992, 171.

¹⁰ Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 118 proem.: *statui autem per sermones id agere, qui proferantur in populis, quas graeci ὁμιλίας uocant*.

¹¹ E.g., Harrison 2013, 152–153. Hantel 2025, 77–97 and 306–307 exemplifies this with reference to the sermons of Peter Chrysologus.—The notion of *Tractatus* was initially used synonymously with *sermo* but later specified an exegetical sermon, thus underlining the aspect of teaching. The same applies to *Enarratio*, *Expositio* or *Explanatio*: while these terms can denote a sermon, they were also used for an exegetical commentary based on homilies, like Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos* or Ambrose’s *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* (Sachot 1992, 171).

¹² Lange 1976, 58: “Predigen heißt: Ich rede mit dem Hörer über sein Leben.”

¹³ For a description of the problem see Merkt 1997 and Lipatov-Chicherin 2013.

¹⁴ This is already attested for Origen; cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. eccl.* 6.36.1, and abundantly documented for Augustine; cf., e.g., Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 7.1–3, 9.1; Dolbeau 2018, 36–37.

¹⁵ For the transcription, publication and circulation of sermons see Bass 2023, 66–69, who refers to Gamble 1995, 132–140 (both are using African sermons as examples for a common usage).

¹⁶ Augustine, *Ep.* 41.2: *sermones conscriptos et emendatos*.

¹⁷ Vessey 2013, 37.

¹⁸ Cf. Anders 2024, 5–7, 99–102.

¹⁹ Weidmann 2021.

not be ashamed of using the work of others but put extant sermons in their own parishes to good use.²⁰

As such, this interdependency of spoken and written word was not innovative at all. Ancient rhetoric viewed both kinds of expressions as converging²¹, and Christian preachers (who often were well-trained rhetors, at least in the 4th and 5th centuries) reckoned with the distribution of their speeches. We have thus to distinguish the “audience addressed” from the “audience invoked”²²: sermons that were given to a present audience could and would be reused in written form for other audiences or readerships. In turn, written texts were present as sources and in the background of oral delivery. Speakers were also hearers.²³ By careful examination, written sermons enable us to draw conclusions concerning the situation of their original delivery.

A third proviso relates to what has already been said, namely, that individual sermons were mostly preserved and transmitted in larger collections. The study of such corpora and their transmission is an expanding field of current research.²⁴ Sermons were a “living genre”²⁵, a fact that makes their analysis fascinating and at the same time demanding, and this is also true for the collections. Far from being faithful renderings of what had once been said to an audience, it has to be assessed whether the texts in a given collection reflect to a considerable degree the actual preaching of the assumed author or the predilections of later editors. For instance, the collection of sermons of Peter Chrysologus was compiled by Felix, an 8th century bishop of Ravenna who ordered the texts of his predecessor thematically.²⁶ Other sermons of Peter were known under the name of Augustine or “Severian” (later understood as the 5th century preacher Severian of Gabala).²⁷ The sermons which were ascribed to Augustine and John Chrysostom are countless; the more prominent the name, the more later writers felt attracted to ‘enhance’ his œuvre by adding further texts. Therefore it is necessary to assess in the concrete case which patristic preacher

²⁰ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 4.29.62. For circulating collections see Dolbeau 2018, 38–41.

²¹ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 12.10.51.

²² See Forness 2018, 29–30.

²³ Harrison 2013, 133–149. For Augustine’s *sermones ad populum* as examples of preacher-audience interaction see Pauliat 2023, 50–57.

²⁴ The transformations from Late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages are lucidly presented in Dolbeau 2018, 42–49. For more details see the contributions to Kienzle 2000a and the forthcoming online database of the PASSIM project (“Patristic Sermons in the Middle Ages”, <https://www.ru.nl/en/research/research-projects/passim-project> [accessed 2024-06-04]).

²⁵ Kienzle 2000b, 147.

²⁶ Thus Agnellus, *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravenntnis* 150 (writing an additional century later).

²⁷ Hantel 2025, 36–38.

we actually ‘hear’ teaching and exhorting his flock. This potential to be reused, rewritten and recontextualized makes it difficult to define the textual basis of any investigation into late antique sermons, and it may be one of the reasons why sermon studies have long lagged behind, compared to other fields of patristic literature.

1.2 *Sermon Studies: a Brief Sketch of Previous and Current Research*

Preaching has gained prominence in patristic research since the 1990s, beginning with collected volumes on the Greek patristic and Byzantine tradition²⁸ and recently supplemented for the Latin-speaking world²⁹; this volume—titled *Preaching in the Patristic Era*—is an invaluable resource for the present undertaking which focuses on Latin sermons (see below). The most exhaustive treatment of Christian preaching is still the monograph by Alexandre Olivar, written as early as 1991³⁰, while the slightly later multi-volume work *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* by Hugh Oliphant Old is useful as an overview but not designed to present a complete picture; therefore, preachers like Gaudentius of Brescia, Chromatius of Aquileia, Maximus of Turin and others are missing.³¹ The same is true for the recent volumes by David Dunn-Wilson (*A Mirror for the Church. Preaching in the First Five Centuries*) and Andrew Hofer (*The Power of Patristic Preaching*).³² It is however the category of, so to speak, ‘middle-level-preachers’ which deserves more interest than it has received until now: these bishops never reached a prominence like Augustine’s, but their sermons may offer insights into the late antique variety of contexts, audiences, and communicative strategies.

Besides the question of genre (mentioned above), the liturgical setting has found attention, including the interplay of texts and images with space and time, but also the interdependency of preaching with exegesis and hermeneutics.³³ The latter may seem obvious, but there were quite different ways to deal with the

²⁸ Hunter 1989; Cunningham / Allen 1998.—In the following, we refer only to general or thematic works, not to specialized studies on the authors which are dealt with in the contributions to this volume (each with bibliography).

²⁹ Dupont et al. 2018. Mühlenberg / van Oort 1994 already brought together Greek and Latin homiletics, even if selectively.

³⁰ Olivar 1991. An overview about later developments is found in Mayer 2008, Schmidt / Boodts 2022, and Gemeinhardt 2026 [forthcoming].

³¹ Old 1998 and 1999a; the first volume is only partly (pp. 251–352) dedicated to post-NT preaching, while the second comprises the history of preaching until the time of Gregory the Great. Strangely, however, Caesarius of Arles is relegated to the third volume on “The Medieval Church” (Old 1999b, 74–81).

³² Dunn-Wilson 2005; Hofer 2023.

³³ Harrison 2000; Mayer 2019.

Scriptures in sermons³⁴, and thus there were many ways how exegesis contributed to the “formation of Christian culture”³⁵. The art of rhetoric (on which see more below) was crucial to the successful proclamation of the Gospel and gained even more importance as Christianity became the dominant religion within the Roman empire and entered the public space.³⁶ The repeated exhortations to employ a *sermo humilis* instead of polished speech were not very effective: many sermons were artfully crafted and made use of carefully designed prose rhythms and metrical *clausulae*. Thus, not only the Bible but also their rhetoric skills shaped the “homiletical style” of 4th century preachers³⁷, fitting the aesthetic expectations of upper-class hearers.³⁸ Consequently, in recent times not only the preachers found attention but also the listeners as participants in the homiletical event, as partners in a dialogue with the preacher about Scripture.³⁹ Carol Harrison even spoke of an “art of listening”⁴⁰. It is precisely this interaction where education comes into play.

1.3 Education as a Particular Focus on Late Ancient Preaching

While references to the Bible are virtually present in every sermon and distinguish this genre from other kinds of oral performance in the late antique world, preaching was deeply intertwined with the standards and methods of rhetoric.⁴¹ Public speech was based on rhetorical knowledge, and notwithstanding the frequent claim that Christians should be extremely careful when ‘using’ classical education, the latter was simply indispensable, at least in the cities where literate listeners expected a convincing homiletical performance. Thus, within the framework of erudite and polemical discourses about the acceptability of classical education for Christian purposes, preaching was a practice that simply could not do without education.

Christian preaching adopted two of the classical *genera dicendi* (forensic, deliberative, and epideictic rhetoric).⁴² Deliberative rhetoric was used in Sunday and weekday sermons for teaching and exhortation, while panegyric served as praise of the martyrs and saints. The only patristic theory of preaching—book 4 of Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*—emphasizes that the preacher must have command of all three offices of the rhetor: to teach, to please, to motivate (*docere*,

³⁴ Discussed with reference to Origen, Augustine, and Peter Chrysologus in Gemeinhardt 2022.

³⁵ Young 1997.

³⁶ Cf. Uthemann 1997.

³⁷ Oberhelman 1991, 101–120; see also Schäublin 1994; Dunn 2018.

³⁸ Cf. Rebillard 2018.

³⁹ Van Dam 2003, 103.

⁴⁰ Harrison 2013; cf. Forness 2018.

⁴¹ Cf. Tornau 2018.

⁴² Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1.3.

delectare, flectere).⁴³ Yet pleasing is viewed skeptically, since the preacher might be tempted to earn praise for his brilliant speech and not for the message of the Gospel: “not the teacher should serve the words, but the words the teacher.”⁴⁴ But to speak wisely, he must take care that his speech is heard with understanding and obedience, because otherwise he will only attract die-hard listeners.⁴⁵ Thus a certain education was needed, although Augustine never explains how a preacher should acquire the necessary skills. They were simply taken as a given, and only in the 6th century, when the Roman institutions of schooling began to decline, synods and bishops started to develop concepts for a (very basic) pastoral and homiletical training.⁴⁶

The question of the education of preachers is however only one side of the medal. How did they act as teachers? Which kind of education did they envisage for their flock? And did they reflect on what they were doing? In other words, how were Christian life and faith communicated in late antique sermons, and which role did the latter play as means of religious education?

Education has been prominent in scholarly discourse on Late Antiquity in the last decades.⁴⁷ Moreover, education serves as a focus for comparative investigations into the dynamics of religion in Antiquity and Medieval Times.⁴⁸ Analyzing the interplay of the modern term “Bildung”—which has Christian roots—and ancient concepts of education has been highly enriching in order to identify overlaps between and characteristics of pre-modern cultures.⁴⁹ Although it is obvious that education plays an important role in the whole field of preaching—for the preachers as well as for the audience—, studying sermons under the aspect of education has not yet been undertaken in a systematic and comparative way. To fill this gap (limited to a certain region, a few centuries and one of the relevant source languages) is the purpose of this volume.

The background is formed by a more modest project which investigated “Preaching as Communication of Education in Late Antique Christianity” (2020–2024) at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Göttingen. If preaching can be conceived as a process of religious education, sermons can be examined in terms of the extent to which they made use of education, i.e. were

⁴³ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 4.13.29.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 4.28.61. This is exemplified by his report that he attended Ambrose’s sermons in Milan first not to hear the exegetical content but to admire his brilliant speech (*Confessiones* 5.23–24).

⁴⁵ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 4.11.26; 4.26.57.

⁴⁶ For more details see Gemeinhardt 2018, 43–49.

⁴⁷ This is not the right place to provide an exhausting review of recent literature. See, *pars pro toto*, Morgan 1998, Bloomer 2015, and Stenger 2022.

⁴⁸ Again, we only refer to the comparative volume by Tanaseanu-Döbler / Döbler 2012; specifically on the interplay of ‘pagan’ education and Christianity see Gemeinhardt 2007.

⁴⁹ A set of categories for such transcultural comparisons has been presented in Gemeinhardt 2019.

designed rhetorically (*formal aspect*), how education is conveyed in preaching (*material aspect*) and whether the process was reflected in terms of form, content and participants (*didactic aspect*). ‘Education’ in this context refers to the process as well as results and contents, and it includes the preachers and the hearers alike as participants in this process of ‘Bildung’.⁵⁰

The present volume focuses on the middle step: sermons as a process of conveying religious education. Starting from the assumption (which has been elaborated above) that sermons were the central institution for communicating Christian education in Late Antiquity, the question is how biblical and hagiographic texts were interpreted, ethical orientation given and statements of faith explained: How did Christians learn about faith and life, about biblical traditions and exemplary saints in sermons? What mediation strategies did the preachers use? Was a distinction made between beginners and advanced learners? Into which linguistic world were the listeners introduced? On what types and forms of argumentation were the sermons based? Did preachers actively invite the participation of the listeners, or were the latter supposed to limit themselves to the reception of what was being communicated?

In order to scrutinize the entire communication process in sermons and their reception, it is necessary to limit oneself to a number of corpora and within them to selected sermons as test cases. In accordance with the research project mentioned above, this volume focuses on Latin *sermones ad populum* from several authors. The purpose is to examine the communication of religious education based on specific homiletic processes to draw a cumulative image. This endeavor has been organized under four headlines: How do sermons impart

- a) knowledge about the Bible,
- b) knowledge of martyrs and saints,
- c) principles of everyday ethics and
- d) familiarity with basic Christian dogma?

Of course, these topics are intertwined, but it seems helpful to view those collections each from a specific angle. For the sake of coherence, the focus is on Latin sermons. The criteria were that these corpora include sermons ‘to the people’ in a sufficient number, stem from the 4th to the 6th century and are ascribed to an identifiable author. We do not claim to cover the whole range of the material but only a reasonable portion of it in order to allow for a close-reading of the texts.⁵¹ It goes without saying that comparisons with contemporary Greek sermons under the same guiding questions would be highly desirable. But also within the

⁵⁰ The results of this project are two doctoral dissertations (Anders 2024 and Hantel 2025) and several articles, e.g., Gemeinhardt 2022, 2024 and 2026.

⁵¹ An overview about all Latin-speaking authors whose sermons are attested (although many of them are no longer extant) is provided by Vessey 2013, 34.

given limitation of scope, these sermons open up a window into churches all over the Western Mediterranean in a period of sociocultural, political, and religious transformations, and it will become clear that the marvelous volume *Preaching in the Patristic Era* is not the last word on this issue.

2. The Contributions to this Volume

Section I: Preaching on Biblical Themes and Texts

The reference to biblical themes and texts is an essential characteristic that sets sermons apart from other rhetorical or literary genres. In Christian preaching of Late Antiquity, various methods of referring to biblical texts and different strategies for conveying their content can be observed. Some sermon collections use biblical texts as a starting point, providing verse-by-verse commentary, while other sermons first address the specific situation of the listeners and then confront them with fitting biblical quotations.

Marius van Willigen (Apeldoorn) reflects on how the oral situation can be caught in the sermons of Ambrose of Milan. Van Willigen points out colloquial elements such as the non-artificial use of the first, second, and third person as well as the imperative and the character of the sermon (encouraging, equipping, and constructive). Exegetically, the oral situation of Ambrose's sermons can be captured in the elective reference to biblical texts and origenistic methods rather than the orderly approach in his commentaries indicating that the use of scripture depends on the current preaching situation. Before drawing conclusions about characteristic elements of Ambrose's sermons in a second step Van Willigen discusses passages from sermons in which Ambrose comments on his own preaching.

Francesco Pieri (Bologna) portrays the homiletical corpus of Jerome as an "anthology of his preaching" that provides an exemplary selection of sermons referring to the Book of Psalms, the Gospel of Mark and the liturgical year. It is inspired by the work of Origen and the orality of the texts is clearly recognizable. The preacher refers to the biblical texts and is eager to differentiate his exegetical interpretation from other "heretical" or Jewish exegesis. In some sermons Judaism is treated as a religious group in opposition to Christianity like paganism, in other sermons Jerome encounters it in the same way he treats "heretical" Christians. A crucial point the preacher refers to is the triumph over "the literalism of the interpretation" of Scripture by the spiritual understanding of Scripture, which is essential for orthodox Christian belief. The fact that the "vocabulary on the senses of Scripture" as used by Jerome in the homilies "tends to be reduced by simplification if compared to his commentaries and more scholarly works" can be seen as a pedagogical adjustment to his multi-ethnic audience with varying educational backgrounds.

In his *Sermons on the First Epistle of John* Augustine emphasizes the theme of love as it is focused in the biblical text. *Christian Tornau* (Würzburg) notes that Augustine connects his theology of love with anti-Donatist Polemics. Aware that he needs to persuade his Catholic congregation, Augustine adopts a more pedagogical approach in his sermons compared to his anti-Donatist treatises, focusing on the inner disposition of love as “the sole criterion of moral value.” He communicates this idea with allusions to philosophical concepts for educated listeners and with simple examples for the rest of the flock. Building on his defence of the forcible correction of the Donatists as motivated by love, Augustine develops a “new teleology of love” in his sermons. It relates to the thought that true Christian love includes correcting errant neighbors or enemies to maintain the unity of the body of Christ and ensure eternal salvation. Thus, he uses his sermons to convey both the biblical text and insights from the Donatist controversy, teaching an understanding of love that is applicable for his diverse audience in their daily lives.

Section II: Preaching on Martyrs

As exemplars of faith and virtue, martyrs are an indispensable part of Christian preaching. They are particularly prominent in sermons that are dedicated to a martyr—usually on the occasion of the day of their martyrdom. But they are also found in other sermons as commendable examples, who are to be memorialized for Christian imitation. The two preachers analyzed find different answers to the question of what needs to be done so that the martyrs can act as intercessors for the congregation. At the same time, the martyrs and their relics shed particular light on the role that the place, i.e. the city, plays in the original situation of delivering a sermon.

Dominic Keech (Brighton) offers an insight into the role of martyrs and their relics in the sermons of Gaudentius of Brescia. Comparing two homilies which address martyrdom to the Preface and set of *Tractatus* Gaudentius sent to a sick member of his congregation the corpus also “reveals the adaptability of homiletic discourse across a variety of didactic contexts, and throws light on the role of the bishop as teacher”. After introducing the life and works of Gaudentius Keech shows Gaudentius’ straightforward understanding of martyrdom: “the faithful death of the martyrs after the pattern of Christ grants them a distinctive place within the order of the church”. He outlines a double function of the memory of martyrs: By drawing a dialogue between the relics and the biblical text, the martyrs as examples are given a significant role in virtue, faith, and the conversions of pagans. At the same time, the martyrs become intercessors for the audience by transferring merits to the earthly church through prayers. As an unbaptized person, the recipient of the collection of sermons, Benevolus, cannot yet count on the intercession of the martyrs, which is why on the one hand they serve as

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