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# METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES FOR COMPARATIVE THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN<sup>1</sup>

Enfoques metodológicos para la investigación teológica comparativa sobre  
San Agustín de Hipona y el evangelio de Juan

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## Abstract

This review article concerns Augustine of Hippo's (354-430 A.D.) specific and sustained reception of John's gospel. Here, the author summarizes and evaluates a series of research methods for contextualizing core elements of the bishop of Hippo's theological points of departure and exegetical practice. Section one identifies the twin theoretical considerations of this retrospective account, including the nature of 4<sup>th</sup>-century African Christianity and late antique emergence of Pauline commentaries in Latin. Section two then identifies the central advances in methodology of the research, further identifying and reconsidering both textual and theological elements that contribute to Augustine's Johannine commentary. Section three explores primary results for both theological lines of approach of already completed research: in particular, the author determines aspects of an Augustinian

- 1 Articles and chapters discussed in this review either anticipate or directly reflect a Flemish Research Foundation (FWO-V) research project, "Reception of John's Gospel in North Africa (c. 325-533): Augustine of Hippo's *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* and Contemporary North African Sermons," conducted at the KU Leuven's History of Church and Theology research unit, under the direction of Prof. Dr. Anthony Dupont and Prof. Dr. Mathijs Lamberigts. For this reason, the Flemish scholarly influence and heartfelt gratitude of this author deserve foremost mention. Nearly all works presented here also appear in the author's 2019 doctoral dissertation, *Augustine, John, and the Donatists: Reflections on the African Context, Biblical Interpretation, & Ecclesiological Polemics* (KU Leuven).
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view of Christ and the Church, the ecclesial reality of passing controversy and biblical interpretation, as well as openings for further research on human emotion and eschatology. The result exercises renewed attention toward Augustine's reading on John and the Johannine corpus, with implications for works of his corpus to include not only the *Tractatus in euangelium Iohannis* ("Tractates on the Gospel of John") but also various popular sermons, other biblical commentaries, polemical and doctrinal works.

## Keywords

Christian North Africa; Latin Patristics; NT Interpretation; Sacramental Theology; Comparative Theological Research; Augustine of Hippo; Gospel of John.

## Resumen

Este artículo de revisión se refiere a la recepción específica y sostenida del evangelio de San Juan por parte de Agustín de Hipona (354-430 d.C.). En él, el autor resume y evalúa una serie de métodos de investigación para contextualizar elementos centrales de los puntos de partida teológicos y de la práctica exegética del obispo de Hipona. La sección uno identifica las consideraciones teóricas gemelas de este relato retrospectivo, incluyendo la naturaleza del cristianismo africano del siglo IV y la aparición en la antigüedad tardía de comentarios paulinos en latín. Seguidamente, la sección dos identifica los avances centrales en la metodología de la investigación, al reconocer y reconsiderar los elementos tanto textuales como teológicos que contribuyen al comentario de San Juan sobre Agustín. La sección tres explora los resultados primarios para ambas líneas de enfoque teológico de la investigación ya completada: en particular, el autor determina los aspectos de una visión agustiniana de Cristo y de la Iglesia, la realidad eclesial de la controversia pasajera y la interpretación bíblica, así como las aperturas para una mayor investigación sobre la emoción humana y la escatología. El resultado ejerce una atención renovada hacia la lectura de Agustín sobre San Juan y el corpus juanino, con implicaciones para las obras de su corpus que incluyen no sólo el *Tractatus in euangelium Iohannis* ("Tratados sobre el Evangelio de Juan"), sino también varios sermones populares, otros comentarios bíblicos y obras polémicas y doctrinales.

## Palabras clave

Norte de África cristiano; Patrística latina; Interpretación del NT; Teología sacramental; Investigación Teológica Comparativa; Agustín de Hipona; Evangelio de Juan.

## Introduction and State of the Art

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) continues to receive sustained attention of philosophers, theologians and church historians, biblical scholars, and more. His many written works reveal the mind of a scholar, pastor, philosopher-theologian, spiritual guide, and public advocate. As such, Augustine belonged to schools of thought and networks of influence that touched upon each of these facets of his career and ministry. Concerning biblical interpretation, as scholarship of early Christianity continues to explore,

the major patristic schools were as much a product of ancient culture, language, other philosophical or rhetorical elements, as simple geography. In this respect, Augustine belonged both to a North African tradition of earliest Latin Christianity and to a European and wider Mediterranean context (see Hunter and Yates, 2021; Toom, 2017). For interpreting the bible, Augustine was in dialogue both with famous European scholars, e.g., Ambrose and Jerome –fellow doctors of the Church–, as well as less well-known figures such as Tyconius or Optatus of Milevis, fellow North Africans. Just as the Christian Scriptures show readers insight across many years of composition from a range of cultural viewpoints (e.g., Hebrew, Greek, Roman), Augustine himself expressed a plurality of contextual influences. Augustine further demonstrates the complexity of reading the Scriptures with a profound pastoral sensibility as he sets about drafting two sets of written documents in his vast corpus: first, **in practice** through his many received sermons and tractates, and secondly **in theory** with his eminent *De doctrina christiana* (“On Christian Teaching”) –among other exegetical or polemical works. While these approaches are not so easy to separate, at times, neither is it so evident when Augustine writes strictly as a North African or as a Roman Christian.

With regard to his cultural encounters, as well as his pastoral applications and scholarly insights, one relatively undermined cause for distinction is Augustine’s extensive commentaries on the Gospel of John. The following retrospective scholarly agenda identifies key pathways or lenses by which to make integrative and systematic sense of Augustine’s Johannine comments. Additionally, we may also wish to accept less worn pathways by which to re-read Augustine’s entire collected works, in view of his preaching and teaching from the “spiritual gospel” of John the Evangelist.

As it happens, due to case studies of the past two decades (e.g., Cameron 2017, Drecoll 2017), on the one hand, and special treatment within book length studies (Harmless 2014, Quicke 2011), on the other, speaking of a complete “state of neglect” may be unfair (Milewski 2002; cf. Pope 1913).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, as the first complete such biblical commentary in the Latin patristic tradition, one expects to find greater scholarly attention in this area.<sup>4</sup> A *lectio continua*—or “careful reading”—of John’s gospel, the *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* can be compared to similar exegetical works of Origen of Alexandria and John Chrysostom, with elements of both a desk scholar and *ex tempore* preacher. In the transmarine development of Latin theology and biblical scholarship beyond North Africa, Augustine boldly took on the difficulties

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3 Indeed, as Fr. Harmless notes, Augustine’s preaching on John was an integral component of his baptismal catechesis, that is, Augustine’s efforts to prepare those marked for Christian initiation. An implication of the author’s study is that such initiation today can and should make use of Augustine’s exemplary preaching, even more with respect to his preaching on John, where the key rites of baptism and Eucharist receive prominent attention. Fr. Quicke affirms a similar, pastoral reading of the John commentary of Augustine, with important implications for our view of the Church.

4 In the Latin tradition, both St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas (13<sup>th</sup> c., A.D.) composed a peroration of the Gospel of John. Evidently, the existence of Latin Johannine commentaries became more common in the later patristic and medieval period. Other complete readings of John from the patristic period include those of Theodore of Mopsuestia, in Syriac (and Greek fragments), and St. Cyril of Alexandria, in Greek. Those of Origen of Alexandria and St. Gregory the Great are incomplete. Any notion of the Greek patristic tradition being friendlier to Platonism and therefore the Gospel of John, thus accounting for the relatively late completion of a peroration by Augustine of Hippo, seems plausible but only speculative absent further research. In fact, despite his acknowledged contribution to Christian Platonism, Augustine’s comments on John explore other, ecclesial and sacramental realities of the Gospel, perhaps a deep application of Platonic elements, yet more proximately traceable to Paul.

of expounding the Johannine text for the Christian faithful, at a period spanning the adoption of newer European translations anchored in the Old Latin versions (Houghton 2008, 2016).

Composed between 406 and 422 A.D., Augustine's 124 "tractates" on John can be read with other works of Augustine within the same literary genre, including his comments on the first letter of John, as well as (contemporaneous) comments on the Psalms and popular sermons. Yet, due to the overlapping boundaries of pastoral exhortation, biblical explanation, and firm polemical correction, the earliest tractates on John reveal how the bishop of Hippo admonished his congregations, from the pulpit, regarding the "dissident" religion of so-called Donatists (cf. Shaw 2011).<sup>5</sup> These prominent and inescapable currents of Augustine's comments in *Tractates on John*, 3-16 most tellingly have received the attention of important recent studies, including Adam Ployd's monograph (2015) and series of articles, as well as the earlier, all too brief insights of Berrouard (1969), just for example.<sup>6</sup> A properly thorough re-contextualization of these important tractates –and the immediately relevant Johannine and anti-Donatist corpora– within Christian (Roman) North Africa thus stands out as an initial, overarching research objective. In fact, precisely this element served as the primary genesis and point of departure for the research being summarized in this review article.

At the level of continuity and harmonization of Augustine's own writings and unwavering Pauline allegiances, further horizons can be detected, to include essential features of what makes the Doctor of Grace so compelling. The student and lifetime disciple, even, of St. Paul never lost his early footing in the Letters to the Romans and Galatians (Cameron 2012, pp. 133-164; cf. Martin 2001): "Augustine learned rhetoric from the speeches of Cicero, and he learned philosophy from the books of the Platonists. But *he learned Christianity from the letters of St. Paul...* the model for becoming a Catholic pastor and biblical preacher" (Cameron 2012, p. 164, emphasis mine). This fact is visibly on display in Augustine's earliest biblical commentaries, where the doctrines of salvation, human nature, and the work of Christ receive sustained attention (cf. Dupont 2008; Brown 1967, p. 144, cited in Cameron 2012, p. 135). Later in his career, however, Paul's thought and spirit are fully owned by Augustine, echoed not only in the later Pelagian controversies but also with the Donatists.

The treatises on the Church, Paul's First Letter to the *Corinthians* (and Letters to the *Philippians* and *Ephesians*), also appealed to Augustine, which we can see in his deeply ecclesial and deeply Christological comments on the Gospel of John (e.g., see *Tractate on John* 9,8-10 and 15,4-7). One also finds similar, expansive reliance upon St. Paul in the "anti-Donatist" dossier. Not least, one detects in Augustine's polemical tracts the Apostle's emphasis upon charity at 1 Cor 13:1-2 (cf. *On Baptism*, 1,8,10-1,9,12; 1,18,24; 7,53,102; *Against the Writings of Petilian*, 2,55,126; 2,77,171; *Letter to Catholics* 23, 67). The

5 One must look elsewhere for a healthy introduction to the history and nature of Donatism (cf. below). Suffice it to say here that the movement and subsequent polemics dealt with competing theologies of the Church and of the sacraments. Indeed, advances in sacramental theology –many of which were articulated and defended by Augustine or generations immediately before him– appeared as a direct result of this controversy that spanned the fourth and early fifth centuries, with roots of the debate stretching to the time of Cyprian (3<sup>rd</sup> c.).

6 It is possible to view the first sixteen tractates in view of a *lectio continua* of the early chapters of John. Yet, as my 2019 dissertation emphasizes, the anti-Donatist elements do not enter Augustine's mind when presenting the Johannine prologue with its Christo-centric focus in *Tractates on John* 1-2, where the contemporaneity and precise dating to 406-407 A.D. (cf. Milewski 2002, following Berrouard 1969), plus shared material and methods, demand a comparative reading.

Church as body and bride of Christ, a thoroughly Pauline metaphor found in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians most evidently, likewise receives ample reflection in these texts of preaching and polemics (see, e.g., *Tractate on John* 14,10; 21,8). At first pass, this reconsideration of Augustine's unceasing devotion to the Apostle Paul, even when preaching or discoursing on John (cf. Grabau-Dupont 2016), stands out as a primary finding that has colored all subsequent research, clarifying and deepening the initial point of departure.

Augustine's interest in Paul's views of Christ and the Church, thus, in turn becomes a principal element of his interpretation of John. Readers note quickly the value of Johannine texts for sacramental theology, for example, texts on baptism (John 3:3-8; *Tractates on John* 11,3-6; 12,5-8), the Eucharist (John 6:60-71; cf. *Tractates on John* 27,1), and matrimony (John 2:1; *Tractates on John* 9,2)—or texts which draw each of these together, in Augustine's Pauline imagination (John 19:34; *Tractates on John* 9,10; 15,8). One effect is a rich Christological, Augustinian ecclesiology, as the symbolic dimensions of John's text create opportunity for Augustine's way of connecting texts together, in a synthetic doctrinal and pastoral whole. The signs and discourses of John's Jesus—for example, the wedding at Cana, an evening colloquy with Nicodemus, moments with the Samaritan woman, the healing of a blind man and raising of Lazarus, meditations with his closest disciples on the eve of his passion and death, or the symbolic finding of fish after his resurrection—together invite Augustine and his readers to explore contours of a sacramental view of the Church and of the Scriptures (cf. *Tractates on John* 9,1, where Augustine speaks of the Gospel's mysteries, “contained in the sacraments”, i.e., symbols or “sacred signs”).

In what follows, this review article first lays out an orienting theoretical framework largely from the point of view of Donatist studies and late antique Pauline commentaries in the West. These two aspects, in fact, derive from the textual and theological origin of my research, as noted above; here they also become starting points for further re-evaluating Augustine's commentaries on John. A subsequent section then focuses properly upon the methods proposed for a historical reading of Augustine on the biblical texts (John, Paul) and theological positions (Christ, Church, the sacraments) principally at issue. Key points raised here include *a*) Augustine's identity as Roman and African; *b*) the value of sermons and preaching for understanding the texts and ideas at issue; and *c*) Augustine's way of linking John and Paul in his connective approach to the Christian scriptures. A summary of results and discussion then appears, with a concluding postscript aimed toward future advances in the field of studies set forth—along with some practical, pastoral implications. My emphasis, throughout, is primarily upon the methodological considerations at each turn of the journey, taking note of how questions of a systematic and pastoral nature necessarily come into focus.

## 1. Theoretical Framework: *pars Donati* and Saint Paul

As Milewski (2002) pointed out, much of the foregoing modern scholarship on the *Tractatus in Iohannis euangelium* itself focused almost exclusively upon questions of chronology: when did Augustine write groups of tractates, in what polemical and historical context, in line with what other contemporaneous writings? The result, twenty years ago, was a lamentably incomplete reading of these tractates in terms of contextual or theological insights—a major exception being the articles of George Lawless, O.S.A. Fortunately, more

recent case studies on individual tractates or groups of tractates have affirmed the existence of a new subfield, calling for continued and specialized attention of scholars. In 2008, following the author's 2006 doctoral dissertation, H.A.G. Houghton provided an illuminating and exact study on the textual basis for Augustine's tractates and sermons on the Gospel of John. In general, these demonstrated Augustine's early preference for the earlier "Old Latin" (*Vetus Latina*) renderings of John; however, Augustine often recalled a "mental text," which could draw from multiple translations or text traditions.<sup>7</sup> The same author's 2016 handbook systematically introduced and summarized scholarship on the Latin New Testament and its manuscript traditions—with frequent comparisons of Augustine and his contemporaries, as well as conscientious awareness of the African polemical contexts. These studies are of great interest because such careful reading of a philological nature can further reveal the emergence and use of technical Latin terms in sacramental theology (e.g., Ramelli 2015). Nevertheless, the theologian's eyes also permit other questions and faithful, sensitive readings of Augustine that help us to move beyond the strictly chronological.

Since the advances proposed in this review article presume the importance of Donatist Christianity, this section will not repeat a survey of scholarship on the tractates found elsewhere. Important studies on Donatism, of course, are well known, including the less recent yet monumental 1952 study of W.H.C. Frend, the more recent new history and advent of "Donatist studies" undertaken by Maureen Tilley in her life's work, or the critical evaluation of Brent Shaw (2011). The edited volume of Dupont, Gaumer and Lamberigts (2015) carries this renewed interest forward, as have other case studies of the past twenty years mentioned here for other reasons.

The following key elements of the "Donatist controversy," while not exhaustive, will nevertheless reveal some of the ideas Augustine brought to his task of explaining the holy Scriptures. *The purity of the Church*, of course, was a North African concern anchored in earlier, 3<sup>rd</sup>-century debates decided by Cyprian in the aftermath of the Decian persecution (Ephesians 5:27; see *On Baptism* 1,17,26; 4,3,4; *On Christian Teaching* 1,16,15). Similarly, *the purity of the bishop and priest* came ever more clearly into view during the Diocletian persecution in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century when the North African schism truly began (cf. *On Baptism* 4,4,5, on the power to forgive sins of heretics; *Tractates on John* 6,8). Finally, as a result, *the validity of the sacraments* duly celebrated by certain bishops and priests—dismissed as *traditores* (or "traitors") by the rigorous "Donatists"—was further called into question (cf. *Tractates on John* 5,3-4; 6,6-7, 9).

Because this third element concerned a, presumably, tainted sacrament of holy orders, it also included the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, where polemical energies were often spent.<sup>8</sup> Other issues could be presented in a lengthier treatment as well, such as the millenarian and apocalyptic tendencies of the Donatist Christians (on which, see Hoover 2018); however, the three concerns mentioned here, briefly, establish fundamental boundaries of the debate (see, further, Tilley 1999 for a replete overview). Evidently, there were implications for the role of a human minister in mediating sacramental grace to the faithful, and for this topic, Augustine found special evidence in both John and Paul.

7 A meaningful achievement of the work is the very effort to identify and organize, in particular, the many popular sermons of Augustine that meaningfully emphasized the Gospel of John.

8 One may consult, for example, Augustine's *On Baptism* on this score, which demonstrates the centrality of baptism in both Donatist and anti-Donatist theologies of the Church.

To the first issue above, for clear reasons the Pauline text of Ephesians 5:25-27 was important in both the history of Donatist and anti-Donatist discussions (cf. *On Christian Teaching* 3,34,49). What could it mean, and when could it come about, that Christ must cleanse his Church, making it holy and “without blemish” (*sine macula aut ruga*)? Concerning the second issue of a minister’s purity, one also finds in the Pauline corpus an explicit treatment of the Christ-centric nature of any Christian ministry. For example, the Apostle emphasizes the distinct ministries of human agents, when he writes “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor 3:6-7; *Tractates on John* 13,18; 26,7). Regarding the third issue, which frequently became the most evident area of debate regarding sacramental validity, texts from the Gospel of John entered especially Augustine’s recasting of the polemical lines of argument. One need only think of John 3:5-6, where Christ speaks of spiritual birth to notice a distinctly Johannine flavor to Augustine’s theology of baptism (e.g., *On Baptism* 6,12,18; *Against Petilian* 3,56,68; *Reply to Parmenian* 2,11,23).<sup>9</sup> Still, so too with John 1:33—Christ is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit! (see *Tractates on John* 5-6, in whole)—Augustine tunes his ear to the Johannine sacramental-Christological melody.

Numerous other passages from both the Johannine and Pauline corpora provided further material by which to expand the three lines of pro- and anti-Donatist insights summarily introduced here, not least concerning the Eucharist. In a key example discussed in my research, Augustine and other Church Fathers brought baptism and Eucharist together in a Pauline reading of John 19:34, where blood and water flow from Christ’s spent body as the source of his bride, the Church (*Tractates on John* 9,10 and 15,8; see Grabau-Dupont 2016). The master exegete, Augustine, thus follows a Pauline model (cf. Ephesians 5:31-32) of reading the Pentateuch on the creation of Eve (see Genesis 2:21-24) together with the creation of the new Eve, from the side of the new Adam, Christ (Romans 5:14).<sup>10</sup>

It was not merely a polemical reading of the New Testament (or similar, well-known texts from the Song of Songs), however, that allowed such verses to enter the North African controversy. After all, one must recall the one-time Donatist scholar, Tyconius, who deserves mention not only for his role in advancing polemical lines of interpretation and theorizing about the Church, but also for his nuanced “unlocking” of the Scriptures in his 4<sup>th</sup>-century “Book of Rules” (*Liber regularum*), placing him squarely within the emergent Latin tradition of Pauline commentary.<sup>11</sup> Drawing extensively from the Pauline corpus and often relying upon a typological reading of the Scriptures, the “Book of Rules” was explicitly recognized by Augustine in his work on biblical interpretation and preaching (*On Christian Teaching* 3,30,42-37,56). While the bishop of Hippo acknowledged the formative influence of these “mystical rules,” a telling further influence and characteristic of other Church Fathers is that of typological, ecclesial interpretation. Paul himself was a pioneer among early Christians in this mode of exegesis, in his readings of Genesis, for example, expressed throughout the Letter to the Romans, but especially at Rom 5:14, where Adam

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9 To be sure, a robust Augustinian theology of the Holy Spirit must admire such verses in the Gospel of John, as well as others in the Letters of Paul.

10 It is difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, to distinguish the Pauline contribution of spiritual typology from the Johannine charism for symbolism and sacramentalism in Augustine’s presentation. Methodologically, of course, reading behind the scenes one detects that both biblical authors made their impression upon Augustine as a preacher of God’s word and pastor of God’s people.

11 Other major figures in this early Latin tradition include the Ambrosiaster and Pelagius himself, not to mention Augustine!

becomes the “typos” or *forma* of Christ, “the one to come.” Michael Cameron’s 2012 study of figurative exegesis established how Augustine’s commentaries on Genesis and other early, anti-Manichaean works proved fruitful ground for re-integrating the Scriptures with an overwhelmingly Pauline lens.

Theoretically, then, this framework acknowledges both Donatist Christianity’s contribution to sacramental theology, as well as the Pauline gospel and rise of a Latin commentary tradition on the Apostle’s letters. For both of these elements can rightly be emphasized as determinative contextual and interpretative keys by which to unpack the bishop of Hippo’s encounter with John’s spiritual gospel.

## 2. Methodologies

This section first retraces important steps in re-contextualizing Augustine from the point of view of his African identity, central to which is the bishop of Hippo’s sustained encounter with the so-called Donatist faction of Christianity presented in the previous section. Second, I briefly explore the value of sermons to illuminate theological controversy, and thirdly offer a slightly expanded recounting of the Johannine-Pauline synthesis undertaken primarily in Augustine’s homilies on the Gospel of John and various popular sermons. Because I view the third contribution as the most original proposed here, this section receives greatest attention—as the evidence previewed above already confirms. To a fourth point, I recall further concrete methodological aspects that facilitate findings for each of these principal concerns.

Unavoidable works of contemporary scholarship have already launched this extensive re-reading of Augustine’s works, at least since the monumental 1967 biography of Peter Brown, whose first chapter begins stridently with “Africa.” In doing so, the author followed in the wake of earlier efforts by Monceaux (1901-1923), on the one hand, while anticipating an emergent field (e.g., Yates & Dupont 2020, Wilhite 2017, Burns & Jensen 2014, Tilley 1999).<sup>12</sup> The contributions of Augustine and other North African authors to the early Latin patristic tradition of sacramental theology, ecclesiology, and biblical interpretation stand out immediately for their sustained impact and enduring legacy. In this vein, Augustine himself stepped into a late-fourth century world in which the Latin commentary tradition on the Pauline corpus was rapidly expanding, especially in Augustine’s milieu (cf. Hoover 2018). Substantially independent of any psychological re-reading of Augustine, these contextual factors all play a necessary role in establishing new methodologies.

A second major development, also acknowledged by Brown’s compelling two-part epilogue (2000) on “New Evidence” and “New Directions,” is a shifting scholarly attention to consider in detail the promising field of Augustinian sermons. For evidence of Augustine’s views on Christ and the Church, his radical Pauline interpretation of Scriptures, and his combative moments of correcting heresy from the pulpit, the bishop of Hippo’s preaching presents an expanding series of opportunities for case studies by which to illuminate and focus the African-identity thesis. J. Patout Burns (2018) provides a recent summary of approaches to studying Augustine’s sermons, in particular. A leading source mentioned is that

12 See, also, Catherine Conybear’s forthcoming biography, *Augustine the African*.



of Anthony Dupont's revised Leuven dissertation (2012); yet one should also mention the same author's ensuing monograph (2014), prolific series of articles, and valuable edited volumes (e.g., 2017, 2018), in which Augustine's sermons feature prominently. In fact, preaching and sermons have been an important avenue to test and confirm ideas about African identity, and not only that of Augustine (Grabau 2017b).

When combined with attention to specific Donatist concerns for ritual purity, this second avenue (or lens of interpretation) energizes the first with a rigorous plan of action for scholarship. Maureen Tilley, for her part, opened the door to this generic plan for rereading Augustine and his contemporary North African authors, with her 1999 monograph, which created anew the field of Donatist studies. From the beginning, however, Tilley was keenly attentive to the importance of sermons and martyr stories—especially those attributable to others other than Augustine. She notes, for example, how a preacher engages in “world construction” (for which, more recently, see Muehlberger 2019, pp. 105-146). Various collections of sermons and homilies, some well identified as to authorship or origin, and others under revision and dispute, have captured significant scholarly attention for how they contribute to such world building or “constructed meaning.” Authors such as Bass (2014), Ployd (2015), Grabau (2017), and Hoover (2018), continue to amplify the meaning of collections of such late-antique Christian sermons, from the point of view of Augustinian and Donatist studies. Other essential studies that deepen scholarly understanding of late antique African Christianity—for other social and political forms of analysis, while appealing to evidence of preachers and sermons—include those of Antonino Isola (1990), Leslie Dossey (2010), and Brent Shaw (2011). In thematizing both sermons and African identity, Isola, Shaw, and Dossey's work represents a wider effort among historians of early Christianity and the ancient world, beyond that of Tilley and those engaged in the more limited scope of Donatist studies. Methodologically speaking, then, sermons prove central to uncovering the full nature of the ancient world of Latin Christianity in northwest Africa.

Beyond these somewhat generic trends, in collaboration with senior colleagues at the Catholic University Leuven (Belgium), my research has also isolated a further methodological keychain by which to reread much of Augustine's biblical theology and thinking—that is the inescapably Pauline dimension of his Johannine sermons and commentaries (cf. Grabau-Dupont 2016). Since the divine word played a perfecting role evident throughout the bishop of Hippo's corpus, at least from the mid-390s, the potential implications are thus open-ended. Cameron (2009) and Bright (1999), among others, succinctly retrace the decisive journey of Augustine into the thought world of the Scriptures as a young priest: from a lingering Manichaean, Neoplatonic phase of preparation to the mature bishop of Hippo in later years. Memory of the pervasive influence of Saint Paul (and Pauline literature) upon the doctor of grace and subsequent Christian theology needs less than a breath to recall, though Cameron (2012) and Martin (2001) stand out as recent examples—as the text above clearly states.

A seminal aspect of my research since the publication of Grabau-Dupont 2016, then, has been to evaluate the synthetic and “mutual *xenogamy*” of the Pauline and Johannine corpora at play in Augustine's writings. As the bishop's connective approach demonstrates, the two biblical authors are not so “foreign” (*xenos*) after all. Nor, in fact, are the pair so unevenly yoked. Rather, the bishop of Hippo freely reads the Gospel of John and Johannine letters in light of the letters of Saint Paul, and vice versa. One may view this expression as a statement of hypothesis; however, it is one repeatedly confirmed. The phenomenon occurs not least in the areas that are also at times distinctive of Augustine's embedded-ness within a North African (and transmarine, early European) spiritual and intellectual culture: for example, particular synthetic

topics include Christ and the Church, sacramental theology, and typological exegesis, just to name a few of the more prominent.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, in terms of concrete methodological considerations by which to realize these still somewhat conceptual programmatic elements, I must mention only two aspects: first, that of comparative attention to genre, and second, that of discerning new degrees of inter-textuality powered by modern search engines and databases. To the first, the genre and precise context of an Augustinian turn of phrase or entire line of thinking is a crucial, undeniably important factor in harmonizing or summarizing the bishop of Hippo's ideas and practice. As implied throughout this review article and the underlying research, Augustine's sermons or doctrinal works stand on different rhetorical ground than his polemical counterarguments, launched against literary adversaries. Comparison, at times, illuminates how in fact polemical interpretations or reasoning directly informs a more doctrinal foundation, especially on matters of Christian purity, the nature of Christ's church, the sanctity (or personal holiness) of Christ's ministers. On the second aspect, as scholars of Augustine will already be familiar, the now fully online *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed.—published under the direction of the late Cornelius P. Mayer, O.S.A., and in connection with the *Augustinus-Lexikon*—is indispensable for its text search functions. Reading the *Tractatus in euangelium Iohannis* consecutively or “line-by-line” has its advantages, but also its limitations. Similarly, reading Augustine's comments in the *Tractatus* alone, without consideration of the Psalm commentaries, popular sermons, and especially his polemical treatises, neglects a more robust, diachronic and comparative scope. As it happens, using digital media on platforms such as the CAG-3 (or Library or Latin Texts, available through Brepols), facilitates such intertextual studies in the vast expanse of Augustinian (and patristic) writings.

The cross-referenced text of the CAG-3 and searchability of Latin stemmata creates a dynamic work environment for both precise, comparative philological research with a tremendous breadth of inquiry. This upgrade to research methods, as one expects with other advances in the digital humanities, allows the reader to notice when and where, for example, Augustine makes use of a particular Johannine (or Pauline) verse, in any translation or in a precise wording.<sup>14</sup> Searching such forms or strings of Latin text, thanks to the database, may also be limited to a precise genre or sub-corpus within the whole. One may search Augustine's use of a Latin term, whether in his preaching, exegetical work, or doctrinal and polemical works. Even a short study of how Augustine deploys the Cyprianic adage, “*nulla salus extra ecclesiam*,” offers immediate results deserving further reflection (cf. Grabau 2017b). Of course, direct patristic citations—when evident—are clearly indicated in the dynamic, searchable online text, as well. One must develop a personal approach to such use of database research.<sup>15</sup>

13 More difficult, but for this reason perhaps a welcome challenge for scholarly energies, is to explore the fundamental and inclusive dynamic of Johannine contributions to the architecture of grace in the thought of Augustine of Hippo, so commonly (and rightly) assessed for its Pauline inspiration (Burns 1980; cf. Grabau 2021a). This is a major avenue that merits further scholarly attention and interpretative analysis.

14 In this respect, the guiding principles of Houghton (2008, 2016) are crucial for recognizing Augustine's use of a “mental text,” especially when preaching, which reflects the overall flexibility of his biblical citations, and, thereby, his synthetic (organic) reading that accommodates both the letter and the spirit. Houghton (2008) also identifies every sermon in which Augustine took a Johannine verse or pericope as his Scriptural point of origin, more often in connection with a public, liturgical reading, at a time preceding standardization of any lectionary.

15 The Works of St. Augustine (WSA) for the 21<sup>st</sup> century series, a nearly complete English translation of the entire Augustinian corpus, is also now available in a fully digitized and searchable format.

### 3. Discussion of Results and Future Research

In this section, I present a summary review of important results achieved by this research project, in view of the conceptual and methodological elements outlined in previous sections. To be sure, many results have already been anticipated above in my presentation of the orienting principals of this research. Therefore, rather than discuss the entire set of ten or more book chapters and articles that have been presented to the scholarly public (cf. Grabau 2019), here I will recall only prominent examples already referenced (Grabau-Dupont 2016, Grabau 2017a-b). In addition, I also introduce two subsequent publications following the public defense of my doctoral thesis, which further represent new approaches for exploring, as it happens, Augustine's interests in human emotion, perfectibility, and eschatology (Grabau 2021a, 2021b).

The foremost, original contribution of Grabau-Dupont 2016 (see also Grabau 2017a) confirms the project thesis of viewing Augustine's comments on John in relation to: a) his anti-Donatist, sacramental theological points of departure, and b) his Pauline, typological modes of interpreting the text of John. The primary source material in Augustine's corpus are his many tractates and sermons. Augustine's interpretations for a magnificent constellation of Johannine and Pauline verses, as the authors demonstrate, provide a telling sketch of his development as a scholar and biblical commentator. To be precise, in *Tractates on John* 9 and 15 Augustine explores a faithful and thoroughly Pauline reading of a rather distinctly Johannine image, that of Christ's blood—and water—pouring from his side (John 19:34) on the Cross. Together, these precious gifts prefigure the holy sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. In this way, the Johannine outpouring constitutes in an elemental way the first seeds of the Church, whose life is created through baptism into Christ (John 3:6-8; Romans 6:1-10) and sharing in his body (1 Corinthians 11:24).<sup>16</sup>

Here, one finds a regular pattern of Augustine recalling the Letter to the Ephesians and Genesis as he applies the text of Romans 5:14 to that of John's gospel. The goal is somehow anti-Donatist, but it is more than that: Augustine rediscovers again and again the depths of the mystery that is the Church. As it happens, the 2016 article also dives into the earlier, anti-Manichaean polemical uses for some of the same Pauline verses on Christ as the bridegroom of the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32). In the *Tractates*, building on his own earlier works, Augustine further applies the same Pauline typological reading of Genesis, with the creation of woman from man's side. In this way, Augustine puts his Johannine-Pauline sewing to polemical use against key Donatist teachings on the Church and sacraments of Christ. Here we have the entire sent of issues on display: joining biblical texts distinctively, focus on theological points of interest to North African Christianity, and a preacher's sensitivity to communicating doctrine effectively—at times against the grain of the need for polemical corrections.

At the same time, it must be said that the origin of Augustine's pastoral typology on display in his *Tractates* was drawn from a previous period of controversy, which mainly concerned human nature and biblical interpretation (Manicheanism). Therefore, in terms of results for my research agenda, we can see

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<sup>16</sup> Here, we find another avenue for an extended case study: how Augustine draws upon both Paul and John's texts in order to formulate his (pastoral/preaching) theology of baptism and Eucharist. Emphasizing the textual basis for Augustine's theology, even in the anti-Donatist text *On Baptism* can almost certainly become valuable research. Again, this example hints at unveiling Johannine perspectives on mediation of grace to be found in writings of our notably Pauline doctor of grace.

how, at least in this case, Augustine directly overturns the third Donatist core doctrine referenced above, that is, the source of the sacraments.<sup>17</sup> In fact, he also addresses a prevalent North African concern for ministerial purity, as well as purity and holiness of the Church herself. Thus, the Pauline—and, admittedly, anti-Manichaean—aspects of Augustine’s reading of John are indeed constitutive and orienting. And yet, the anti-Donatist readings of John 19:34 found within *Tractates* (and elsewhere) further contextualize Augustine’s Pauline, typological approach.

It can be stated explicitly that such a diachronic analysis should also bear fruit when considering the bishop of Hippo’s later writings—where further such work must be continued. Here, comparison between the preaching of Augustine and his polemical works against Manichaean and Donatist positions further validates the second methodological consideration above, while expanding the scope of implications for the third. What remains underexplored in Grabau-Dupont 2016 and Grabau 2017a, then, is how Augustine’s anti-Donatist or Pauline interpretations of John are likewise a function of his African identity. Is a sacramental and ecclesial emphasis in reading the Gospel enough to claim an African or non-African stream of influence? This shared African context appears with greater clarity in Grabau 2017b, which takes up Tilley’s invitation to read certain anonymous—or, as the case may be, “mis-identified”—sermons for their apparent Donatist theological and ecclesiological commitments.

In this case, I look to the first doctrine referenced above, that of ecclesial purity in North African Christianity, with the often repeated saying of Cyprian of Carthage about salvation only within the Church (*nulla salus extra ecclesiam*) explicitly front of mind. The text of interest is John 4:23-24, where Christ speaks of “true worshippers”—a potential occasion for polemicizing within the *milieu* of Christian North Africa. To summarize, on the one hand, Augustine consistently explores in the *Tractates* a universalizing, Catholic view of the Church, made up of those who worship “in spirit.” On the other hand, however, a presumably contemporary homilist (thoroughly studied by François Leroy and later Alden Bass, who continues to provoke scholarly intrigue, if not consensus) apparently addresses, instead, those who worship “in truth.” The second author presents some degree of familiarity with concerns in the Church in North Africa, if not evident Donatist sympathies. Though both authors move in somewhat different directions, which tellingly reflect dissimilar not to say incompatible views of ecclesial purity, one also recognizes elements of a shared religious and theological context. Pointing to the outsized influence of Tyconius and his mystical rules on this score, unfortunately, is more ambitious than exactly demonstrable. Still, Augustine’s principled reception of the Tyconian “key,” that of a divided or mixed body, shows its graceful shadow here.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, again to the point of sermons and bringing together the Gospel of John with other polemical or doctrinal concerns, two published case studies expand the horizon of application for these methodologies. On the one hand, Grabau 2021a, presented for the Oxford Patristics Conference in August 2019, explores a fundamental doctrine at issue in sacramental theology, that of grace and its mediation. By holding up Augustine’s ways of commenting upon John 1:17 and, e.g., Galatians 4:4-5, my lecture observed how the Johannine mention of grace received a somewhat Pauline interpretation for Augustine in his *Tractates*.

17 Here, baptism and Eucharist are at issue explicitly, though priesthood and the status of human ministers is directly implicated as well.

18 As it happens for such a case study, Grabau 2017b does not emphasize the Pauline vector of interpretation as much as a comprehensive, book-length treatment must.

Not surprisingly, this Pauline interpretation follows a precise, four-fold schemata of grace and the law—developed by Augustine elsewhere (and frequently observed by scholars). A crucial question for the research thus becomes, “Does Augustine allow for a distinctively Johannine view on grace and the perfectibility of human nature?” As it happens, my lecture preferred to propose such a question rather than to answer it satisfactorily. In a preliminary way, it seems that Augustine’s ideas about the law and grace in *Tractate 1* on the Gospel of John are colored by a classically Pauline division, the well-known four-part schemata. In this respect, as the expansive bibliography on sin and grace in the thought of Augustine will demonstrate, perhaps Augustine with his specific configuration of the ideas and verses at issue came to symbolize an African approach, particularly in later debates with the forms of Pelagianism.

Grabau 2021b follows this shift in polemical concerns toward the perfectibility of nature, an issue directly linked to Pelagian theological anthropology. In the article, I highlight Augustine’s reception of Stoic impassibility—that is, *apatheia*, or “emotionlessness”—in his reading of John. Again, the rhetorical and polemical context for Augustine has changed in this set of case studies. Nevertheless, a doctrinal continuity and interpretative faithfulness is evident.<sup>19</sup> So often the ancient debate surrounding Stoic philosophy revolved around the morality of certain emotions, such as sadness (cf. Oppel 2004). Grabau 2021b gently steps into that debate, while looking toward practical implications even today. The result is to highlight how in pastoral contexts Augustine tends to read one Pauline text, that of 1 Thessalonians 4:13 on “grieving without hope,” at least partially in view of Christ’s emotions on display in the Gospel of John.

In this way, for issues relating to Stoic philosophy Augustine naturally reads Paul in light of John, with frequent mention of telling passages such as the raising of Lazarus, for example, when explaining Paul’s cautions against emotional excess. As a result, with such evidence, my principal thesis of Augustine’s Johannine-Pauline combinative reading is realized, again on display in Augustine’s preaching, yet with no apparent strong confirmation of African (or transmarine, European) Christian identity. Still, undercurrents of potential Donatist influence in the eschatological aspect of human possibility continue to prevail. One finds eschatology linked plainly with emotion, for example, when Augustine later considers the blessed saints who enjoy beatitude in heaven (see *City of God*, 14.6-8). Gabriël Quicke (2011) and Adam Ployd (2015) nicely illuminate the pilgrim nature of Christ’s wayfaring bride, the Church—both in Augustine’s comments on Johannine literature and the Psalms. So, too, the sermons studied in Grabau 2021b explore further the bishop’s ecclesially-minded approach to the Church and the Word (cf. McCarthy 2015).

## Concluding Postscript

The question of continuity looms, especially in studying the *Tractates on John*, comments on the Latin Psalter, and popular sermons. As it happens, each of these sub-corpora serves as valuable repositories of Augustine’s Johannine-Pauline insights (cf. Cameron 2017). We also find the bishop’s contextual use of doctrine and exemplary pastoral sensibility—as well as, admittedly, his polemical preoccupations. What appears as most promising, then (yet also a touch daunting), is how a Johannine view of grace and sacramental theology—

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19 Some Augustinian scholarship has linked Stoic and Pelagian ideologies of human nature, thus further extending the possible scope of case studies in this direction.

built in conjunction with a Pauline typology—might function as global interpretative key, by which to re-read Augustine. In this respect, one must resist the temptation to view the Donatist contribution as merely passing and so circumstantial. Yet so too one must remain open to the importance of Augustine's comprehensive development of anti-Pelagian tactics in later years. For both polemical contexts, and more importantly as a productive biblical exegete, Augustine already stands in prime position for rendering the early Latin (and North African?) reception of John more recognizable. Further scholarship must clarify in greater detail this promising line of inquiry, not least in view of the complex field of less-studied Latin patristic sermons and literature.

Two final points of hermeneutical accuracy bear considering as practical implications of this research not yet brought to a satisfactory close. The first is to propose a restriction of the African identity thesis. It is tempting to revise the efforts of Monceaux or Frend with an upgraded summary of African Christian identity. All the same, doing so must concede forms of diversity and plurality beyond pre-conceived norms. Interest in the presence of a distinctively Johannine or Pauline biblical imagination in Roman North Africa could yield positive results, which a focus upon polemics may overlook. For example, the prominent figure of Tyconius, a giant of early Latin biblical interpretation, has been neglected within the framework of this research project. One can and must integrate this author (and Optatus of Milevis, further) without anxious concern for confirming the African identity thesis. This open-handedness allows for greater appreciation of how Augustine adopted certain Tyconian rules of interpretation—or indeed, how the Gospel of John was received in Roman Africa at a time when the letters of Paul were receiving such extensive attention. In other words, a study of the importance of Paul and John for Augustine cannot alone sustain the thesis of properly characterizing African identity.

The second extension is a restatement of the final methodological point already present throughout this review. In other words, mutual interpretation of biblical authors tellingly provides an exciting catalyst for networks of preachers and interpreters. The mysticism of Paul—not to mention the “difficulty” of his thought, at times, observed in 1 Peter 4:18—and the spirituality of John together offer a crucial intersection of similarity and shared resources. This commonality is, likewise, marked at times with dissimilarity and distinctive theological and especially ecclesial insights. On topics of sacramental grace and human perfectibility, I think Augustinian scholarship must consider the determinative importance of John, within and beyond the Donatist controversy. As I have indicated, one need not neglect the on-going presence of Pauline influence throughout Augustine's thought when entering his works hunting for Johannine signatures.

The research objectives stated above have thus been partially achieved. One strength of the project design is to account for multi-variable analysis in approaching Augustine's reception of John, theologically speaking. It is a more demanding and less concrete task than strict attention to the bishop's textual reception and remains only slightly open to criticism of interpretative imagination. In other words, the prevailing winds of John the Evangelist and Paul the Apostle are, without a doubt, among the most visible and reliable guides for sailing through the Augustinian canon. To paraphrase, Augustine was indeed a student of Paul, and yet surely, he was a greater friend of Christ, the Eternal and Incarnate Word. As the *Confessions* carefully documents, whatever the historical accuracy of events leading up to his narrated spiritual conversion, it was both the Gospel of John *and* the Letters of Paul which nourished the young, conflicted Augustine.

To an extent, the future priest and bishop followed a trend of Latin reception of Paul. It can be argued, I suggest, that Augustine also inaugurated a rigorous Latin reception of John and the Johannine letters. Thus, together with due mention of Platonism, it was Johannine sacramentalism that escorted the young skeptic into a richly symbolic and Pauline-typological mode of interpreting biblical literature. As a rising, sailing star in the North African clergy, Augustine had returned to his early love of poetry, figure, and the expressive dynamism of the human word—now mysteriously encompassed within the innate vitality and humility of the divine Word Incarnate, who remains our best example of perfect and total communication. Attending to the symbolic, sacramental, and spiritual mindset of Paul and John at work in Augustinian and other patristic texts is a crucial, on-going task not only for historians and exegetes, but for theology and the perennial “love of wisdom,” as well. May these humbly proposed methods for entering such a subdiscipline promote additional research on the texts and authors mentioned here.

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