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Review of the doctoral dissertation of Fr. Mgr. lic. Jude Shang Njegani, *The Pedagogy of Love in the Sermons of Saint Augustine*, written under the supervision of Rev. Prof. UKSW. Dr. hab. Mirosław Mejzner SAC, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Faculty of Theology, Warsaw 2026, pp. 308.

The dissertation submitted by Fr. Jude Shang Njegani takes up a topic of enduring relevance for theological reflection, spiritual theology, and pastoral practice: the formation of the Christian person and community through love (*caritas*), as it is preached, taught, and enacted by Saint Augustine. The Candidate proposes to read Augustine's sermons not merely as doctrinal statements, but as a coherent and intentional pedagogy - one that aims at the conversion of desire, the ordering of love (*ordo amoris*), and the shaping of ecclesial communion.

From the perspective of theological anthropology and ecclesiology, Augustine's preaching is a privileged locus in which the Church's faith becomes a formative event: the Word, proclaimed and interpreted within the liturgical assembly, aims to shape not only convictions but also desires and habits. In this sense, the Candidate's decision to approach Augustine through the sermon genre is methodologically well-founded. It allows him to read *caritas* as the 'inner form' of Christian life, not as sentiment, but as participation in the life of God that orders the will and builds communion.

I. Research problem, sources, method, and contents of the dissertation.

The research problem is formulated clearly and adequately for doctoral-level work. The Candidate asks how Augustine conveys and nurtures love in preaching, and how love functions as a pedagogical principle within the ecclesial act of the sermon. This central question is developed through subsidiary concerns: the theological foundations of love, the object and effects of love, the biblical and sacramental horizon of charity, and the practical formation of the hearer toward a life shaped by *caritas*.

The chosen focus on preaching also has an important theological advantage: it makes visible the unity of Augustine's doctrinal teaching, biblical exegesis, and pastoral concern. The sermon, as Augustine practises it, is neither a detached lecture nor a purely moral exhortation; it is a concrete ecclesial act ordered toward conversion (*conversio*) and the healing of disordered loves. The dissertation generally respects this unity and keeps the analysis close to Augustine's pastoral intention.

Concerning Chapter I, the Candidate rightly begins from the theological origin of love in God. This is a sound point of departure, because it prevents an ethical reduction of charity. The chapter shows that, in Augustine, love is inseparable from truth and from the confession of God as the source of every authentic movement of the heart. Such a foundation is necessary if the later pedagogical claims are to remain genuinely theological.

Chapters II and III develop the dynamic dimension of love: its object and its effects. The Candidate's exposition of *ordo amoris* is particularly valuable, because it frames formation as a re-ordering of desire toward God and, therefore, toward the neighbour. In doing so, the dissertation highlights the practical realism of Augustine's preaching: charity is tested in concrete relationships, in forgiveness, and in the daily discipline of the heart. The treatment of the effects of love further clarifies that charity is transformative: it forms moral agency and gives a distinctive Christian shape to virtues, habits, and communal life.

Chapter IV, devoted to the 'biblical pedagogy of love', offers an important hermeneutical synthesis. The Candidate shows that, for Augustine, Scripture is properly understood only within the horizon of charity, because the purpose of revelation is not mere information but the formation of the believer into Christ. This chapter is a strong place in the dissertation, as it safeguards the theological claim that interpretation and sanctification are inseparable when Scripture is received in the Church.

Finally, Chapter V deserves special mention for its integrative character. By placing Augustine's preaching within the arc of his conversion, ecclesial responsibilities, and episcopal service, the Candidate avoids reducing 'pedagogy' to technique. He reads pedagogy as a spiritual and ecclesial logic: teaching is an act of charity, and charity seeks to build communion. This chapter also helps the reader to perceive Augustine as a pastor-theologian for whom doctrinal clarity and pastoral solicitude belong together.

Methodologically, the dissertation employs a theological-patristic approach grounded in close reading of selected sermons (especially those related to 1 John, the Psalms, and the Gospels) and supported by engagement with Augustine's broader corpus as well as secondary literature. This approach is in principle correct for the discipline: it treats the

sermon as an ecclesial event of interpretation and formation - located within liturgy, addressed to concrete hearers, and ordered toward conversion of life.

The work is well structured. After the introductory matter (pp. 17–25), the dissertation is divided into five chapters: Chapter I, “Characteristics of Love” (pp. 26–79), establishes the fundamental theological profile of love and its origin in God; Chapter II, “The Object of Love in the Sermons of Saint Augustine” (pp. 80–155), describes the ordering of loves toward God and neighbor; Chapter III, “The Effects of Love” (pp. 156–191), focuses on charity’s transformative consequences for the heart and moral agency; Chapter IV, “The Biblical Pedagogy of Love” (pp. 192–223), treats love as a hermeneutical key to Scripture; and Chapter V, “The Pedagogy of Love in the Life and Preaching of Augustine” (pp. 224–256), integrates biographical and pastoral elements, showing how Augustine’s own journey and episcopal ministry illuminate the formative logic of his preaching. The work ends with a General Conclusion (pp. 257–259) and a bibliography (from p. 260).

II. Formal and substantive merits of the dissertation.

In my assessment, the dissertation possesses several notable strengths that deserve to be articulated explicitly.

First, the topic is well chosen, and the theological intuition is sound: Augustine’s *caritas* is not treated as an abstract virtue, but as the inner form of Christian existence and a criterion of ecclesial authenticity. Fr. Jude Shang Njegani rightly shows that Augustine teaches love to form people and communities, not merely to inform them.

Second, the work has internal coherence. The progression from foundations (God as source of love), through the ordering and effects of love, to the biblical hermeneutics of love, and finally to Augustine’s life and preaching, provides a stable narrative line and prevents the study from dispersing into unrelated thematic essays.

Third, the dissertation evidences competence in handling patristic material and in presenting it theologically. The Candidate follows Augustine’s logic with care and presents the argument in a readable and largely systematic form, with an evident sensitivity to spiritual-theological implications.

Fourth, Chapter V deserves particular appreciation: by integrating Augustine’s biography and episcopal ministry, the Candidate avoids reducing pedagogy to technique

and interprets preaching as an ecclesial act shaped by grace, conversion, and the building of communion.

Fifth, the conclusion is pastorally meaningful without abandoning the theological register. The Candidate succeeds in showing that the pedagogy of love is simultaneously doctrinal, spiritual, and ecclesial: it concerns the truth about God, the conversion of desire, and the concrete practices that build *communio*.

Formally, the dissertation has a clear structure, a list of abbreviations, and a broad bibliography that includes primary sources and a significant body of secondary literature. The work evidences considerable effort and a genuine scholarly engagement with the chosen problem.

Sixth, the dissertation shows sensitivity to the distinction between charity as a gift and charity as a task. Even when the argument moves toward ethical consequences, the Candidate generally maintains the primacy of grace and presents Augustine's exhortations as rooted in God's initiative. This theological balance is crucial for avoiding moralism and for preserving the properly soteriological character of Augustine's pedagogy.

Seventh, the work's ecclesial perspective deserves recognition. The Candidate does not isolate love as a private virtue, but repeatedly connects it with the building of *communio*: love creates the Church as a living body, shapes relationships within the community, and becomes a criterion of Christian authenticity. This aspect is particularly important for contemporary formation, where individualism often obscures the communal and sacramental form of Christian life.

Eighth, the dissertation is written in clear academic English that makes the argument accessible. The prose is largely disciplined, and the structure enables the reader to follow the progression of the thesis. At the same time, the author's pastoral concern is perceptible, which makes the study relevant not only for patristic specialists but also for theological pedagogy and formation practice.

III. Remarks, conclusions, and questions.

Alongside these merits, the dissertation contains a few points that, in my judgement, require clarification or improvement. They do not undermine the overall value of the work, but addressing them would strengthen methodological transparency and academic discipline.

1) Corpus and representativeness. The thesis works with a selected set of sermons; the criteria of selection (chronology, liturgical setting, thematic focus, and textual basis/edition) should be stated more explicitly. An appendix listing the principal sermons (numbering, edition/translation) together with a brief rationale for their representativeness would strengthen methodological transparency.

2) The category of “pedagogy”. While the notion of a “pedagogy of love” is persuasive, it remains at times too broad. A short methodological note could specify sermon-level pedagogical units (exposition/egesis, doctrinal clarification, exhortation, correction, consolation, performative prayer) and clarify how textual observations yield pedagogical conclusions. It would also be worthwhile to use Augustine’s own reflections on preaching (*De doctrina christiana*, Book IV) as a controlling framework.

3) Bibliography and editorial finish. The bibliography is wide, but some items appear only loosely connected to the patristic/theological core and should be either justified or omitted. The dissertation also needs careful proofreading of the front matter and a few transitions where the argument becomes more associative than analytical; these refinements would improve scholarly credibility and presentation.

4) Interdisciplinary references. Occasional psychological or ‘well-being’ language may remain as brief pastoral applications, provided it is clearly marked as such and kept subordinate to the patristic argument.

These remarks are offered in a constructive spirit and are intended to strengthen methodological transparency and academic discipline.

In view of the above, I propose two questions for the doctoral defense:

Since the dissertation reads Augustine’s sermons as a “pedagogy of love”, could the Candidate describe the internal pedagogy of a sermon: the steps by which Augustine moves from Scripture to the conversion of desire and concrete practice, while safeguarding the primacy of grace?

Which criteria governed the selection of the sermon corpus, and how does the Candidate justify this corpus as representative of Augustine’s preaching across different liturgical and pastoral contexts?

IV. Conclusion.

The study of the problem undertaken is methodologically and factually correct. The objections, questions, or doubts raised in the review can be discussed. The doctoral student

has undoubtedly achieved the stated goal. The reviewed dissertation is a scientific work and meets the requirements of the *Ustawa z dnia 14 marca 2003 roku art. 31 o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki (Dz. U. z 2017 r. poz. 1789*. Therefore, I make a motion to the Council for the Discipline of Theological Sciences of Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw to continue the doctoral dissertation of Rev. Mgr. lic. Jude Shang Njehani.

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