

Review of Fr. Jude Shang Negoni's Doctoral Dissertation Entitled: *The Pedagogy of Love in the Sermons of Saint Augustine*, Warsaw 2026, p. 308, Written Under the Supervision of Rev. Prof. Mirosław Mejzner SAC

1. The Problem of the Trial

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), considered one of the most outstanding Christian theologians, is rarely studied in terms of the pedagogical significance of his homiletic works. Therefore, it is commendable that Fr. Jude Shang Negoni has created a work that focuses on selected sermons of Bishop Hippo. The author aims to analyze Augustine's rhetorical strategies, biblical hermeneutics, and pastoral intentions. Additionally, the PhD candidate seeks to demonstrate how Augustine directed the listener away from disordered desires (*cupiditates*) toward the love of God (*caritas*). He plans to achieve this by selecting sermons from Augustine's homiletic works, specifically the "First Letter of St. John", "Psalms", and the "Gospels". In the doctoral candidate's opinion, Augustine's homilies represent a pedagogical approach where teaching and charity are inseparable. The historical and theological context for this exploration is Augustine's own life and spiritual journey, from youthful chaos to conversion, along with the concept of *Ordo Amoris* and the ministry of Bishop Hippo Regius (cf. "The Pedagogy of Love", p. 5).

The proposed source base for the reviewed work includes a critical edition of Augustine's pastoral writings in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina: Augustinus Hipponensis, In Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos*, edited by Bernard Dombart and Alfons Kalb, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 36/1-2. Vienna: 1896-1900 and Augustinus Hipponensis, *Six Sermons in the People d'Afrique*, edited by François Dolbeau, Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1996. Unfortunately, the dissertation lacks a critical edition for *Enarrationes in Psalmos* and does not justify the choice of the editions used. Furthermore, it does not provide a description of preliminary issues, such as detailed analyses related to the dating of individual works or descriptions of their textual structure. The absence of a historical-

philological description raises concerns about the author's use of the critical apparatus of individual editions and the commentaries included therein, which are essential for understanding the history of the work and its interpretation.

In the context of the search for appropriate models of Christian education and formation, the topic of Fr. Jude Shang Negoni's doctoral dissertation is commendable. It is also worth mentioning the commitment and competence of his supervisor, Rev. Mirosław Mejnzer SAC, a Polish patrologist specializing in eschatology, Christology, and Christian anthropology.

2. Content of the Hearing

The dissertation, which comprises 308 pages, includes a dedication, acknowledgments, bibliographic description, declaration and approval, list of abbreviations, introduction, five chapters, final conclusions, and bibliography. In the introduction, the author correctly defines the research goal: "The central question of this dissertation is: How does Augustine convey and nurture love in his sermons as a pedagogical method?" ("The Pedagogy of Love", p. 17). He also describes the assumed research perspective, stating, "This research aims to articulate Augustine's pedagogy of love as it appears in his sermons and to analyze its theological, rhetorical, and pastoral dimensions" ("The Pedagogy of Love", p. 18). Finally, the research methods are outlined: "The inquiry into the monographic theme here, Augustine's pedagogy of love, chiefly grounded in his sermons, allows for analytical engagement from multiple synchronic and diachronic perspectives: philological, historical-literary, philosophical, and theological" ("The Pedagogy of Love", p. 18). However, I believe that the interpretative perspective adopted is too broad, raising concerns about research imprecision. The absence of a clearly defined main research method leads to generalizations in the initial assumptions and a lack of clarity in the final conclusions.

In light of these methodological assumptions, the author ultimately points to the theological method appropriate to patristic sciences: "Methodologically, this dissertation adopts a theological-patristic approach, engaging in detailed readings of key sermons from Augustine's corpus (notably those on 1 John, the Psalms, and the Gospels), with a focus on rhetorical strategy, scriptural exegesis, and pastoral purpose" ("The Pedagogy of Love", p. 18). After reviewing the work, it seems that this methodology is not effectively utilized.

The author references existing publications on Augustine's pedagogy (A. Nygren, J. Rist, R.A. Markus and C. Harrison, R. Burnaby, O. O'Donovan, J. Marion, G. Bonner, P. Madec,

R. Cribore, G. Lambot, D. Smith and J. Smith, J.K.A. Smith, R. Williams), noting two research gaps: how Augustine's concept of love becomes a pedagogical process realized through preaching and pastoral commitment, and how he integrates this with the theological anthropology he adopted (cf. "The Pedagogy of Love", pp. 19-24). The author also presents the structure of the work, which consists of five comprehensive chapters (cf. "The Pedagogy of Love", pp. 19-20). In these chapters, he considers homiletic-pastoral strategies through three interpretative keys: "The three key words of this dissertation are: *caritas*, *pedagogia*, and *Sermones*" (cf. "The Pedagogy of Love", p. 19).

3. Substantive Evaluation

The PhD dissertation presented for review has two significant methodological shortcomings: firstly, the author does not apply the patristic method as announced; secondly, he relies on argumentation from authority in a rather passive manner.

The doctoral dissertation raises doubts regarding the research method employed. Although the author claims to use the patristic method in the introduction, he fails to implement it effectively throughout the work. After initially identifying pedagogical themes specific to Augustine in his selected pastoral works, the author does not illuminate the historical context of Augustine's writings (whether it be the Commentary on the Psalms or the Gospel according to St. John). Consequently, he does not answer the crucial question for patrologists: why is this theological approach the most representative of Augustine of Hippo as an early Christian writer? This interpretation reflects the necessity of employing the historical method as an auxiliary in patristic research.

Furthermore, the author does not conduct a philological and theological analysis of Augustine's texts, which is another fundamental aspect of the patristic method that is lacking in this work. Such analysis is essential for providing a comprehensive explanation of the theological content within the writings of the Church Father. Augustine's teachings should be presented chronologically to reveal any development in the analyzed topics. This aspect is also absent from the dissertation.

The author quotes only the English translations of Augustine's *Sermons*, without referencing the original texts or the critical editions in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (he quotes for *Sermones* only the text of their English translation, included in the series *Augustinus Hipponensis, The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*, Part III, vol. 1-

10: *Sermons*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle, New York, 1992-1997) A similar approach is found when citing Augustine's treatise *In evangelium Ioannis*, where quotations come solely from the English translation (Augustinus Hipponensis, *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century. Homilies on the Gospel of John*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. Allan Fitzgerald, New York, 2009-2020). This pattern continues with *In Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos* and *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (we find in the work only the English translation by Boniface Ramsey, ed. Daniel E. Doyle – Thomas Martin, New York, 2008) or for *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Expositions on the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding, ed. John E. Rotelle, New York 2000-2004).

As a result, the dissertation lacks a genuine patristic analysis of the original Augustine texts, relying instead on English translations. This reliance on translation limits the potential for thorough patristic analysis, preventing the work from being classified as a dissertation in the field of patrology.

Additionally, the work predominantly employs methods based on argumentation from authority. In theology, *argumentum ad verecundiam* serves as a specific tool rooted in theological tradition and institutional teaching. However, the author uses this approach in a manner that can be seen as an abuse, representing a significant methodological error.

The author typically constructs arguments based on the following scheme:

- a thesis from Augustine's text
- an opinion from selected contemporary theologians
- a concluding sentence summarizing the paragraph.

While referencing recognized scholars specializing in Augustinian theology is valid, the same cannot be said for citing historical theologians or unrelated figures, such as Martin Luther or Thomas Aquinas, as seen in footnote 37 on page 28. Such citations, alongside references to figures like Leonardo da Vinci or contemporary psychologists and pedagogues, dilute the theological analysis and result in generalizations that lack critical commentary on Augustine's own text (e.g.: page 39: the author refers to Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Aquinas, Arnaldo to Espirito Santo and Pope Leo IV, this type of argument is rather an essayistic cultural insert, rather than a critical commentary on Augustine's own text; footnote 567, p. 82: the conclusion of the paragraph is a sentence from the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas; page 86, where the Author supports Augustine's sentence about the kenosis of Christ with the opinion of Francisco Arias; page 87 Augustine's opinion on ordered love is reinforced by the opinion of

José Míguez Bonino, Argentine Protestant theologian, Methodist, one of the pioneers of Latin American liberation theology; page 98 - reference to the similarity of Augustinian thought to F. Macchio, a Pentecostal theologian; p. 127 – citing the opinion of Yazdani, Abbas, an Islamic theologian; p. 180 – a collection of opinions by R. Crowther, H. Passmore and A. Howell, T. Helne, I. Wolf, R. Baños – the entire passage is made up of digressions resulting from the similarity of Augustine's thought to the theories of ecologists and positive psychologists, these are associations similar to thoughts, but they do not result from a theological analysis of the text; ect.).

Consequently, there is no hierarchy of sources within the work. He treats Augustine's thesis on an equal footing with the theses of contemporary theologians of various denominations. In addition, they are compared with the humanistic opinions of contemporary psychologists and pedagogues, and the latter do not constitute any theological place in theological argumentation (*loca theologica*). Therefore, the final conclusions at the end of the chapters are very generalizing. They are more of a didactic postulate than a message resulting from a critical analysis of Augustine's text. This is a big weakness of this job. I have mentioned before about replacing theological analysis with a quotation. This is the most common mistake made by the Author in this work. The mere quotation of Augustine's words does not end the scientific discussion, but should be its starting point. It is a mistake to assume that the opinion of authority exempts the researcher from the obligation to critically prove the thesis.

The work cannot be considered a study in patrology, but rather as one in pastoral theology. This field utilizes Divine Revelation, Church teaching documents, and the experiences of individual Christians and religious groups. The first sources are studied using deductive methods typical of theology, while the latter require inductive methods from social sciences. The paradigm of this methodological approach involves confronting life with the Gospel, encapsulated by the triad: see, evaluate, act. Therefore, in the pastoral approach, three stages of research can be distinguished: ecclesiological (reflection on the essence of the Church and the basic forms of its salvific activity), sociological (theological-sociological or theological-psychological analysis of the Church's salvific activity, using the results of empirical research for this purpose) and strategic (determination of conclusions and pastoral postulates).

In his work, the author analyzes selected sermons of Augustine pertaining to the Gospel and 1 John and the Psalms, examining rhetorical strategies and pastoral intentions while emphasizing Augustine's transformation of disordered love into divine love. Throughout the

chapters, the author explores the nature of love from Augustine's pastoral perspective, its appropriate objects, transformative effects, role in biblical hermeneutics, and integration into a comprehensive educational framework of the contemporary Church. By situating pedagogy within Augustine's life and ministry, the dissertation connects doctrinal theology with pastoral practice, offering a model of Christian formation where knowledge, affection, and virtue serve divine love.

Therefore, I can accept the evaluated work as a doctoral dissertation in the field of patristic theology, but in the field of pastoral theology, which, starting from Augustine's pastoral thought in selected works, arrives at pastoral and formative conclusions. Therefore, I postulate a change in the description of the methodology of work: from patristic to pastoral.

4. Formal Assessment

The structure of the work is clear, with the scope of each chapter defined at the outset, leading to coherent final conclusions. The dissertation is written in accessible language.

Attention should also be given to footnotes. The author generally uses commas for punctuation but lacks consistency. Occasionally, he employs a period after the cited author's name or omits punctuation altogether (e.g. footnote 166, page 41 of C. Wolfeich. "Humility and Spirituality; footnote 547 page 79: 547 A. Dupont, and P. Walraet. "Augustine on the Heart; footnote 807 page 109: See K. Han-luen Kantzer. "Grace, Free Will; footnote 840 page 112: See R. Hayes. "One Click; footnote 957 page 127: See M. J. Jeffries. *Venice's Hidden Enemies*; footnote 986 page 130: See Douglas Stone. *Difficult Conversations*; footnote 994 page 131: See E. Mendrofa. "Digital Sin; footnote 1096 page 143: See Jessica M. Schultz. "A Study of Posttraumatic; footnote 1108 page 144: See S. Akhtar. "Understanding the; footnote 1228 page 161: See O. Curry. "Happy to Help; footnote 1322 page 173: See B. Sakallaris. "Optimal; footnote 1323 page 173: See J. Pieczyński. "Mind-Body; footnote 1408 page 183: H. Woo, B. "Pilgrim's Progress; footnote 1419 page 184: see I. Sergeevna. "Creating a Supportive; footnote 1621 page 210: See B. Sorrells. *Love and Christian*; footnote 1809 page 237: See K. Lai "Not to Hide; footnote 1847 page 243: See G. Morrison. "A Spiritual"; etc.).

Moreover, the number of footnotes is excessive, with the last one being footnote 1929 (notably in the *Conclusion*, which is a formal error). This makes it somewhat difficult to follow. I recommend separate numbering for each chapter.

The bibliography, which includes source literature, studies, and supplementary literature, lends the work credibility. I suggest separating theological literature from psychological and formative literature.

5. Final Conclusions

Fr. Jude Shang Negoni's doctoral dissertation is an interesting contribution that systematizes information about the pedagogical views of Bishop Hippo Regius. The author demonstrates competence in using sources, conducting analysis, and drawing logical conclusions. However, the research method employed is questionable. While the author claims to use a patristic method, I believe it is more appropriate to classify it under pastoral theology. Therefore, I recommend revising the methodology description in the *Introduction*. The use of auxiliary literature indicates that the topic has been treated appropriately.

Considering both the substantive and formal aspects, as well as the scientific originality of the work, I evaluate it as sufficient. Fr. Jude Shang Negoni's doctoral dissertation meets the basic conditions outlined in the "Degrees and Titles Act". Consequently, I request that he be admitted to the next stages of the doctoral procedure.

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