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**Review of the PhD thesis by
Fr. mgr lic. JUDE SHANG NJEGANI**

entitled:

**THE PEDAGOGY OF LOVE
IN THE SERMONS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE**

**written under supervision of Rev. prof. UKSW, PhD hab. Mirosław Mejzner,
SAC**

Warsaw 2026, pp 308.

General discussion of the dissertation – its aim and thesis

The aim of the dissertation is to present „the pedagogy of love (caritas) in Saint Augustine of Hippo’s Sermons, arguing that his homilies constitute a pedagogical approach in which teaching and loving are inseparable” (p.5). The author analyses Augustine’s rhetorical strategies, scriptural interpretation, and pastoral intent focusing on selected sermons on 1 John, the Psalms, and the Gospels (p.5).

The author also sets the following specific goals:

- Examining Augustine’s theological concept of love as both the essence and purpose of formation.
- Analysing selected Sermons to uncover the pedagogical methods and structures embedded in his preaching.
- Examining how this pedagogy influences the audience’s effects and desired change.
- Contributing to contemporary theological reflection on Christian formation, particularly within pastoral and ecclesial settings. (p.18)

In order to answer fundamental question „How does Augustine convey and nurture love in his Sermons as a pedagogical method? The author formulates auxiliary questions which are answered in the course of deliberations:

- What theological and anthropological assumptions underpin Augustine’s pedagogy of love?
- What rhetorical and exegetical strategies does he employ to inspire love in his audience?
- How does Augustine address the disordered loves of his listeners and redirect them towards love of God and neighbour?
- What role do Scriptures, liturgy, and ecclesial life have in this pedagogy? (p. 17)

Structure of the thesis

The entire dissertation has 308 pages. It consists of: Table of Contents (pp. 8-15), abbreviations (p.16), introduction (pp. 17-25), five chapters (pp. 26-256), followed by the final General Conclusion (pp. 257-259), and Bibliography (pp. 260-308), which is divided into two parts: Sources (pp. 260-262), Fundamental Studies (pp. 262- 267) and Secondary Literature (pp.267-308).

The main part of the work consists of five chapters divided into numerous subchapters and subsections, which demonstrates the great orderliness, analytical skills of the author and the deep reflection with which he approached Augustine's sermons.

Chapter I: CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVE (pp. 26-79).

Chapter II: THE OBJECT OF LOVE IN THE SERMONS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE (pp. 80-155)

Chapter III: THE EFFECTS OF LOVE (pp. 156-185)

Chapter IV: THE BIBLICAL PEDAGOGY OF LOVE (pp. 186-223)

Chapter V: THE PEDAGOGY OF LOVE IN THE LIFE AND PREACHING OF AUGUSTINE (pp. 224-256)

Methodological and formal assessment of the dissertation

In the introduction, the author presents not only the aim of the work and research questions, but also presents the methodology he adopted for the dissertation. That is

“theological-patristic approach, engaging in detailed readings of key Sermons from Augustine’s corpus, with a focus on rhetorical strategy, scriptural exegesis, and pastoral purpose” (p.18)

Although the author of the dissertation declares that: „An important methodological aspect of this study will be historical contextualisation. Augustine’s views cannot be separated from the era’s mentality and the environment in which he lived and worked.” (p. 19) It must be admitted that he does not fully keep this promise, which will be noted in the later part of this review

Since there are numerous studies on Augustine's thought and specifically on the issue of love, it is valuable for the author to present the specific approach he wants to take and its innovative character.

„This study is significant in three ways.

Theologically, it offers a new view on Augustine’s pastoral theology, emphasising love as a transformative force in preaching.

Historically, it situates Augustine’s Sermons in the late antique context of episcopal ministry, catechesis, and community building.

In practice, it enhances modern homiletics and spiritual education by revisiting a model that focuses on instruction, conversion, and emotional transformation.” (p.18)

In principle, the work has been prepared correctly in terms of methodology and form. The introduction can be considered exemplary. In addition to the standard elements of this part of the work, the definition of keywords deserves recognition. The division into chapters is correct. The author skilfully uses footnotes and bibliographic references, in line with the reservations presented below. The language of the dissertation is appropriate for this type of scientific works. The undoubted advantage of

the work is that it is based on a rich source material, which proves a very good orientation in the writings of St. Augustine.

Substantive issues:

The work is original and source-based, and the author freely uses the wide range of Saint Augustine's thought, as well as the latest literature on the subject. Especially the freedom in selecting the literature on the subject deserves recognition.

The topics of the chapters and the logical connections between them are clear and convincing to the reader. The first chapter begins with the love that God himself is and which he bestows upon man. "Love is the foundation, measure, and goal of life, connecting humans with God and each other" (p.79). The author then moves on to the location of the theme of love in Sermons (object of love), and in the third chapter he shows divine love as the root of spiritual, moral and community life (effects of love). (p. 191). In the fourth chapter devoted to biblical pedagogy, the author discusses specific acts of love relating to everyday life (prayer, good deeds) and extraordinary situations, such as calls to martyrdom.

Undoubtedly, an interesting and valuable part of the work is Chapter five, which presents the pedagogy of love not only theoretically, but also in the life of Augustine himself. This reversal of the usual order, where the presentation of the author's profile is the beginning of the work, has a profound justification. We also find here an extremely interesting paragraph on Augustine's performative pedagogy expressed in Sermons (p.233)

My reservations are raised by the following issues:

The author demonstrates considerable erudition in referring to the thought of later writers who draw upon or interpret the teachings of Augustine, beginning with Thomas

Aquinas and extending to Pope Leo XIV. The discipline of a scientific text requires self-restraint, from such unnecessary digressions as for example: contemporary education (p. 164), Coran (p. 194), the nature of love songs up to Shakespeare (p. 170). However, despite the author's great erudition, the study appears somewhat suspended in a vacuum, since—apart from references to the Bible—it lacks concrete discussion of the sources underlying Augustine's own teaching. A few mentions of polemics with Stoic and Epicurean philosophy do not satisfy this need. The mention of the polemic with the Donatists is not sufficiently discussed (p. 196). How can one approach the topic of martyrdom as the consummation of love and not refer to the earlier tradition? This disproportion is also reflected in the bibliography. There is a clear overrepresentation of general studies compared to source material other than Augustine himself.

A second issue that raises certain doubts concerns the nature of ancient sermons. Such sermons frequently refer to the concrete circumstances of the faithful, to the historical context, and to the social characteristics of their audiences. The most outstanding representative in this regard is John Chrysostom, whose homilies provide valuable insight into the society and social structures of the cities in which he served as a priest and bishop. In the present work, however, I find not only the absence of comparable references to the needs or circumstances of the faithful, but even a lack of temporal and spatial contextualization of the sermons themselves. They appear largely ahistorical. The author does not systematically indicate where or when particular views were articulated. Yet, as is well known, such contextualization may be closely connected with the specific themes addressed and can significantly contribute to a more accurate interpretation of them. Paradoxically, the author himself points this out in the introduction, but does not keep his promise.

The author does not explain to us what the criteria for selecting Sermons are, nor does he introduce us to their specificity or the context of their creation.

The final note is technical in nature. The author writes that he relies on the latest editions of Latin texts and lists them in the bibliography, but based on the footnotes and

bibliography, we can see that he also uses English translations. This is understandable, of course, but it's worth noting in the introduction.

Questions:

1. Which Church Fathers had the greatest influence on the development of Augustine's teaching on love? In which area Augustine was inspired by their ideas?
2. Given the thesis that Augustine's sermons are rooted in context, we must ask what we know about the audience?

Final conclusion

The discussed doctoral dissertation is of a source nature and meets the requirements for doctoral dissertations. The author set himself the goal to address in researches by interpreting Sermons as deliberate act of formation rather than merely theological commentaries. In my opinion he was successful in this field. The selected topic has been developed with due care, both in terms of the research methodology as well as the source material and studies used. The conclusions from the conducted research were presented in accurate and transparent manner.

Without a doubt, the reviewed dissertation by Fr. mgr lic. Jude Shang Njegani meets all the requirements (formal and substantive) that Polish state law places on doctoral theses and their authors. Therefore, **I evaluate it positively and put forward a proposal to admin Fr. mgr lic. Jude Shang Njegani to further stages of the registration and conferment procedure for a doctoral degree.**

Warsaw, the 16th of March 2026