Echoes of Cicero: A Digital Approach to Augustine's Presentation of Pauline Diction

In the late Roman empire, Christianity transcended its origins and became an apparatus of the state. As Christianity's place in the Roman world changed, it assimilated much of classical culture. Christian leaders struggled to reconcile the lingering foreignness of their religion with conflicting Roman ideals. In the fifth century, church fathers tried to regulate non-Christian literature and yet, they simultaneously expressed novel features of Christianity "in a language that had not broken with the past" (Brown, 1992). Throughout his writings, Augustine exemplifies this struggle to reconcile classical culture with Christian practice.

Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* (*DDC*) establishes a method of Christian teaching. In the early fifth century, the use of rhetoric by teachers of Christianity was a matter of controversy (Murphy, 1960). In book four of *DDC*, Augustine argues for the incorporation of rhetorical technique, and draws directly on classical manuals of rhetoric to establish the literary primacy of scripture.

Scholars have long agreed that Augustine engages with classical rhetorical treatises in *DDC*. Conley has called *DDC* a kind of Christian *De oratore* – the first manual of Christian eloquence (Conley, 1990). Schaeffer, Fortin, Murphy, and others have persuasively shown that Augustine uses Ciceronian ideas (Schaeffer, 1996; Fortin, 1974; Murphy, 1960). As early as 1930, Sullivan attempted an exhaustive list of parallels between Augustine's rhetorical works and those of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian (Sullivan, 1930).

With newly developed computational tools, it has become possible to empirically measure Augustine's engagement with rhetorical works. This analysis of language shared between Augustine and his predecessors using the Tesserae program (tesserae.caset.buffalo.edu) lends quantitative support to existing arguments based on close reading. Furthermore,

experimental modules can test Augustine's differential level of engagement with Cicero as opposed to his engagement with other Latin rhetoricians.

In previous work, I argue that Augustine sanctions the use of rhetoric in Christian teaching by his own adoption of Ciceronian language and by his demonstration of Ciceronian rhetoric in Paul's writing. I suggest that Augustine frames Paul as a new Cicero, and scripture as a new model of style, when he explicitly shows how Paul's language exemplifies Ciceronian eloquence. In the wake of Augustine's considerable influence, the performance of scripture would be, in many respects, a performance of Cicero. Augustine thus adopts the tradition of rhetoric for Christianity, and at the same time, checks the power of that tradition by replacing its figurehead and central texts.

This paper builds on the aforementioned previous work and draws on current developments in measuring big data, both in Tesserae and in digital humanities at large. I expand my methodological approach to explore what makes a text recognizably Ciceronian. The specific quality of Ciceronian prose requires a digital approach that goes beyond topic modeling and phrase-based allusion. I use Tesserae to evaluate the stylistic and colometric markers I believe Augustine uses to make Paul's diction appear particularly Ciceronian. I test my observations against criteria that have established Lactantius as a Christian Cicero, as well as against non-Ciceronian late antique prose authors. In Augustine's voice, Paul resounds with a particularly Ciceronian echo. Such investigations continue to push the limits of traditional intertextual analysis and promise exciting results in tracing allusion, authorial influence, and the development of themes, especially in late antiquity. In particular, the sanctification of the potentially perilous practice of Roman rhetoric has important implications in understanding cultural inheritance – both in Romanization of the emerging church and in the Christianization of

the late Roman empire.

Bibliography

Brown, P. 1992. *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*.
Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Conley, T. M. 1990. *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*. New York: Longman.

Fortin, E. L. 1974. "Augustine and the Problem of Christian Rhetoric," in R. L. Enos and R.
Thompson (ed.), *The Rhetoric of St. Augustine of Hippo:* De Doctrina Christiana *& the
Search for a Distinctly Christian Rhetoric.* Waco: Baylor University Press. 219-233.

Murphy, J. J. 1960. "Saint Augustine and the Debate about a Christian Rhetoric," in R. L. Enos
and R. Thompson (ed.), *The Rhetoric of St. Augustine of Hippo:* De Doctrina Christiana
& the Search for a Distinctly Christian Rhetoric. Waco: Baylor University Press. 205-
217.

Schaeffer, J. D. 1996. "The Dialectic of Orality and Literacy: The Case of Book 4 of Augustine's
De Doctrina Christiana." *PMLA* 111.5: 1133-45.

Sullivan, Sister Therese. 1930. "*S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis Episcopi De Doctrina
Christiana, Liber Quartus: A Commentary, with a Revised Text, Introduction, and
Translation*," in R. L. Enos and R. Thompson (ed.), *The Rhetoric of St. Augustine of
Hippo:* De Doctrina Christiana *& the Search for a Distinctly Christian Rhetoric.* Waco:
Baylor University Press. 33-183, 315-363.