

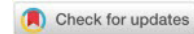
# DIDACTIC AND THEOLOGICAL WORKS OF ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the theological and didactic works of St. Augustine of Hippo. He is considered one of the greatest founders of Christianity, combating the Donatist and Pelagian heresies, preaching the Christian faith to his flock, and addressing topics concerning the relationship between man and God, the relationship between God and the world, the existence of evil in the world, and the dichotomy in the understanding of God and the world by the Manicheans. In addition to his theological work, St. Augustine of Hippo is also remembered for his sermons, which bear the characteristics of didactic work and are based on the understanding of human nature, upon which the extent to which it is possible to educate a person depends. From his teachings, some didactic principles can be derived: 1) if you are silent, be silent out of love; 2) if you speak, speak out of love; 3) if you admonish, admonish out of love; and 4) if you forgive, forgive out of love. It is concluded that from the theological and didactic work of St. Augustine of Hippo, it follows that what is primal and blessed, instructive and didactic, is only that which is done willingly and out of love. Recommendations for employing St. Augustine of Hippo's theological and didactic works in instructing pupils in the modern educational setting are made in light of these conclusions.

**Keywords:** manichaeism, donatism, Pelagianism, pansophy, sermons, teaching

**Field:** Social sciences and Humanities

## 1. INTRODUCTION

St. Augustine of Hippo (hereinafter: St. Augustine) was born on November 13, 354, in Thagaste in Numidia, present-day Algeria. His father was a pagan and his mother a Christian. Based on the preserved autobiography of St. Augustine containing his poignant confessions, it can be observed that he was a pagan in his youth and lived a different life and attitude towards the Church (Wills, 2011). His mother significantly influenced the transformation of his personality, contributing to his quest for God through prayers and suggestions. Alongside his studies of rhetoric in Carthage, St. Augustine also began studying Manichaeism (Runciman, 2008). According to reliable sources (Tremblay, 2001; Decret, 1974; Steffen, 1930; Rochat, 1897), he embraced their theology and understanding of the world's existence for nearly 10 years. He also engaged with key topics concerning the relationship between man and God, the relationship between God and the world, the existence of evil in the world, and the dichotomy in the Manichaean understanding of God and the world.

Although his theological development was influenced by the study of other religions and philosophical doctrines based on Plato's teachings, the pivotal moment in his development was his encounter with Saint Ambrose of Milan upon his return to Latin Africa in 391 (Augustine, 2023). This chance encounter led St. Augustine to engage in the study of rhetoric and law, as he realized the significance of eloquence and erudition. This contributed to his conversion to Christianity. St. Augustine was baptized by Saint Ambrose of Milan. From that moment, his growth in the Christian faith began, culminating in his complete dedication in 386 (Augustine, 1957). Following the suggestions of Saint Ambrose of Milan, he started to preach, study the Holy Scriptures, and write commentaries. Over time, he became the Bishop of Hippo (modern-day Algeria) in 395 (Augustinus, 1934).

At the time of St. Augustine's return, Latin Africa was known for the Donatist heresy, which stemmed from the rigorist tendencies present in the time of Saint Cyprian of Carthage and is described in the history of the Christian Church as a heresy that greatly shook the Christian Church (Cyprian, 1943). Several councils were convened to resolve the dispute with the Donatists. Later, the Pelagian heresy emerged, named after Pelagius, just as the Donatists were named after Donatus (Ivanković, 2015). St. Augustine engaged in constant polemics with these heresies but was primarily devoted to and always available to his flock, whom he never neglected. Besides Latin Africa (centers in Carthage and Hippo) where Latin was spoken, his influence also extended to Greek Africa (centers in Alexandria, Egypt, and other areas)

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where Greek was spoken (Cross, 2005).

The Pelagians advocated for free will in relation to sin (Knežević, 2015). St. Augustine addressed the conflict with them by developing his socio-spiritual and sacramental themes. He also promoted anthropological themes by preaching about the significance of the grace given to humans by God. He pointed out the consequences of original sin, paternal and ancestral fall, Abraham's fall, and other themes (Koščak, 2018). Pelagius, originally from the British Isles, initially worked in Rome and later in Latin Africa. Although he insisted on meeting St. Augustine, such a meeting never occurred, but they exchanged letters. Despite differences in their understandings, Pelagius and St. Augustine agreed that original sin did not significantly affect the cognitive and other abilities of believers, as these capacities were present in believers and were not hindered by anything in their actions. The key disagreement lay in the fact that Pelagians believed that human will alone was decisive in overcoming all obstacles between man and God, while St. Augustine believed that these obstacles could only be overcome by the grace of the Holy Spirit. All of this contributed to the later emergence of the terms and concepts of Gnosticism and Neopelagianism (Martinjak, 2019; Knežević, 2017).

He died in Hippo at the age of seventy-six. He was declared a saint by Pope Boniface VIII (Augustine, 2023). He is equally revered in the Catholic and Orthodox faiths. His day is celebrated on June 15th in the Julian calendar and on June 28th in the Gregorian calendar. The challenge in studying this theoretical discourse lies in the theological and didactic works of St. Augustine.

## 2. THE THEOLOGICAL WORKS OF ST. AUGUSTINE

St. Augustine's understanding of the world and surroundings stemmed from the realization of oneself as an individual. He believed that one best comprehends the world and phenomena around them by recognizing their own weaknesses. Starting from Augustine's understanding that God cares more about blessing people than people care about receiving the blessings, it follows that the willingness of every individual to be humble is a human virtue. According to St. Augustine, there is something in humility that miraculously elevates the heart and thoughts of a person (Ahmetagić, 2012). This approach of St. Augustine should be linked to his pagan life in the past, which he completely renounced over time.

He regarded the church as a place of forgiveness of sins and one of the significant reasons for its existence. Such understanding should prevail among all believers because if believers did not believe that there is forgiveness of sins in the Church, there would be no hope for eternal life (Gašpar & Šehić, 2012). From this, it can be understood that believers should not be enslaved by their past, whatever it may be. The past should be left to God's grace, the present to His love, and the future to His providence. This suggests the conclusion that God became human so that humanity could be divinized.

St. Augustine preached the necessity for believers to constantly remain connected to God and His grace through prayers. The aim of his sermons was to teach believers to recognize the significance of prayer, as well as the differences between earthly and eternal life. This knowledge was meant to contribute to the believers' conviction that, on one hand, the body dies when separated from the soul, while on the other hand, the soul dies when separated from God. All of this points to the need for the prayers of believers to reach God and His grace, which is achieved through human virtues, such as fasting and almsgiving.

St. Augustine lived during the decline of the Roman Empire. In such circumstances, he saw the Church as the only institution capable of contributing to the survival of human society (Sunajko, 2012). In his work "The City of God," he presented his interesting understanding of the state and the Church. According to St. Augustine, the Church is legally subordinate to the state, while the state is morally subordinate to the Church (Sunajko, 2012). He wrote 22 works. The first ten works deal with apologetics, that is, his opposition to paganism for the benefit of Christianity. The remaining 12 books concern dogmatics, determining the fundamental tenets of Christian doctrine. His philosophical and historical work can be viewed through six epochs: from Adam, through Noah, Abraham, David, the Babylonian captivity, to Christ and the Last Judgment. In addition to the aforementioned work "The City of God," his work "Confessions" is significant, considered his autobiography (Burton, 2007). Other works include "Against the Academics," "On the Blessed Life," "On Order," "Soliloquies," "On the Quantification of the Soul," "On Genesis against the Manicheans," "Retractations," and other letters and writings about his efforts in establishing and developing Christianity, combating heresies, and preaching to his flock (Augustine, 1957).

### 3. THE DIDACTIC WORKS OF ST. AUGUSTINE

The foundational principles of St. Augustine's didactic work are based on his understanding of human nature, which determines to what extent it is possible to educate humans. St. Augustine viewed human nature through its relationship with the environment and other people. He observed that as humans pass by mountains, they admire the beauty of their peaks; as they pass by the sea, they admire its waves; they also admire the long courses of rivers, the expanses of the ocean, and the circular movement of the stars... These are indicators that can be utilized in teaching and learning. Humans have always learned best in a real environment and through visible examples. Such a principle of learning is particularly significant in the education of preschool children and students in the younger grades of elementary school.

Unlike the active admiration humans express toward their environment, St. Augustine observes that the relationship between humans and other people is different. When passing by other individuals, humans do not marvel or express wonder, unlike the active admiration shown towards nature. Hence, there is a highlighted need for a different approach to human interaction, emphasizing that one should not merely talk about love to others but should actively love one's neighbor. This approach by St. Augustine forms the basis of modern education. Education and learning are based on the mutual interaction between preschool teachers and learners, or school teachers and students. It also relies on the relationship between preschool and school students and other factors involved in education and learning, particularly concerning the content of education and learning, family, and the broader social community. Preschool children and students in the younger grades of elementary school learn and are raised best as active participants in their own development, upbringing, and learning through interactions and actions in various practical life situations within preschool institutions, schools, families, and the wider community.

According to the sermons by St. Augustine, some fundamental principles of his teachings can be observed. They are based on his sermons through which he instructed others on how to preach, which could be related to today's key competency for lifelong learning - learning to learn (Milenović, 2021), as well as teaching students (Milenović, 2017). St. Augustine, through his sermons, taught others to preach in a way that: 1) the listener believes; 2) the believer hopes; and 3) the one who hopes loves their neighbors.

From the actions of St. Augustine, some other didactic rules of his teaching can be derived. They are: 1) if you are silent, be silent out of love; 2) if you speak, speak out of love; 3) if you admonish, admonish out of love; 4) if you forgive, forgive out of love. From the aforementioned didactic rules of St. Augustine, it follows that only what is done willingly and out of love is genuine and blessed. Actions performed according to laws that are not based on human will but are imposed or done merely for the sake of themselves cannot be considered blessed actions.

### 4. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

St. Augustine is considered one of the founders of Christianity and one of the greatest Fathers of the Church. He is regarded as the greatest Christian thinker of his time. This is confirmed by the large number of letters, exegetical works, and doctrinal writings attributed to him. His extensive body of work indicates that he achieved success in all fields through his actions and preaching. His creative output should be interpreted humbly, much like he himself was, both in his relationship with God and the Church, as well as in his actions and sermons. He documented his spiritual journey in a poignant manner. In conclusion, St. Augustine is recognized as one of the main systematizers of Christianity.

In addition to his theological work, the study and preaching of St. Augustine encompass all elements of didactic activity. The skills of preaching undoubtedly include teaching and educating students in today's schools. Based on the didactic activity of St. Augustine, several didactic rules have been derived. They do not differ from the general didactic rules in today's schools (Ilić, 2020). It is concluded that the study and preaching of St. Augustine encompass all elements of didactic activity related to teaching and educating students, as well as general didactic principles in today's schools.

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study of this theoretical work, several didactic implications can be derived. Familiarity with the preaching skills of significant historical figures, primarily theologians, contributes to the acquisition of skills by preschool and in school teachers in educating preschool children and students. It also contributes to a more thorough definition of general didactic principles in today's schools and encourages preschool children and students to learn in real-life situations and through visible examples, which is also the foundation of learning for preschool children and students in the younger grades of elementary school. To achieve this, it is necessary to provide professional development for preschool and school teachers in how to teach and educate preschool children and students in the younger grades of elementary school through training programs focused on the preaching skills of historically significant

theologians. Conducting empirical research on the issues addressed in the study of this theoretical work is also essential.

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