

Book review:

Kolawole Chabi, *Augustine, prédicateur de la Trinité: La Trinité dans l'histoire du salut et dans la vie du chrétien selon ses Sermones ad Populum*.

Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum, 159 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum and Firenze: Nerbini International, 2021), 554 pp. ISBN 978 88 6434 704 2

The book *Augustine Prédicateur de la Trinité* by Kolawole Chabi offers a thorough analysis of Saint Augustine's teachings on the Trinity, particularly as articulated in his *Sermones ad populum*. It is structured into seven chapters, each tackling different aspects of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine and its implications for Christian life and salvation history.

The introduction sets the stage for the exploration of Augustine's thought on the Trinity, establishing its relevance in contemporary theological debates. Chabi emphasizes the importance of understanding Augustine's views in light of historical and modern challenges to his doctrine.

The first chapter outlines various criticisms of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine as presented in *De Trinitate*. Chabi begins by establishing a "paradigm" that examines the heritage of theological critiques, particularly those stemming from Théodore de Régnon and subsequent theologians. Among the key figures discussed are Henri Couget, Étienne Portalié, and Michael Schmaus, each presenting unique perspectives that challenge the traditional understanding of the Trinity. The chapter also addresses critiques from various theological schools, including psychological models of the Trinity proposed by modern theologians such as Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann, and Catherine M. LaCugna. These

critiques argue that psychological analogies oversimplify the complexity of the divine relationships and risk leading to heretical interpretations. Chabi concludes the chapter by summarizing the major critiques and setting the foundation for responses in subsequent chapters.

In the second chapter, Chabi provides responses to the objections raised in Chapter I, drawing on Augustine's writings and interpretations by contemporary scholars. He critically evaluates the Régnonien paradigm, revealing its limitations while defending Augustine's use of psychological analogies as significant in articulating the relational dynamics of the Trinity. Chabi argues that Augustine's analogies should be seen not as definitive explanations but as tools to guide understanding of the divine relationships. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of Augustine's responses to the critiques, emphasizing the enduring relevance of his trinitarian thought for contemporary theological discussions.

The next chapter places Augustine's *Sermones ad populum* within the broader context of ancient Christian preaching. Chabi examines the literary genre, language, style, and intended audience of Augustine's sermons, placing them alongside the works of earlier Latin Fathers such as Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, and Ambrose of Milan. The analysis reveals how Augustine's sermons not only convey doctrinal teachings but also serve as a means of engaging the community and fostering spiritual growth. Chabi highlights the importance of Augustine's context—both cultural and ecclesiastical—in shaping his preaching style and theological content, illustrating how he sought to address the spiritual needs of his congregation.

In the fourth chapter, which concerns the theological significance of the *Sermones ad populum*, Chabi posits that the *Sermones ad populum* function as a crucial theological site for transmitting doctrinal teachings. He explores the liturgical and pastoral contexts in which these sermons were delivered, emphasizing the role of the preacher as a servant of the Word. This chapter underscores Augustine's understanding of the relationship between preaching and prayer, the spiritual communion between the preacher and the congregation, and the confessions of the preacher as integral to effective ministry. Chabi also discusses the impact of the sermons on the spiritual lives of the audience, noting how they served to deepen the understanding of faith and promote moral living in accordance with the teachings of the Church.

The fifth chapter traces the evolution of Augustine's doctrinal understanding of the Trinity throughout his life, particularly in his sermons. Chabi examines key sermons from Augustine's presbyterate and episcopate, illustrating his views on the indivisibility of the Trinity, the equality of the Persons, and the unchanging nature of God. The analysis demonstrates how Augustine's sermons

reflect a deepening understanding of the Trinity's role in salvation history. Chabi highlights significant moments in Augustine's thought, showing how his reflections on the Trinity matured over time and responded to various theological controversies.

Chabi explores how Augustine articulates the revelation of the Trinity within the historical context of salvation in the sixth chapter. The chapter examines the intra-Trinitarian life and the distinct roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as well as their missions in the economy of salvation. The use of similarities to communicate the relationships within the Trinity is highlighted, providing insight into Augustine's pedagogical approach. Chabi discusses how Augustine's understanding of revelation shapes the believer's relationship with God and emphasizes the transformative power of the Triune God in the life of the Church.

The final chapter addresses the practical implications of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine for Christian living. Chabi emphasizes how Augustine's teachings on the Trinity inform the spiritual life of the believer, focusing on themes of love, communion, and the transformative power of the Triune God. He explores how understanding the Trinity can lead to a deeper experience of faith, fostering community among believers and guiding ethical living in accordance with God's will. The chapter concludes by reiterating the relevance of Augustine's thought for contemporary Christian practice, encouraging readers to engage with the Trinity in their spiritual journeys.

Overall, Kolawole Chabi's *Augustine Predicateur de la Trinité* is a scholarly yet accessible exploration of Augustine's rich theological insights on the Trinity, showcasing the relevance of his thought for both historical understanding and contemporary theological reflection. The book serves as a vital resource for anyone interested in the intersection of Augustine's theology, preaching, and the life of faith in the Christian tradition.

Rev. Dr Jonathan Farrugia
Department of Church History, Patrology and Paleochristian Archaeology
Faculty of Theology
University of Malta
Msida MSD 2080
Malta

jonathan.farrugia@um.edu.mt