

Jerusalem in Augustine's *Sermones ad populum*: Its Textual Dimensions to the Construction of Christian Identity

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The religious landscape of the Mediterranean world was gradually changed from the reign of Constantine the Great when the church came to function as a centre of the spiritual, pastoral and liturgical life of the community of faith. It seems to indicate that both the emergence of sacred geography and the growing phenomena of sacred mobility affected a manifestation of the religious identity and behaviour in late antiquity. Interesting in this regard are the writings of Augustine of Hippo. While not showing much interest in the function of holy places for Christian faith, Augustine saw it as crucial to make references to the “mother church”, Jerusalem, in various contexts. Jerusalem was defined as the “city of peace”. It had Christ as its foundations. It stood in opposition to Babylon, the city of the devil against God. Augustine's concern for the spiritual and eschatological dimensions of the city is explicit, though he did not attend to the role of sacred sites and pilgrimage. In what ways did the sacred geography play its role in the development and refinement of the Christian identity? What significance did Augustine's treatment of Jerusalem have for these *topoi*? In the paper which follows, I have confined myself to evidence in Augustine's *sermones ad populum*, adding some remarks about their chronological setting, and have not considered the *enarrationes* and the *tractatus*. It is because the *sermones* are thought to be the primary source of his preaching activities, while the latter were edited later by himself. To answer the questions, I shall focus on Augustine as a pastor who encouraged his people to live as a committed Christian. In the process, I shall draw out from his description of both the realities of Jerusalem of his own day and the historical one recounted in scripture. In the context of his exegetical scheme, I shall concentrate on the various dimensions of Jerusalem and its correlation with the shaping of Christian identity in late-antique society.

The realities of the earthly Jerusalem

Augustine did not overlook the realities of Jerusalem as both the historical one recounted in scripture, in particular at the time of Jesus and his disciples, and the

earthly one in Palestine of his day. However, concerning the city in his contemporary, only a few brief references were given in his sermons.

Augustine preached *Sermon 348A* (= Dolbeau 30) in Hippo at the end of May or the beginning of June 416. He begins by drawing attention to the theme of Christ the *medicus* and relates it to his concern for the grace of Christ's incarnation and the death on the cross. Christ came and offered Himself as the antidote: His humility is the remedy for the pride of all humanity.¹ Indeed, this sermon warns of the unity of Christian faith that could be threatened by the Pelagian movement. For this reason, he hopes to share the sense of urgency with his audience and discloses new information he has just known from the east with a leaflet, including Pelagius's reply to him. It is noteworthy that, though his intent is not to be informative, he reports briefly on a conflict in Jerusalem: "Because there have been, heaven knows, how terrible a disturbance in Jerusalem, and the very sad news has also been reported to us, that the rioting populace is said to have burned down two monasteries in Bethlehem."² Around the same time, there occurred an event in Jerusalem which was to shake his congregation to the core. In *Sermon 19*, preached in Carthage in December 419, Augustine encourages them to concentrate on the change of their way of life: "Again, in addition to being so fragile, this life is under daily threat from enormous dangers."³ He then gives a report on the disaster in Jerusalem.

Colossal earthquakes are reported from the eastern provinces. Several great cities have all of a sudden been laid in ruins. Everyone staying in Jerusalem was so terrified—Jews, pagan, catechumens—that they were all baptized. It's said that possibly 7,000 people were baptized. The sign of Christ appeared on the clothes of the Jews who were baptized. These details are mentioned with the utmost regularity in the reports of the faithful, our brethren.⁴

Again his primary concern is not for the current situation of Jerusalem. No further information about the city after the earthquakes is given.

While the limited evidence for the actual Jerusalem available in his sermons, Augustine referred to the historical Jerusalem, in conjunction with stories of Jesus

1. Aug. s. 348A, 1.

2. Aug. s. 348A, 7: "Quia nescio quam magna perturbatio Hierosolymis facta est nobisque nuntiata plena tristitia, ut etiam tumultu populari duo monasteria in Bethlehem incensa esse dicantur."

3. Aug. s. 19, 6: "Accedunt etiam ipsius fragilis uitae tanta et tam cotidiana pericula."

4. Aug. s. 19, 6: "Terra motus magni de orientibus nuntiantur. Nonnullae magnae repentinis collapsae sunt civitates. Territi apud Hierosolimam qui inerant Iudaei, pagani, catechumini, omnes sunt baptizati. Dicuntur fortasse baptizati septem millia hominum. Signum Christi in vestibus Iudaeorum baptizatorum apparuit. Relatu fratrum fidelium constantissimo ista nuntiantur."

and his apostles. In *Sermon 89*, preached in 397 during a Council of African bishops in Carthage, he makes a distinction between the proper and symbolic sense in the scriptures and takes a passage from Galatians 1:18 as an example of the proper meaning: “the apostle went up to Jerusalem to see Peter. The apostle did this, it happened, that’s what it means. It tells you a story of something done; that’s its proper meaning.”⁵ Moreover, between Ascension and Pentecost in 403–404, he delivered *Sermon 101* in Carthage. Augustine reminds the audience of Paul’s mission to the gentiles and his words from Galatians 2: “after he had already been called by the Lord Jesus he went to Jerusalem and discussed the gospel with the apostles, [...]”.⁶ Accordingly, not only in the story of his disciples but in that of Jesus, he mentions the city’s name. Again, in both *Sermon 301A* (= Denis 17; c. 401) preached in Bulla Regia and *Sermon 218* (= Etaix 5; undated) delivered as a series of detailed notes for Good Friday, Augustine gives an exposition of the passion of Christ and mentions the name of the city.

The very people who had slain the Lord did this. There in Jerusalem, when the Lord had ascended into heaven, and after ten days had fulfilled his promise and sent the Holy Spirit, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in the tongues of all nations.⁷

[H]e was crucified at the place of the skull, Calvary, signified the forgiveness of all sins through his passion.⁸

Augustine’s way of referring to the historical Jerusalem is straightforward. He does not attach much significance to the circumstances out of which the passion narrative was told. Instead, it can be assumed that he stresses on the universal dimension of the passion story. In this regard it is noteworthy that, in *Sermon 265* preached on Ascension day in 412, Augustine’s interpretation of Acts 1:8 appears to regard the significance of Jerusalem as a historical testimony of Jesus message: “*But you shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming down upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me. [...] Where? In Jerusalem, where I was killed, and in the whole of Judea and Samaria,*

5. Aug. s. 89, 4: “Ascendit Apostolus Ierosolimam uidere Petrum: fecit hoc Apostolus, factum est, ipsius proprium est. Narrat tibi rem gestam: gestum ipsum secundum proprietatem cape.”

6. Aug. s. 101, 1: “uocatum se iam a domino Iesu uenisse Hierosolimam et euangelium cum apostolis contulisse”.

7. Aug. s. 301A, 4: “Ipsi hoc fecerunt, qui dominum occiderunt. Ibi in Ierusalem, cum dominus ascendisset in caelum, et post decem dies misso Spiritu sancto impleret promissum, impleti Spiritu sancto discipuli linguis omnium gentium locuti sunt.”

8. Aug. s. 218, 3: “Quod in loco caluariae crucifixus est significauit in passione sua remissionem omnium peccatorum.”

and as far as the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)."⁹ The focus may be shifted to the place itself of the revelation. However, Augustine proceeds to the interpretation of the latter part of this passage and stresses on the universal significance of the church: "You shall be, he says, witnesses to me in Jerusalem. 'That's not enough: you didn't pay such a huge price just for that, just to buy that only: *in Jerusalem*. Say some more.' *And as far as the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8)."¹⁰

The Spiritual interpretation of Jerusalem

Augustine's reflections on the spiritual meaning of Jerusalem are explicit in his sermons. Although it may be impossible to offer a coherent explanation for the development of his interpretations, it is connected with particular passages.

My initial focus is on the interpretation of Galatians 4 in his sermons. In the sermons preached around 403 or 404 Augustine dealt with Paul's calling Jerusalem "our mother". "But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother" (Galatians 4:26). In *Sermon 360A* (= Dolbeau 24), where Augustine is exhorting pagans and Donatists to convert themselves, he turns their attention to the message of Jeremiah (16:19), "Lord, my strength, and my help and refuge in the day of evils (Jer 16:19)." He interprets the "day of evils" as "the day of trials and temptations, [...] the day of this heavy labor, [...] the day of sickly life, [...] the day of sighing with longing for the *Jerusalem that is above* (Gal 4:26). As long, after all, as we are not where we are eager to be".¹¹ Here Augustine has in mind the heavenly Jerusalem and, in contrast with the earthly city, defines it as the place towards which "we" must be led by "my help and refuge in the day of evils". Augustine also opposes the pagan claim that Christians participate in idolatry and the traditional exchange of gifts in *Sermon 198* augm. (= Dolbeau 26). Because Paul's teaching of shared possessions and the offering for the poor (Acts 4:32–35) is foundational in imitating the angelic mode of life. He comments on this: "those angels, who are of course more perfect, serve on the heavenly staff and in the great house and the heavenly city Jerusalem, *the mother of us all* (Gal 4:26), want nothing to be shown them as their personal and private

9. Aug. s. 265, 6: "Sed accipietis virtutem Spiritus sancti supervenientem in vos, et eritis mihi testes. [...] Ubi? In Jerusalem, ubi occisus sum: et in tota Iudaea et Samaria, et usque in fines terrae."

10. Aug. s. 265, 6: "Eritis, inquit, mihi testes in Jerusalem. Parum est. Non pro hoc tantum pretium dedisti, ut hoc solum emereres. In Jerusalem. Dic adhuc: Et usque in fines terrae."

11. Aug. s. 360A, 9: "Domine, uirtus mea et auxilium et refugium meum in die malorum. [...] in die temptationum, in die laboris huius, in die infirmae uitae, in die suspiriorum ex desiderio supernae Hierusalem. Quamdiu enim non sumus ubi esse cupimus".

honor, [...]".¹² It does not seem to be a coincidence that in these sermons he imparts a way of dealing with the spiritual interpretation of Jerusalem. His negative perception of paganism is closely linked with the dichotomy between the earthly and the heavenly realm.

The dichotomous hierarchy became so well entrenched in order to prevent his congregation from conforming to the code of behaviour for which Augustine hoped. *Sermon 10* was preached around 412. Augustine directs the audience's attention to the story of two women on Solomon's judgement (1 Kg. 3:16–27). He quotes the passages from Galatians 4, in the opposition between the mother with the dead child and the mother with the living child, that is, between Jews and the converted Gentiles. He then contrasts the Jerusalem below with the Jerusalem above: "hell is sown below, where the dead belong; and heaven above, where the living belong."¹³

Passages from the gospel of Luke is also crucial to the spiritual interpretation of the heavenly Jerusalem. Augustine's allegorical treatment of Luke 24:44–47 directed attention to the union between Christ and the church. He referred to this spiritual marriage and confirmed that Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. In *Sermon 116*, preached probably in 416, the case is clear that, first, he stresses on Luke 24:46, "For the Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead on the third day",¹⁴ and next on Luke 24:47, "And for repentance and forgiveness of sins to be preached in his name throughout all the nations, with their beginning from Jerusalem."¹⁵ While "they saw him, [...] the bridegroom, the bride was still concealed."¹⁶ His disciples "couldn't yet see the church throughout all the nations, with their beginning from Jerusalem. They could see the head, and about the body they could believe the head."¹⁷ He explains the correlation that "the sight of Christ helps them to believe in the church that is to be; the sight of the church helps us to believe that Christ has risen."¹⁸ Augustine's approach to the Jerusalem is, thus, determined by

12. Aug. s. 198 augm., 48: "illi angeli utique perfectiores, qui in caelestibus apparatibus et in domo magna et ciuitate caelesti Hierusalem, matre omnium nostrum, concordissima caritate deo seruiunt, nihil sibi honoris priuatim et proprie uolunt exhiberi".

13. Aug. s. 10, 2: "inferi deorsum sunt quo pertinent mortui; superi autem sursum, quo pertinent uiui."

14. Aug. s. 116, 5, 6: "Christum pati, et resurgere a mortuis tertio die."

15. Aug. s. 116, 6, 6: "Et praedicari in nomine eius poenitentiam et remissionem peccatorum per omnes gentes, incipientibus ab Jerusalem."

16. Aug. s. 116, 5, 6: "Illum videbant, [...] Sponsum videbant, sponsa adhuc latebat."

17. Aug. s. 116, 6, 6: "Ecclesiam per omnes gentes, incipientibus ab Jerusalem, nondum videbant. Caput videbant: et de corpore capiti credebant."

18. Aug. s. 116, 6, 6: "Adiuvat eos visus Christus, ut futuram Ecclesiam crederent: adiuvat nos visa Ecclesia, ut Christum resurrexisse credamus."

the spiritual contract and the Christ-centred understanding of the church. His congregation was urged to protect the church from the fear of heretics.

Augustine dealt with the same passage in the anti-Donatist sermons. In *Sermon* 162A (= Denis 19), preached in Carthage in the first half of 404, he takes up Luke 24:44–47 when he intends to dismiss the claim of Donatists that the true church is limited to Africa. In the face of their view of complete sanctity, his message of the ecclesial unity of the church is directed to his people: “Are you communion with that Church which is spread throughout all nations, beginning from Jerusalem? If you are in communion with it, then you are there, [...] which has grown and filled the whole wide world, the body of Christ, the Church of Christ, whose head is in heaven.”¹⁹ In *Sermon* 359B (= Dolbeau 2), delivered in 404 in Carthage, Augustine considers the problem of obedience and the martyrdom, in particular of both Vincent as a faithful martyr and a Donatist as a false martyr. Here he defines the cause of true martyrs as justice, because “I do it for Christ.”²⁰ He stresses the spiritual marriage between the bridegroom and the bride, referring to the passage from Luke 24:46. A faithful martyr confesses Christ and his bride, the church, thus hoping for maintaining the unity and peace with his brother, while the Donatists refuse the reconciliation of Christians in the church.

The eschatological dimension of Jerusalem

Along with the network of scriptural passages on the aspect of Jerusalem, the repeated references conformed to another aspect. His attention was directed towards the opposition of the two kinds of human beings, one was the crowd of the impious, and the other was the pious dedicated to God, which would be derived from his reflection on the course of human history. This scheme was then defined in terms of the two opposing cities, one was called Jerusalem, of the saints, and the other was called Babylon, of the impious. In *Sermon* 110A (= Dolbeau 17), preached in 397, Augustine deals with the story of Luke on the woman who spent eighteen years in her infirmity (Luke 13:11–13). While engaging in the numerological interpretation of the passage, he considers the two kinds of human desire and the opposing course of human beings.

19. Aug. s. 162A, 10: “communicas ei ecclesiae, quae diffusa est per omnes gentes, incipiens ab Hierusalem? Si communicas, ibi es, [...] quae crevit et implevit totum orbem terrarum, corpus Christi, ecclesia Christi, cuius caput in caelo.”

20. Aug. s. 359B, 18: “Ego pro Christo.”

[T]he whole human race was weighed down by earthly lusts; then one came with the promise of the kingdom of heaven. There is another life, there is the society of the angels, there is a home country [...] That country is called Jerusalem, Jerusalem means 'vision of peace.' [...] don't have a taste for the earth.²¹

Despite the lack of Babylon in contrast, the opposition would be stated in terms of the two different countries. In *Sermon 299A* augm. (= Dolbeau 4), delivered in Carthage in 404, Augustine refers to the two cities, Babylon and Jerusalem, in the course of human history.

You see, there's a certain godless city, [...] and it is mystically called Babylon in the scriptures. Again, *there is a certain city, an alien wanderer on this earth, [...] and this one is called Jerusalem.* Right now both cities are mixed up together, at the end they will be sorted out and separated.²²

What is interesting is the fact that he emphasises on not only an expected future of Jerusalem but the status quo of the Jerusalem as "an alien wanderer on this earth." Also in *Sermon 16A* (= Denis 20), preached in 411, his reflection on the opposition of two cities is clear.

We end in the place we were going to. So now then, here we all are, engaged in life's pilgrimage, and we have an end we are moving toward. So where are we moving to? To our home country. What is our home country? Jerusalem, mother of the faithful, mother of the living. That is where we are going. That is our end. [...] We didn't know which way to go. [...] We had all gone astray, you see, and though we are citizens of Jerusalem we have become citizens of Babylon, we have become sons of confusion: Babylon means confusion."²³

In this vein, he defines the two kinds of the human community as those situated in the course of human history in accord with their mutually opposed and ultimately divergent values.

21. Aug. s. 110A, 6: "Totum genus humanum terrenis cupiditatibus gravabatur; venit qui promitteret regnum caelorum. Est alia vita, est societas angelorum; est patria [...] Patria illa Hierusalem vocatur, Hierusalem "visio pacis" interpretatur. [...] noli terram sapere."

22. Aug. s. 299A augm., 8: "Quaedam enim ciuitas impia describitur [...] et haec Babylonia in Scripturis mystice nominatur. Rursus *quaedam ciuitas peregrina in hac terra* [...] *et haec Hierusalem nominatur.* Modo ambae ciuitates permixtae sunt, in fine separabuntur."

23. Aug. s. 16A, 9: "Ibi finit, ubi tendebat. Modo ergo in hac peregrinatione constituti, finem habemus ubi tendimus. Vbi ergo tendimus? Ad patriam nostram. Quae est patria nostra? Ierusalem, mater piorum, mater uiuorum. Illic tendimus. Finis noster ipse est. [...] Nesciebamus qua ire. [...] Aberrauimus enim, et cum simus Ierusalem ciues, facti sumus ciues Babyloniae, facti sumus filii confusionis: Babylonia enim confusio est."

Concluding remarks

Augustine referred to Jerusalem in his *sermones ad populum* throughout the ecclesiastical career from the early 390s to the mid 420s. He provided the congregation with only fragmentary information of the Jerusalem of his day. In contrast, his preaching contains many references to the historical Jerusalem in relation to the story of Jesus and his disciples in the gospels and Acts. What does it mean? It has specific spiritual, ecclesiastical, and eschatological implications. Augustine does not intend to realise the city as a historical testimony of divine revelation. When he interprets the story of Acts, the focus is naturally turned to the universal significance of the church, not to a particular place in its history. It permits us to assume that this may be the reason why he did not pay any concern for both the phenomenon of pilgrimage in the fourth and fifth centuries and the religious role of a holy place. From the outset of his exegetical efforts, Augustine encourages the congregation to impart a way of dealing with the spiritual dimension of Jerusalem: it is the heavenly city and the "mother of us all", connected with the law of the spirit of life. In his preaching against Donatists, Augustine emphasised the universality of the church and its Christ-centred view. His focus is on the ecclesial unity, with which they could dispel the fear of losing their salvation and protect the foundation of their spiritual mode of life.

Along with the dichotomous hierarchy between the heavenly and the earthly, Augustine implies the alienation from the world and relates it to the construction of a Christian way of life. His attention is directed towards the two opposing factors, thereby stressing the superiority of the heavenly Jerusalem in the course of human history, which is the vision of peace, in contrast with Babylon, the city of the impious. He presents the spiritual and eschatological aspect of Jerusalem to provide the basis both for the spiritual life of the individual and for the ecclesial unity of his congregation. Augustine's concern with Jerusalem situates a wider set of the anti-heretical, spiritual, and ecclesiological mode of thought, rather than being a social and cultural focus on the actual Jerusalem.