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# Depth and Weight: Augustine's Sermon Illustration

Peter Sanlon

*"Let us treat scripture like scripture: like God speaking."*

Augustine, Sermon 162C.15

Where there are sermons, there are illustrations to be copied! Almost all preachers use illustrations. Some use them too much, some re-use them too often—hardly any of us reflect theologically about the nature of sermon illustrations. This article intends to provoke theological reflection on the nature of sermon illustrations. We often use illustrations unthinkingly—we must have a good illustration (whatever that means!) and we desperately seek the one that fits. Yet our use of words and our selection of illustrations ought not to lie unexamined theologically.

To prompt what we hope will be fruitful reflection we will consider the sermon illustrations of Augustine of Hippo. As he learnt much of his preaching skills as a secular orator, we will begin by looking at some of the raw material the culture provided him—the challenges and frustrations his education bequeathed. We will then highlight two areas of theological insight which feature prominently in Augustine's sermons: Scripture's depth and the heart's weight. Crucial to theological reflection is the act of establishing connections between ideas; we shall suggest ways in which reflecting on our doctrine of Scripture and anthropology can enrich our sermon illustrations.

## Secular Orators seek depth and weight

Oratory played a central role in the culture of antiquity—law, politics, entertainment, education, funerals and career advancement were suffused in rhetoric. There were differing schools of thought and varying degrees of ability, but few would have seen any point in challenging Cicero's claim that the most influential man in the world was the one that could speak well.

What is so powerful or splendid as when a single man's speech reverses popular upheavals, the scruples of jurors, or the authority of the Senate? If we consider our leisure time, what can be more pleasant or more properly human than to be able to engage in elegant conversation?<sup>1</sup>

In such a culture, even the earlier philosophers who had challenged the supreme value of oratory could be dismissed with a rhetorical flourish—

I read Plato's *Gorgias* with close attention under Charmadas during those days at Athens, and what impressed me most deeply about Plato in that book was, that it was when making fun of orators that he himself seemed to me the consummate orator.<sup>2</sup>

In a culture which valued rhetoric so highly and devoted extensive efforts to its practice, it is perhaps surprising to discover how critical some orators were about the rhetoric of their day. Two of the most famous orators stand out in particular: Cicero and Quintilian. Neither doubted the importance of rhetoric, but in various ways they desired more depth and weight. Intriguingly, both men voiced their criticisms of oratory towards the end of their careers. This was humbling for Cicero—he dismissed his earlier work *On Invention* as immature.<sup>3</sup> Quintilian was born in about 35 AD and probably died shortly after publishing his work *The Orator's Education*. The work bears the marks of maturity: Quintilian spent decades teaching oratory, absorbing other view points and formulating his approach.

From their positions of maturity, both Cicero and Quintilian expressed—in slightly different ways—a longing for oratory to develop what may be termed depth and weight. They were frustrated with overdeveloped rules of oratory, and dissatisfied with the flamboyance of many speakers.

So, for example, Quintilian mentioned the practice of studying oratory by declaiming example speeches—

By far the most useful of exercises ... has become so popular that many think that it is sufficient by itself for the formation of an orator ... Yet the thing has degenerated to such an extent (and this is the fault of the teachers) that the ignorance of speakers has become one of the prime causes of the decline of oratory.<sup>4</sup>

A good method for training speakers had led to the decline of rhetoric, because the students had failed to learn to see past a simple exercise to the deeper reality of what the teacher ought to have communicated. The problem was compounded by students foolishly thinking that if they could complete the classroom exercises accurately, they knew all that was necessary to speak.

The decadence of oratory which Quintilian decried included not only flamboyance; being boring and repetitive was also a problem—

Sameness or homogeneity is a fault; a style that has no variety to relieve the tedium, and which presents a uniform monotony of hue. This is one of the surest signs of lack of art, and produces a uniquely unpleasing effect, not merely on the mind but on the ear, on account of its sameness of thought, the uniformity of its illustrations, and the monotony of its structure.<sup>5</sup>

In these and other ways Quintilian bemoaned the decline of oratory, longing for more weight and depth.

The distinctive way in which Cicero suggested a need to deepen contemporary oratory is seen in his refusal to accept the limitations and conventions of what had become the accepted rules of rhetoric. It was common to write books on public speaking that contained detailed rules and principles of best practice. Cicero had himself produced such guides. However he came to see the focus on principles as too shallow to feed and grow truly accomplished orators. He could be caustic in criticising those who thought they had learned to speak by following rules. One reason was that it led to a shallow ability which was not grounded on the underlying realities of oratory: ‘In a growth that has reached maturity too quickly, vitality cannot be long lived.’<sup>6</sup> Cicero wanted to encourage orators to see beneath the rules of speech to the realities of what it meant to communicate. This involved philosophical debates about the nature of the will and personhood, how people view good and evil and the means by which people may be persuaded to change. The fact that he entitled his mature work *On the Ideal Orator* shows that he was concerned with the type of person the orator was. Persuasive rhetoric could not be communicated merely by principles taught to students. Students had to—if at all possible—become a certain type of person. Such a transformation involved natural abilities and training, but it would require an engagement of the entire person which Cicero felt too few were able or willing to give. For such a task ‘It was Cicero’s conviction that rules can never be enough.’<sup>7</sup>

### **A Secular Orator becomes a Preacher**

Augustine sought to make his way in the world by becoming an orator. He achieved success and fame through his speaking. After conversion to

Christianity he described his secular rhetorical career as *vendito verborum*,<sup>8</sup> a peddler or salesman of words. Once he had thought the scriptures not worthy of comparison with Cicero.<sup>9</sup> A huge change in Augustine's values led him to see opening up the scriptures in preaching as a speech truly worth hearing 'The preaching of God's word has to be repeated to you always'.<sup>10</sup>

Yet as Augustine preached he did not reject all he had learned from Cicero. Augustine modified, developed and engaged with Cicero's insights. Augustine's work often looked back 'chronologically and intellectually to the pre-Christian world of Cicero, Augustine's principal model'.<sup>11</sup> Some of the depth and weight Cicero longed to see in oratory, Augustine realised in his preaching. The brightest and best secular minds had been able to perceive deficiencies in rhetoric, but only the orator turned preacher was able to mine the riches of God's resources for speaking.

Modern academic scholarship has unreasonably downplayed the importance of Augustine's sermons. In one standard reference work they are said to have a 'Short and scrappy focus on issues of pastoral urgency'.<sup>12</sup> An academic lecture complains that 'Much of what Augustine says in his preaching is unexceptional, even banal'.<sup>13</sup>

The distribution of published works on Augustine is disproportionate: Augustine left us in excess of five million words, yet fully 15% of publications concern two works: *Confessions* and *City of God*.<sup>14</sup> When the sermons are neglected an unbalanced portrait of Augustine emerges. His previous career as an orator was self-critically put to service in the pulpit. He firmly believed that preaching was central to his ministry—on occasion declining to answer theological enquiries as he viewed a previous sermon as an acceptable rejoinder.

An indication that classical scholars have become aware of the value of Augustine's preaching is found in *The Edinburgh Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome*. This argues that the sermon was Christianity's foremost contribution to ancient culture. The sermon represented 'Nothing less than a revolution in the politics of literary production, a democratisation theorised, in fact, by Augustine himself'.<sup>15</sup> We have hundreds of Augustine's sermons recorded by the team of notaries who preserved Augustine's preaching with their own form of shorthand. Some of these sermons, for example on the

Psalms, were edited into commentaries. However there are about five hundred sermons on various subjects that were never edited or collected into a series on a Bible book. These are known as the *Sermons to the People*.<sup>16</sup> An astonishing level of detail is preserved in the records. It was frequently uncomfortably hot, causing Augustine to refer to his perspiration.<sup>17</sup> He was conscious that while he sat others stood getting tired.<sup>18</sup> Cheering, applause<sup>19</sup> and raucous shouting of Bible verses could make it difficult to hear the bishop's voice,<sup>20</sup> which was in mature years afflicted by laryngitis or possibly pleurisy.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the demanding physical environment, Augustine felt the strain which flowed from his theology of preaching. He believed that he was engaging in an act of tremendous theological importance. He was speaking many words, which he frequently interpreted in light of Proverbs 10:19 (When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but the prudent are restrained in speech.) to be a dangerous exercise. He was attempting to ensure his congregation listened not only to him, but to Christ the interior teacher. Augustine used every image, illustration and exhortation he could to communicate with his listeners. He acted out short plays in which he performed the roles of both imaginary interlocutors. He used sarcasm, irony, warmth and humour. Throughout the endeavour one senses not only that Augustine put huge effort, under pressure, into his preaching, but also that the bishop greatly enjoyed preaching.

Augustine has been known as a theologian who answered heresy—this he did. Books which summarise Augustine's theology frequently order it by the heresies he refuted at different stages of his ministry. However to so ignore his sermons as formative of his theological development is to fall short in our engagement with him. Heresy was far from the only stimulus to theological reflection. Preaching regularly forced Augustine to ponder at least two important areas of theological enquiry, in the context of pastoral care. His insight into firstly scripture and secondly the human heart, enabled him to move beyond secular rhetoric. Augustine's illustrations formed one part of the theological enterprise of preaching God's Word. As such they had a depth and weight that Cicero and Quintilian could only dream of.

### Scripture's Depth

In a sermon only discovered in the early 1990s, Augustine encouraged listeners to 'weigh up' the Scriptures. He used an illustration: 'When boys buy themselves nuts, they weigh them in the hand, and when they find they are

heavy, they hold on without a qualm to what is still closed. So weigh them up.<sup>22</sup> Augustine is not merely inviting people to express an opinion about the validity of Scripture: he makes clear that scripture has intrinsic weight due to divine authority, canonicity and prophecy. As he so often does, Augustine uses an illustration—a boy buying nuts—and circles around the image to make a more profound point than the illustration at first conveyed. He describes somebody reflecting on the evidences of weight that Scripture displays, then observes—

When you say this to yourself, you are weighing it; if you have weighed it, you have found that it's heavy; you can hold on to it without a qualm. But perhaps you are such a feeble little boy that you can't break it; just go on holding it and rejoicing, aware that you are holding something full of meaning. You won't be long without someone to break it for you and give it to you to eat.<sup>23</sup>

Augustine uses the image of a boy holding nuts he has bought in a shop to show that if there is a weight of scripture that compels, there is also depth in scripture that confuses. Meaning is not automatically or immediately made clear. So Augustine continues to develop his illustration—little boys need a father to crack open the nuts. Augustine suggests that Paul is like a loving father who breaks open the nuts for his children to eat—his teaching is the nut cracker that unlocks scripture's mysteries. Augustine's appreciation of Scripture's depth was the foundation of his theological approach to sermon illustration. Augustine perceived a depth of meaning in scripture that could be spoken of as obscure and mysterious. Illustrations in his preaching were designed to draw people into this depth of Scripture.

Earlier Latin African preachers had perceived the partialness of our grasp of Scripture. Tertullian wrote, 'I would prefer an incomplete understanding of Scripture to an incorrect one ... bad exegesis is no less worse than bad conduct.'<sup>24</sup> Augustine went further, praising the obscurity of scripture as God's gracious gift to us. He saw the obscurity of images in the Bible as creating opportunity for the preacher—

No-one disputes that it is much more pleasant to learn lessons presented through imagery, and much more rewarding to discover meanings that are won only with difficulty. Those who fail to discover what they are looking for suffer from hunger, whereas those who do not look, because they have

it in front of them, often die of boredom. In both situations the danger is lethargy. It is a wonderful and beneficial thing that the Holy Spirit organised the holy scripture so as to satisfy hunger by means of its plainer passages and remove boredom by means of its obscurer ones. Virtually nothing is unearthed from these obscurities which cannot be found quite plainly expressed somewhere else.<sup>25</sup>

As Quintilian warned, boredom is a danger for the speaker. Augustine saw God's provision to guard against boredom as residing in the obscurity and depth of scripture. Images, metaphors and potential misunderstandings abound in the Bible. These do not add new information to the reader—rather they keep us awake and engaged. It does matter if people are bored by preaching—if pleasure is lacking then something has been done to the scripture by the preacher to make it less than the Holy Spirit inspired it to be.

There is a depth to scripture intrinsic to its inspiration which make it pleasurable and engaging. Part of this depth arises from the obscurity of illustrations and metaphors in the Bible. Augustine is well known for his use of allegory in preaching. Sadly his use of allegory is usually only engaged with for the purposes of distinguishing it from typology and pointing out that in our handling of scripture we ought to avoid uncontrolled allegory. The result of this popular caricature of Augustine is that one fails to engage sympathetically with Augustine. A case can be made that Augustine's allegorising was more controlled than often thought—he was usually working with a consistent assumed biblical theological framework of salvation history and he was not as dogmatic about his interpretations being exclusively correct as with other doctrinal conclusions. It should also be remembered that if we wish to understand how Augustine viewed scripture, we need to bear in mind that he did not operate with the same post-reformation distinction between allegory and typology which we may utilise. The modern assumption that there is a clearly delineated category or practice associated with allegory does not fit the classical attitude; 'Like many technical terms, the words "allegory" or "allegorical" appear to be reassuringly specific.'<sup>26</sup>

There are valuable lessons to be learned from Augustine's use of allegory in preaching; missed if we move too quickly to a pejorative judgement on the practice. The obscurity in Scripture encourages effort—



The mysteries of God are kept hidden not in order to prevent them being understood by those who desire to learn, but in order that they may be revealed only to those who seek. If the closed pages of scripture are read, it is so that the soul may be spurred to read them.<sup>27</sup>

Augustine meditated on passages and invited listeners to share his questioning of the text, pondering, ‘When the prophet says this, is he wishing it on the people, or is he not rather foreseeing what is going to happen?’<sup>28</sup> Augustine engaged in allegory because he was convinced the whole Bible was intended to heal and transform people. The Old Testament could be read in ways that led to heresy, for example as by the Manichees. Augustine wanted to have a different impact—

God produced many medicines from the holy Scriptures, which you could call the shelves of his pharmacy, when the divine scriptures were being read. It is my ministry to apply these medicines to our wounds ... There have been many things read, things both important and necessary. They are all like that, of course, and yet some things are hidden more thoroughly in the scriptures in order to stretch and test the students, while others are set there openly and ready to hand for the immediate treatment of patients.<sup>29</sup>

Augustine’s use of allegory was ‘Intended to characterise the ways that God uses the Bible to transform human beings ... For Augustine the Bible is the privileged conduit of this divine will to transform, and a proper reading of the Bible is one that enables the reader to enter into, and become a participant in, this transformative process’.<sup>30</sup> Augustine wanted the whole Bible to pastor his people; allegory was part of the way he tried to ensure the Old Testament did this.

It may be accepted that allegorising is not the best way to do this, yet there may still be lessons to learn from Augustine. He ought to be more than a warning to modern preachers against the vagaries of uncontrolled allegory. Augustine’s use of allegory reminds us that the Bible narrative itself is the greatest illustration. In his preaching Augustine attempted to draw people into the narrative of scripture. There are depths to the story of salvation in the Bible that are all too easily passed over by modern preachers. Showing how the Old Testament points to Jesus does not have the same transformative power that inviting people into the Old Testament mystery has. Convincing people that the

Old Testament is about Jesus merely explains a problem—they need to fear the surge of battle as David leads his troops, weep for the babies dead in the streets of exiled Jerusalem, wonder at the confident journeying of Abraham, laugh at Pharaoh's futile fight against God—these and many more are the illustrations designed by God to transform. All too often we pass over them, failing to utilise the power that resides in their depths. It may be counter-intuitive, and we may think that our explanation of how the issues relate to Jesus is more accurate than Augustine's. That may be so—but his preaching may still have been richer because he invited people to step into the depths of Scripture which he himself had enjoyed wading in. The reason inviting people to step into the narrative of the Scriptures is convincing is that the illustrations are God's tools of persuasion—

God is the master rhetorician in history; by means of events as his words, he catches our attention and moves us to an objective. We are in the realm of persuasion, the objective of classical rhetoric; but it is nevertheless a Christian world.<sup>31</sup>

Augustine's preaching was persuasive not primarily due to his secular skills of public speaking, but because as he explored the narrative of Scripture he exposed listeners to God speaking, the depths of which are encountered in Scripture's own inspired illustrations.

### The Heart's Weight

Theological issues are inter-related in ways we can neglect. Responsible theological reflection requires that we discern and re-sensitise ourselves to forgotten links between doctrines. In Augustine we have a theologian who exhibits considerable awareness of the theological link between anthropology and preaching. That is, every time somebody preaches, their sermon is shaped by an assumed view of what it means to be human. The link between our doctrine of humanity and preaching might be one that has become neglected. Preachers may not realise that they operate with an assumed anthropology which in other areas of ministry would be rejected as sub-biblical. A sermon illustration reveals much about how the preacher believes humans operate, how God transforms them and what it is to be human.

The illustrations of Augustine engage and draw listeners into the Scripture story because they worked from an anthropology which placed at the centre of

the listener the desiring heart. Augustine, in his early life, held to a more rationalistic view of people—they could be persuaded by the clear presentation of evidence to the mind. The more he reflected on the Bible and his experience of grace, the more he was shaped by his realisation that there is a weight that draws people through life—the heart’s desires, loves and longings.

So Augustine famously confessed, ‘My weight is my love; by it I am carried wherever I am borne’.<sup>32</sup> As he developed an anthropology which viewed people as being shaped at the deepest levels by the heart’s desires and loves, this affected his preaching. ‘In Augustine’s preaching, the heart, wherein love is rooted, appears as the source for the movement of the will.’<sup>33</sup>

Desire, love and delight are so central to Augustine’s theology that he can be said to have modelled a ‘spirituality of desire’.<sup>34</sup> Augustine came to believe that there is ‘No faculty of will, distinct from desire, which we use to determine our actions’.<sup>35</sup>

Augustine’s anthropology had not always focused on this view of the *cor* (heart). His views developed from the Cassiciacum days when he frequently mentioned the *mens* (mind or reason) and *animus* (physical life or vitality), through a period when he used *cor* to describe the moral quality of a person,<sup>36</sup> to a mature position where *cor* signified the essence of a person as a loving being above and before all else. The main factor fuelling this development was Augustine’s immersion in Scripture—evidenced by increasing use of Bible texts in writing—and also his engagement with the shallow anthropologies of Pelagianism and Stoicism.

The impact was seen in Augustine’s preaching.

You are drawn, not merely by the will, but what is more, by pleasure. What is it, to be drawn by pleasure? ‘Delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart’ (Ps. 37:4). Not necessity, but pleasure, not obligation, but delight; how much more strongly ought we to say that a man is drawn to Christ, when he delights in truth, delights in blessedness, delights in everlasting life, all of which Christ is?<sup>37</sup>

Augustine preached, and used illustrations, to arouse desire and delight because he came to believe that the people he was preaching to were carried by

their loves and desires. The main function of illustrations was not to make the complex truth clear, but to make the ignored truth beautiful. We ought not to seek to copy Augustine's actual illustrations—though many are funny, engaging, politically relevant and so forth. The real lasting value he has for us in this area is the theology of the heart upon which he based the nature of his illustrations. Augustine found his anthropology of the heart made sense of people: when people weep it is from the heart, for 'Tears are the blood of the heart'.<sup>38</sup> When people fail to believe in Christ's divinity, it is the inner eyes of the heart that need to be healed to see him as he passes by. When people fail to give generously it is because they are still 'Weighed down with love of the world'.<sup>39</sup>

All of this leads to the work of the Spirit. Augustine believed that the Spirit's role is to transform listeners—not primarily by helping them understand what they previously did not grasp, but by making them long passionately for what the Gospel promises:

When the Spirit of God calls the human race, telling us what we ought to do and promising us what we ought to hope for, he first makes us hot for the reward.<sup>40</sup>

Augustine made explicit what he hoped God would do in listeners:

Even now the fire is burning, the heat of the word is on, the fierce glow of the Holy Spirit ... That heat belongs to the Holy Spirit we are told by the apostle in Romans 12:11. So for the time being treat the Scripture of God as the face of God. Melt in front of it ... Under the heat of the word, when the tears begin to flow, don't you feel yourself rather like wax beginning to drip and flow down as if in tears?<sup>41</sup>

Rational understanding of language and words is not something that requires God's Spirit—it is a natural order of knowledge which common fallen humanity has access to. Individuals vary in the ability to grasp such information, but intelligence, education and literary perceptiveness are not the same thing as sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's voice speaking through Scripture. Augustine grasped this important insight and targeted his illustrations towards the weight which drags all people through the twists and turns of life, the place we need God's spirit to cleanse and renew—the weight of the heart. In this way Augustine's anthropology helped him craft sermon illustrations that carried real weight.

## Contemporary Reflections on Sermon Illustrations

We began our study by summarising secular frustrations from Augustine's age about communication. We too live in an age where people are disillusioned with speech. There has been so much promise from the information revolution, the digital age and professional communicators. Yet behind all the glitz and endless words, there is a sad shallowness in many of the words spoken in our culture. Internet blogs become endlessly self-referential, politicians ever more bend the definitions of words; people become tired and jaded. The raw fuel to speak words of life to the dead lies not in better technique but in richer theology. As Augustine discovered, it was through conversion and the grace of Jesus that he came to have something worth saying.

One of the most surprising things about this article on Augustine's sermon illustrations is that so few of his sermon illustrations have been quoted. That we expect more examples flows from our over-familiarity with books of sermon illustrations. (Even those who eschew the crudity of such books frequently use illustrations from an 'oral source tradition' of popular evangelical illustrations!) Augustine can more fruitfully encourage us to think theologically about illustrations than he can give us examples to follow. We need to ponder what our sermon illustrations reveal about firstly our view of the Bible and secondly our view of people. These theological links inform all of our illustrations; we can only profit from examining what links we have unwittingly forged in our preaching.

Do our illustrations invite people to wade into the depths of Scripture? It is as this is done that listeners discover that 'It is easy to see that the sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of human endeavor, breathe something divine'.<sup>42</sup> The Reformed view that Scripture authenticates itself was never intended to be a philosophical truism demonstrated apart from a personal engagement with Scripture—it was a certainty offered to all who taste and see. Illustrations that draw people away from the Scripture passage may place more confidence in human rationality and clarity than the Scriptures themselves.<sup>43</sup>

Are we too concerned to be culturally relevant? In our quest for the relevance at the end of the rainbow, do we miss the treasure trove of illustrations God has given us in Scripture? It should be our conviction that the Bible's story is

relevant, engrossing and self-authenticating. It is not that we ought to eschew all non-biblical illustrations, but surely we ought to have as a default position, the assumption that the Bible's stories are themselves engaging, and need to be entered into more deeply. Sadly our illustrations move people away from the Scripture too quickly, subtly suggesting to listeners that we are not ourselves gripped by the power of the passage.

There is a need to examine carefully our willingness to use humour as an illustration. What does it say about evangelical preaching that so often the first thing out of a preacher's mouth is a half-baked joke? It becomes even worse when one begins to notice that some preachers copy not only each others' illustrations, but also their jokes! There begins to evolve a canon of 'sound' jokes with which to open an exposition. The passage itself may evoke feelings of fear, awe, love, excitement—regardless of which all too often the first port of call is a witticism. There may be good reasons for humour in sermons, but it is not immediately obvious that our enthusiasm for it comes from an appreciation of the depth of Scripture.

Muddled assumptions about what the outsider expects to hear in our illustrations may dampen our passion for the Bible's stories. The outsider does not expect the minister to be an expert on all areas of cultural trivia—he or she hopes that the sermon will bring a word from outside their secular experience—we should be unashamed to feed that hope. Before we leap to the popular illustrations of Bible doctrines, maybe we could pause and ask if we could illustrate in such a way as to communicate the feeling of the passage read? Can we coin illustrations that evoke the riches of the passage, which open up vistas rather than narrow down horizons? Can we develop the light touch of the suggestive—the illustration that beckons listeners to enter in to something dimly glimpsed but deeply longed for?

As we consider our illustrations, we can ponder not only how they invite people into the depths of Scripture, but also whether they draw the weight of the listening heart towards Christ. It is rightly said of the Puritans that they were good doctors of the heart. We have all too often lost their insight. When we consider using an illustration, we need to think deeply not just about the concept being illustrated, but the people being spoken to. Does the illustration suggest to them that they are machines with lives that can be programmed akin

to spreadsheets—or creatures made in God’s image with deeply felt desires that shape identity and personhood? We want our illustrations to motivate—but as Pelagius testifies, faulty views of human nature can flood in upon us through a desire to motivate. Do our illustrations motivate people in a way that reflects a rich view of the heart? Life is complex, people more so. A profound anthropology of the heart equips us to ponder the wonder of the created person in all his or her longings and desires. For instance, we will never rightly move people to give money away unless we use illustrations that connect with the reasons they rush to store money for themselves. If people think that they are simply rational people making sensible decisions in life, then we must illustrate the gospel in such a way that it awakens in them the realisation that their decisions have been those of a heart borne by its weight towards things God does not desire for us.

We all fall short in this task. God deigns to use us even so. If Augustine’s insights about the depth of Scripture and the weight of the heart are correct, then they reveal how God uses Scripture to save and grow his people. Taking on board his theological connections between Scripture, the heart and preaching helps us to craft our sermons in such a way that they are more in tune with the way God has created people and the way he works in them. As such, the invitation is not so much one to pass on the perfect illustration, nor even to, in the first analysis to become a better preacher—it is to pause, consider afresh the depth of Scripture, the weight of our own hearts—then to ask God to make our sermons flow from hearts that are beating closely with his. As we bring our hearts into the depth of Scripture, the Spirit will fashion us into people of depth and weight—able not only to illustrate but also to experience for ourselves the depth and weight of God’s word and heart.

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## ENDNOTES

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2. *Ibid.*, 1.47.
3. *Ibid.*, 1.5.
4. Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, 2.10.3
5. *Ibid.*, 8.3.52.

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11. Catherine Conybeare, 'The Duty of a Teacher: Liminality and Disciplina in Augustine's De Ordine', in *Augustine and the Disciplines, from Cassiciacum to Confessions*, ed. K. Pollmann and Mark Vessey (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. 50.
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16. In twelve volumes of English translation by Edmund Hill, NY: New City Press.
17. Sermon 183.18.
18. Sermon 355.2.
19. Sermon 19.4.
20. Sermon 289.6.
21. Sermon 37.1; 68.1
22. Sermon 341.22.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Tertullian, *On Purity*, 8.9.
25. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 2.13-15.
26. Andrew Laird, 'Figures of Allegory from Homer to Latin Epic', in *Metaphor, Allegory and the Classical Tradition*, ed. G. R. Boys-Stones (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p. 152.
27. Sermon 60A.1
28. Sermon 22.1
29. Sermon 32.1



30. John David Dawson, 'Figure, Allegory', in *Augustine through the Ages*, Allan Fitzgerald (ed.), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 356-7. See also John David Dawson, 'Sign Theory, Allegorical Reading, and the Motions of the Soul in *De Doctrina*', in *De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, ed. Duane W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
31. R. W. Bernard, 'The Rhetoric of God in the Figurative Exegesis of Augustine', in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froelich on His Sixtieth Birthday*, M. S. Burrows & P. Rorem (ed.), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 97.
32. Confessions XIII.9.
33. Coleen Hoffman Gowans, *The Identity of the True Believer in the Sermons of Augustine of Hippo, a Dimension of His Christian Anthropology* (NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), p. 31.
34. William S. Babcock, 'Augustine and the Spirituality of Desire', *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994).
35. James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 7-8.
36. In, e.g. *De vera religione* and *De beata uita* where *cor* is used in this classical sense.
37. In *Johannis evangelium tractatus XXVI.4*.
38. Sermon 77B.6.
39. Sermon 88.25.
40. Sermon 16.1.
41. Sermon 22.7.
42. John Calvin, *Institutes*, I.viii.1.
43. For a careful exposition of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture's self authentication, see Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, (Oxford: OUP, 2006 p. 255ff).