



Letter or Sermon? The Analysis of Augustine's *De Bono Viduitatis*¹

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Abstract: St. Augustine's work *De bono viduitatis* written in 414 is not a treatise but a letter addressed to a widow issued from a noble Roman family named Juliana. She with her daughter and mother-in-law attempts to live the consecrated way of life. Under the strong influence of the asceticism and moralism of Pelagius, she begs Augustine to acquire the essential instructions for their devotion. Augustine in his answer proposes the original teaching on the widowhood based on the Holy Scripture, especially on the letters of apostle Paul, and encourages the women in their consecration to observe the goods of the widowhood. Nevertheless, St. Augustine does not write this letter only to Juliana. He desires that this letter will be spread to the other widows as well. The aim of our paper is to analyse the Augustine's letter to Juliana and focus our interest on the homiletical forms used by St. Augustine. Our argumentation is based on the analyse of this letter and on its comparison with Augustine's style of preaching. Examining the rhetoric elements used and known by St. Augustine as they are summarized in the Book Four of his treatise *On Christian Teaching* it enables us to present the style of Augustine – preacher and consequently to find some similarity and differences.

Keywords: Augustine; rhetoric; sermon; letter; widowhood

Augustine's work *The Excellence of Widowhood* (*De bono viduitatis*)³ written in 414 was originally composed as a letter of exhortation and spir-

¹ The present paper has been prepared within the project VEGA (Slovak National Grant Agency) no. 1/0257/20 The conception of woman heroin in medieval exegetic literature.

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³ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis*, ed. J. Zycha, CSEL 41, Wien 1900, tr. C.L. Cornish, Augustinus, *On the Good of Widowhood*, in: *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, v. 3, ed. P. Schaff, Buffalo 1887, p. 441-454.

itual direction to a rich widow Juliana who resided with her daughter and mother-in-law in Carthage. These three women, living as consecrated persons observing the continence, were under the influence of Pelagius and his teaching concerning ascetism and moralism. In this work Augustine responds to Juliana's insistent demand to give her and other women in the same condition some advice and guidelines. Therefore, is this letter dedicated not only to her, but through her to other women who could find the encouragement in this work. Due to the strong influence of rhetoric, we encounter the opus opened with the usual epistolary salutation containing not only numerous direct addresses to Juliana, to whom the letter was written, but also the admonitions to laity which form is very similar to the sermon. That is the reason, why we want to study this letter and compare it with Augustine's rhetoric style of homilies that is already well studied by several authors⁴. To do this, we firstly need to present the style of Augustine – preacher and then to apply the acquired material to this letter trying to find some similarities or/and differences if they exist. First of all, in this paper we will examine the rhetoric elements used and known by St. Augustine as they are summarized in the Book Four of his treatise *On Christian Teaching*. That probably will lead us to recognize the rhetorical passages in this letter, the measure of rhetorical and homiletical influence upon this letter, as well.

1. Rhetoric style presented in *De doctrina christiana*

Augustine's primary task as a Bishop was to interpret and teach the Word of God⁵ and to defend the true doctrine of the Faith:

So, the interpreter and teacher of the divine scriptures, the defender of the true

⁴ In this paper we quote some of them: R.J. Deferrari, *Augustine's method of composing and delivering sermons*, "American Journal of Philosophy" 43 (1922) p. 193-219; A.-M. La Bonnardière, *La prédication d'Augustine sur les Psaumes à Hippone*, AEPHE 86 (1977-1978) p. 337-341; M.-F. Berrouard, *Introduction aux homélies de saint Augustin sur l'Évangile de saint Jean*, Paris 2004; S.M. Oberhelman, *Rhetoric and Homilethics in Fourth-Century Christian Literature*, Atlanta 1991; M. Pontet, *L'exégèse de St. Augustin prédicateur*, Marseille 1944; in slovak language: M. Andoková, *Rečnické umenie sv. Augustína v kázňach k stupňovým žalmom*, Bratislava 2013.

⁵ J.A. Sypert, *Redeeming Rhetoric: Augustine's Use of Rhetoric in His Preaching Ministry*, "Eleutheria" 4 (2015) p. 21.

faith and vanquisher of error, must communicate what is good and eradicate what is bad, and in the same process of speaking must win over the antagonistic, rouse the apathetic, and make clear to those who are not conversant with the matter under discussion what they should expect. When he finds them favourable, interested, and receptive, or has made them so by his own efforts, then there are other goals to be achieved, as the particular case demands. If listeners need information, there must be a presentation of the facts (if indeed this is really what is needed) to make the matter under discussion more familiar⁶.

He as a well-educated minister preaching for almost forty years (his career started in 391 when he became a presbyter)⁷ uses common rhetorical elements to make Scripture clear to his audience. To recognize them we can use the rhetoric methodology as was written and presented in the book four of Augustine's work *On Christian Teaching (De doctrina christiana)*.

Augustine developed a distinctive style of preaching, that differs a lot from his style of writing⁸. As Sybert quotes: "It may be said that he wrote primarily for educated men. His preaching, however, was for the uneducated, common man on the street"⁹. To reach the less educated audience St. Augustine uses very often the illustrations that everybody could understand, exploiting the common language¹⁰, which was one of principle of

⁶ Augustinus, *De doctrina christiana* 4, 4, 6: "Debet igitur divinarum Scripturarum tractator et doctor, defensor rectae fidei ac debellator erroris, et bona docere et mala dedocere atque in hoc opere sermonis conciliare aversos, remissos erigere, nescientibus quid agatur quid exspectare debeant intimare. Ubi autem benevolos, intentos, dociles aut invenerit aut ipse fecerit, cetera peragenda sunt, sicut postulat causa. Si docendi sunt qui audiunt, narratione faciendum est, si tamen indigeat, ut res de qua agitur innotescat. Ut autem quae dubia sunt certa fiant, documentis adhibitis ratiocinandum est. Si vero qui audiunt movendi sunt potius quam docendi, ut in eo quod iam sciunt agendo non torpeant et rebus assensum quas veras esse fatentur accomodent, maioribus dicendi viribus opus est. Ibi obsecrationes et increpationes, concitationes et coercitiones et quaecumque alia valent ad commovendos animos, sunt necessaria". Translation of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* used in this paper is made by R.P.H. Green, *On Christian Teaching*, New York 2008, p. 201-203.

⁷ J. Van Oort, *Augustine, his sermons, and their significance*, "HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies" 65 (2009) p. 364.

⁸ C. Conybeare, *Augustine's rhetoric in theory and practice*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, ed. M.J. Mac Donald, New York 2017, p. 351.

⁹ Sybert, *Redeeming Rhetoric*, p. 22.

¹⁰ F. Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, London 1961, p. 971.

Augustine's preaching method¹¹. According to Augustine the goal of the preaching and teaching is to explain simply and clearly the biblical text, no matter the way and the manner of speaking:

Their expositors should not speak in such a way that they set themselves up as similar authorities, themselves in need of exposition, but should endeavour first and foremost in all their sermons to make themselves understood and to ensure, by means of the greatest possible clarity, that only the very slow fail to understand, and that the reason why anything that we say is not easily or quickly understood lies in the difficulty and complexity of the matters that we wish to explain and clarify, and not in our mode of expression¹².

In the preaching it is not important the eloquence, but the clearness.

Concerning the rhetoric, Drobner considers, according the teaching of Augustine, this art as a common tool for everyone who relates a message without any intrinsic value. As he remarks, it can be used for any subject, right or wrong, good or bad¹³. "Rhetoric is used to give conviction both to truth and falsehood¹⁴". The orator has a liberty to choose content and aims of his speech and forms them applying the means of his art. The preacher is a servant of God words and he can preach only the truth in the love of God¹⁵. Thus, the Augustine's main duty in rhetoric theory, was to apply the communicating God's word to his audience¹⁶ and to spread the Christian truth¹⁷. The Bible becomes the primary source of his thinking and arguments. The Scripture remained for Augustine the powerful Word of God and from God himself. The

¹¹ Conybeare, *Augustine's rhetoric in theory and practice*, p. 354.

¹² Augustinus, *De doctrina christiana* 4, 8, 22: "Non ergo expositores eorum ita loqui debent, tamquam se ipsi exponendos simili auctoritate proponant, sed in omnibus sermonibus suis primitus ac maxime ut intellegantur elaborent, ea quantum possunt perspicuitate dicendi, ut aut multum tardus sit qui non intellegit, aut in rerum quas explicare atque ostendere volumus difficultate ac subtilitate, non in nostra locutione sit causa qua minus tardiusve quod dicimus possit intellegi", tr. Green, *On Christian Teaching*, p. 223.

¹³ H.R. Drobner, "I would rather not be wearisome to you". *Saint Augustine's as preacher*, "Melita Theologica" 51 (2000) p. 120.

¹⁴ Augustinus, *De doctrina christiana* 4, 4.

¹⁵ Drobner, "I would rather not be wearisome to you", p. 120-124.

¹⁶ Sybert, *Redeeming Rhetoric: Augustine's Use of Rhetoric in His Preaching Ministry*, p. 25; Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, p. 405.

¹⁷ Conybeare, *Augustine's rhetoric in theory and practice*, p. 354.

rhetoric was also from God for purpose of employing the word of God to men's hearts¹⁸.

Formally, Augustine observes the famous Cicero's¹⁹ dictum of three functions of speech, that should teach, delight and persuade or move²⁰, but at this point he makes a "minor educational revolution"²¹ because he relativizes the formal rules of rhetoric based on Quintilian²² saying that all the rules are good and useful but not indispensable²³. Augustine writes about it:

This is why instruction is a matter of necessity. People may either do or not do what they know must be done; but who could say that they must do something which they do not know they must do? The reason why moving people is not a matter of necessity is that is not always needed [...]. Nor is giving delight a matter of necessity, since when truths themselves, as they are revealed, do produce delight by virtue of being true²⁴.

Augustine uses a new style, accurately characterized as *sermo humilis*²⁵. In his preaching he wants to become after all the minister of the Word

¹⁸ Sybert, *Redeeming Rhetoric*, p. 21; P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, Berkeley – Los Angeles 2013, p. 155.

¹⁹ Cicero, *Orator* 21, 69.

²⁰ Augustinus, *De doctrina christiana* 4, 12, 27.

²¹ Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, p. 406.

²² Sybert, *Redeeming Rhetoric*, p. 25.

²³ Ch.S. Baldwin, *St. Augustine on Preaching (De doctrina christiana, IV)*, in: *The Rhetoric of St. Augustine of Hippo: De Doctrina Christiana and the Search for a Distinctly Christian Rhetoric*, ed. R.L. Enos – R. Thompson et al., Waco 2008, p. 187; C. Harrison, *The Rhetoric of Scripture and Preaching: Classical Decadence or Christian Aesthetic?*, in: *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, ed. G. Bonner – R. Dodaro – G. Lawless, London 2000, p. 217.

²⁴ Augustinus, *De doctrina christiana* 4, 12, 28: "Ac per hoc docere necessitatis est. Possunt enim homines et agere et non agere quod sciunt. Quis autem dixerit eos agere debere quod nesciunt? Et ideo flectere necessitatis non est, quia non semper opus est, [...] Sed neque delectare necessitatis est, quandoquidem cum dicendo vera monstrantur (quod ad officium docendi pertinet), non eloquio agitur neque hoc attenditur, ut vel ipsa vel ipsum delectet eloquium, sed per seipsa, quoniam vera sunt, manifestata delectant", tr. Green, *On Christian Teaching*, p. 231.

²⁵ Van Oort, *Augustine, his sermons, and their significance*, p. 368; E. Auerbach, *Literatursprache und Publikum in der lateinischen Spätantike und im Mittelalter*, Bern 1958, p. 25-54.

who should follow the example of Christ, who humbled himself²⁶. That is why Augustine does not care about the eloquence so much, because the true beauty of speech depends on the sincerity of the words:

What especially differentiates the grand style from the mixed style is that it is not so much embellished with verbal ornament as inflamed by heartfelt emotion. It has room for almost all those ornaments, but if they are not there they are not missed. It is borne along by its own momentum, and derives its beauty of expression, if indeed this emerges, from the power of its subject – matter, and not the pursuit of elegance. It is sufficiently equipped for its purpose if appropriate words follow not from a search for elaborate vocabulary but from the promptings of a passionate heart²⁷.

The remarkable sign of the Augustine's sermons is intimacy²⁸. "Augustine's style of preaching appears on a first reading to be pedestrian and casual. His manner is more temperate than Tertullian's or Cyprian's, less stylised than Chrysologus' and less elegant than Ambrose's. A small number of academics have realised that the informal style of Augustine's preaching is pregnant with theological significance"²⁹. Van der Meer commented Augustine's style using the following words: "The average sermon of Augustine makes such a disorderly impression that his unpretentious manner seems almost to suggest downright carelessness [...]. He made his sermons deliberately art less, and at the same time showed positive genius in his strict observance of all artistic rules"³⁰.

Augustine style has two aspects: the rhetorical and the theological. On the rhetorical side, his casual manner was the mark of his skills to wear his learning lightly. As Bernard says Augustine did not need to labour or draw

²⁶ M.-F. Berrouard, *Saint Augustin et le ministère de la prédication*, "Recherches Augustiniennes" 2 (1962) p. 480-481.

²⁷ Augustinus, *De doctrina christiana* 4, 42: "Grande autem dicendi genus hoc maxime distat ab isto genere temperato, quod non tam verborum ornatibus comptum est, quam violentum animi affectibus. Nam capit etiam illa ornamenta paene omnia, sed ea si non habuerit, non requirit. Fertur quippe impetu suo et elocutionis pulchritudinem, si occurrerit, vi rerum rapit, non cura decoris assumit. Satis enim est ei propter quod agitur ut verba congruentia non oris eligantur industria, sed pectoris sequantur ardorem", tr. Green, *On Christian Teaching*, p. 251-253.

²⁸ P.T. Sanlon, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching*, Minneapolis 2014, p. 13.

²⁹ Sanlon, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching*, p. 17-18.

³⁰ Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, p. 418-419.

attention to his ability in rhetoric; neither was his use of rhetorical devices formulaic.

On the other hand, the theological component of his speeches is necessary to build a convincing case. His personal manner of sermon was deeply theological and based on a conviction that God loved and cared for those, who listened to him. In addition, "the warm colloquial style of Augustine also flowed from his doctrinal convictions about the centrality of the desirous heart. Warm words from God intended to inculcate love naturally demand a preacher to speak with heartfelt warmth"³¹.

The theological concerns were more important for St. Augustine than the whole rhetorical agenda. His sermons flowed from prior contemplation upon Scripture and created the relationality between God, preacher and listeners. It is well known that Augustine starts the preparation of his sermon by praying for himself and for his audience³². So, Augustine's method of preaching required the opening of a preacher's heart to God and a subsequent outpouring of the heart's love to listeners³³. As Van Der Meer said, Augustine "spoke from the fullness of his heart"³⁴ which could be well seen also in his letter to Juliana.

2. Letter to Juliana

Now, let us examine the Augustine's work *The Excellence of Widowhood*. The mentioned work is divided into two parts by Augustine himself. In the first part of this letter, he intends to teach his readers what is necessary to know about the consecrated life. In the second part he wants to encourage them to persevere on the chosen path and in the imitation of Christ³⁵.

St. Augustine dedicate this letter not only to Juliana, but with her help, to the wider audience. He writes:

If in reading this work of mine, you find that some matters treated therein do not concern you personally or your companions who are living with

³¹ Sanlon, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching*, p. 19.

³² Augustinus, *De doctrina christiana* 4, 15, 32.

³³ Sanlon, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching*, p. 20.

³⁴ Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, p. 419.

³⁵ F.A. Doull, *A Contemporary Assessment Of St. Augustine's On The Good Of Widowhood*, "Animus" 6 (2001) p. 35.

you in Christ, and that they are not exactly necessary for the guidance of your conduct, you should not regard them as superfluous for this reason. Although I have addressed this letter to you, it has not been my intention to write it for you alone; on the contrary, I have not overlooked the fact that it may also be helpful to others through you. Consequently, you may find in these pages advice that you never needed and that you do not need now, but if you perceive that others may benefit by it, you should be glad to have this book to lend them for their reading, that through your charity it may be helpful to others³⁶.

The style of St. Augustine is personal. He addresses directly Juliana using the 2nd person singular of various verbs³⁷ as he does habitually and strikingly³⁸; possessive pronoun your³⁹, pronoun you⁴⁰; and refers to the personal information about Juliana⁴¹ and to her familiarity with the material. He addresses her some admonitions and orders concerning her own life. Although this letter alters between personal and impersonal style. In some parts of this letter Juliana becomes a kind of the personification of the state of widowhood⁴². In this case, the admonitions are very general and serve as the manner of persuading that should lead to the transformation of life, to the true interior conversion. In the way of admonition Augustine changes the style of his speech. He stops to address Juliana directly, nor indirectly. He uses the first person plural in every verb to make a sensation that he

³⁶ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 1: "In quo sane opere nostro cum aliqua legeris ad tuam vel ad vestram, quae simul in Christo vivitis, personam minime pertinere nec admonitioni vitae vestrae proprie necessaria, non ideo debebis superflua iudicare. Istae quippe litterae quamvis ad te, non tamen tantummodo tibi scribendae fuerunt, sed ut aliis quoque per te prodessent, non utique a nobis neglegendum fuit. Quidquid ergo hic inveneris, quod vobis necessarium vel numquam fuerit vel iam non sit et tamen aliis esse perspexeris, nec habere te pigeat nec dare legendum, ut et tua caritas sit utilitas aliorum". Translation of Augustine's *De bono viduitatis* used in this paper is made by R. Kearney, *The Excellence of Widowhood*, in: *The Works of Saint Augustine (A Translation for the 21st Century)*, v. 1/9, New York 1999, p. 279-280.

³⁷ See (Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 4, 5), know (Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 4, 6); choose (Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 4, 6); condemn (Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 4, 6); rejoice (Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 4, 6).

³⁸ Conybeare, *Augustine's rhetoric in theory and practice*, p. 359.

³⁹ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 3, 4; 4, 6.

⁴⁰ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 8, 11.

⁴¹ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 14, 18.

⁴² Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 16, 20.

is a part of all orders given not by him, but by God⁴³. He, the bishop, as a shepherd of his herd becomes an example to imitate.

In addition, this Augustine's work, provides us the huge number of different rhetorical devices. Reading his books, we can occur the analogies, word pictures, similes or metaphors⁴⁴. We find the gradations⁴⁵, repetitions⁴⁶, antithesis⁴⁷ as well, which is his favourite theological method⁴⁸.

Augustine in this text observes the triple division of the speech. That is why in the letter to Juliana we can find all the rhetorical components used in the sermon as well: the teaching, delight and the persuasion. The teaching of Augustine does not consist on the human doctrine, nor on his own theory. Augustine is fully dependent on the Scripture and on the word of God himself. His only duty as a bishop and a shepherd who pays always attention to the pastoral dimension of the study and explanation of Scripture is to explain them⁴⁹: "Consequently, I shall not presume to instruct you

⁴³ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 17, 21.

⁴⁴ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 8, 11: "sed melius nubere quam retro ire post satanam, id est ab excellenti illo virginalis vel vidualis castitatis proposito in posteriore respiciendo cadere et interire". In English translation: "but better to marry than to go back after Satan, that is, to fall away from that excellent purpose of virginal or widowed chastity, by looking back to things that are behind, and perish".

⁴⁵ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 5, 7: "Sicut ergo bono melius et beato beatius, sic honesto honestius est, quod honestum voluit appellare". In English translation: "As, therefore, there is than good a better, and than blessed a more blessed, so is there than honest an honester, which he chose to call honest".

⁴⁶ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 9, 12: "quae potest ergo capere, capiat et quae se non continet, nubat; quae non coepit, deliberet; quae aggressa est, perseveret; nulla adversario detur occasio, nulla Christo subtrahatur oblatio". In English translation: "therefore let her who can receive it, receive it; and let her, who contains not, marry; let her, who has not begun, deliberate; let her, who has undertaken it, persevere; let there be no occasion given unto the adversary, let there be no oblation withdrawn from Christ".

⁴⁷ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 7, 10: "Cuius rei non concupiscentiam carnis, sed providentiam generationis fuisse causam illud ostendit, quod sicut sanctis viris habere plures uxores vivas, non ita etiam sanctis feminis licebat misceri maritis pluribus vivis; quoniam tanto essent turpiores, quanto magis appeterent, unde non essent fecundiores". In English translation: "And to the husbands was allowed the use of several wives living; and that the cause of this was not lust of the flesh, but forethought of begetting, is shown by the fact, that, as it was lawful for holy men to have several wives living, it was not likewise lawful for holy women to have intercourse with several husbands living; in that they would be by so much the baser, by how much the more they sought what would not add to their fruitfulness".

⁴⁸ Sypert, *Redeeming Rhetoric*, p. 29-31.

⁴⁹ Andoková, *Rečnické umenie sv. Augustína v kázňach k stupňovým žalmom*, p. 2.

except by presenting to you the words of that Teacher and enlarging upon them as the Lord shall inspire me⁵⁰". In this work Augustine cites mainly the letters of Apostle Paul exploring them by the quotation of the Bible. Augustine's style of explication and teaching is very clear and pastoral at the same time. The Bible represents for him a great source of inspiration and the point of departure of his thinking⁵¹.

Augustine writes about essential things to observe. He explains the women the meaning of the Scriptures, and tries to make this dear with everyday examples. He explains a bible passage, using mainly other Bible texts as a commentary. In addition, the passages were repeated verse by verse, word by word. Some of the Scriptural passages were explained through paraphrases and comparisons⁵². The hermeneutical method used by Augustine, also known as interpretation according "scriptura per scripturam intellegi". This way of textual interpretation of the obscure or ambivalent places of texts using the other texts of the same author created in the time of Alexandrian philology and was used in the rabbinic exegesis as well⁵³. The content of the letter as well as the content of the sermon is then thoroughly biblical⁵⁴.

The role of every preacher is to teach the Word of God himself. The Christian education consists of the interpretation and explanation of the Word. Preaching should also serve to edify and to convert, but that should be the word of God. The preacher could only minister the Word and bring it to the men⁵⁵. That is why Augustine writes in the second chapter of his letter to Juliane:

In every question that affects life and conduct, precept and exhortation are necessary, for through precept we learn what we ought to do and through exhortation we are prompted to do gladly what we have learned to be our obligation. Since this is true, what better instruction can I give you than that which we read in the Apostle. Holy Scripture has laid down a rule for instruction, namely, that we should not presume to rate ourselves more than we

⁵⁰ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 1, 2: "Non sit ergo mihi aliud te docere nisi verba tibi Doctoris exponere et de iis quod Dominus dederit disputare", tr. Kearney, *The Excellence of Widowhood*, p. 280.

⁵¹ Andoková, *Rečnické umenie sv. Augustína v kázňach k stupňovým žalmom*, p. 12.

⁵² Van Oort, *Augustine, his sermons, and their significance*, p. 366.

⁵³ Andoková, *Rečnické umenie sv. Augustína v kázňach k stupňovým žalmom*, p. 36.

⁵⁴ Van Oort, *Augustine, his sermons, and their significance*, p. 367.

⁵⁵ Van Oort, *Augustine, his sermons, and their significance*, p. 368.

ought, but, as the Apostle himself says, we should rate ourselves according to moderation and according as God has apportioned to each one the measure of faith. Consequently, I shall not presume to instruct you except by presenting to you the words of that Teacher and enlarging upon them as the Lord shall inspire me⁵⁶.

In this chapter we can see that Augustine, again, writes on “the internal teacher” – Christ that all ministers and hearers have to obey. There is no one but Christ who gives his word to the minister who is speaking and so spreading the God’s will⁵⁷.

Rather than arguing directly from propositions or doctrines, Augustine typically invited his hearers to join him in an enquiry into the meaning of scripture. Augustine very often uses the questions to call attention⁵⁸ and to create the conversation, at least imaginary, between him and his audience and to make his sermon more vivid. Another reason is to create the illusion, that audience makes a part not only of his speaking, but also thinking and making the decisions. That is why Augustine’s style of writing and preaching could be identified as conversational preaching probing and exploring passages of Scripture in a way that it enlivened scripture and permitted a degree of topical doctrinal speaking. Arguments that could be seen difficult or hardly believed or accepted by his audience are supported by the examples⁵⁹. The function of such examples is to create the absurd situation based on the teaching of Augustine’s opponents or contra arguments. Augustine by using the well-known persuasive speech technics tends to persuade those who listened to him and brings them to the knowledge about their error. It is very well seen in our studied work *The Excellence of Widowhood* in chapter 10, 13. Augustine presents there the absurd case of married woman who dedicated her life in continence to God, with permission of her husband. By this act she commits adultery with God, according bizarre meaning of some Augustine’s adversaries, as we can read:

Since those who renounce marriage for the sake of Christian perfection are said to choose the espousals of Christ, some persons argue thus: If a woman marries another man during the life of her husband she commits adultery, as

⁵⁶ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 2, tr. Kearney, *The Excellence of Widowhood*, p. 280.

⁵⁷ Van Oort, *Augustine, his sermons, and their significance*, p. 369.

⁵⁸ Conybeare, *Augustine's rhetoric in theory and practice*, p. 353.

⁵⁹ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 14, 17.

our Lord Himself has declared in the Gospel; therefore, the woman who has chosen to be united with Christ commits adultery, if she is married to a man, for Christ is always living and over Him death no longer has dominion. Such persons reason astutely, but they do not consider the absurd consequences of their argument. It is meritorious for a woman to make a vow of continence to Christ even while her husband is living, provided she has his consent, but, according to these casuists, no woman ought to do this, for she makes Christ Himself an adulterer by being espoused to Him during the life of her husband, the very thought of which is blasphemous⁶⁰.

The chosen examples have at the same time a function of amusement which is very often in Augustine's writing attached with the irony. Irony is used mainly in the situations when Augustine wants to ease the declarations, deride his opponents or simply to mention the absurdity of their statements.

The purpose of the third part of each sermon should be dedicated to the persuasion. The main task of Augustine's speeches and writings is to bring people towards God. At this point St. Augustine acknowledges the power of the God's word that only is capable to impact the heart and conduct to the change of the life, to the interior conversion⁶¹.

⁶⁰ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 10, 13: "Quia enim coniugium Christi dicuntur eligere quae christiana sanctitate non nubunt, hinc argumentantur quidam dicentes: Si viro suo vivo quae alteri nubit, adultera est, sicut ipse Dominus in Evangelio definiuit, vivo ergo Christo, cui mors ultra non dominatur, quae coniugium eius elegerat, si homini nubit, adultera est. Qui hoc dicunt, acute quidem moventur, sed parum attendunt hanc argumentationem quanta rerum sequatur absurditas. Cum enim laudabiliter etiam vivente viro ex eius consensu continentiam femina Christo voveat, iam secundum istorum rationem nulla hoc facere debet, ne ipsum Christum, quod sentire nefas est, adulterum faciat, cui vivente marito nubit", tr. Kearney, *The Excellence of Widowhood*, p. 293-294.

⁶¹ Augustinus, *De bono viduitatis* 16, 20: "Proinde quoniam in exordio huius opusculi duo quaedam necessaria proposueram et exsequenda pollicitus eram, unum, quod ad doctrinam, alterum, quod ad exhortationem pertinet; et priori parti, ut potui, pro suscepto negotio non defui, ad exhortationem veniamus, ut quod bonum prudenter scitur etiam diligatur ardentius. Qua in re prius illud admoneo, ut quantumcumque tibi inesse sentis pia continentiae dilectionem beneficio Dei tribuas eique gratias agas, qui de Spiritu suo tibi tantum largitus est, ut eius in corde tuo caritate diffusa licitae rei licentiam tibi amor boni melioris auferret".

3. Conclusion

At the end of this paper, we can say that, from the formal side, Augustine's work *De bono viduitatis* is a letter, there is no doubt. Nevertheless, the personal letter addressed to one concrete person Juliana becomes the letter dedicated to the wider audience. The letter which is intensely influenced by the rhetoric to make it more vivid. Due to the strong guidance of rhetoric, we can see that it contains also the marks of the sermon, even the triple division of the speech – teaching, delighting and persuading. We can see also the use of the various rhetorical forms and devices what is a specification of the sermon. So, we can say, that Juliana converts to the personification of a consecrated widow and the personal letter becomes pastoral carrying the bishop's sermon to his herd.

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