



PELAGIANISM AS NOVELTY IN AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Pelagianismo como una novedad en Agustín de Hipona

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ABSTRACT

Augustine fought against the Pelagians for almost two decades, from 411 to his death in 430, when he left unfinished his last work against Julian of Aeclanum. During this long period, Augustine countered the Pelagian movement mainly through theological treatises and sermons. In this paper, these sources will be studied from a rhetorical perspective: in particular, the several passages in which Augustine labels the Pelagian movement as a novelty, a rhetorical technique that offers Augustine several possibility of attacking the Pelagians, will be carefully analysed. This specific rhetorical tactic against the Pelagian serves at least three purposes. First, Augustine clearly identifies the true Catholic community rooted in the ancient tradition of faith with his own teaching. Second, Augustine definitely discredits his enemies of being completely outside the ancient tradition of the Church because they represent a novelty without any connection with the true and ancient faith. Third, Augustine spreads among his audience the doctrine of original sin, which is, at least in Augustine's view, in perfect agreement with the tradition of the Church. All these issues will be explored in this paper.

Keywords: Augustine of Hippo, Pelagianism, heresiology, novelty, Jerome, Orosius, Marius Mercator.

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RESUMEN

Agustín luchó en contra de los pelagianos por más de dos décadas, desde 411 hasta su muerte en 430, cuando dejó su inacabado y último trabajo contra Julián de Aeclanum. Durante este largo periodo, Agustín se opuso al movimiento pelagiano, principalmente, a través de tratados teológicos y sermones. En este artículo, dichas fuentes serán analizadas desde la perspectiva retórica: en particular, observaremos varios fragmentos en los cuales Agustín tilda el movimiento pelagiano de novedad, una técnica retórica que le abre varias posibilidades para atacarlo. Estas tácticas retóricas específicas en contra del pelagianismo están orientadas hacia, al menos, tres objetivos: primero, Agustín identifica claramente sus propias enseñanzas, con la comunidad verdaderamente católica enraizada en la antigua tradición de la fe; segundo, Agustín desacredita definitivamente a su enemigo, pues los sitúa completamente por fuera de la antigua tradición de la Iglesia, ya que representan una novedad sin ninguna conexión con la verdadera y antigua fe; tercero, Agustín difunde entre su audiencia la doctrina del pecado original, que, al menos según él, concuerda perfectamente con la tradición de la Iglesia. Todas esas cuestiones serán exploradas en este artículo.

Palabras clave: Agustín de Hipona, pelagianismo, heresiología, novedad, Jerónimo de Estridón, Orisio, Marius Mercator.

The Pelagian controversy was not merely a theological controversy,² but also and especially a rhetorical one. Both Augustine³ and the so-called Pelagians⁴ used rhetorical tools to counter each other. In this perspective, I will study how Augustine represented the Pelagians as upholding *novel* doctrines, thus heresies. In fact, novelty is the feature most frequently highlighted by Augustine both in his specialized theological/polemical treatises of the Pelagian controversy, and in some of his sermons intended for a broad audience of that same period. In this paper, a selection of the most important passages in which Augustine defines Pelagianism as novelty will be analysed in order to show the frequency and pervasiveness of such an accusation in reference to Pelagius and his followers. Furthermore, Augustine's

2 Valuable introductions are Drecoll (2016), and Lamberigts (2008).

3 See, for example: Toczek (2011); Ribreau (2009) and Trapè (1985, esp. p. 860). Furthermore, Augustine rhetorically used the authority of his predecessors as proof in favour of his own doctrine, see the bibliography cited at note 25. It is noteworthy citing the study of Dodaro (2014, pp. 13-22), who tries to understand how Augustine applied the principles of literary decorum to the theological argumentation of *De trinitate*.

4 Julian of Aeclanum, for example, rhetorically attacked Augustine for several reasons, including Augustine's African origin, see Lamberigts (2003); the low-level of his teachings and of his followers, see Rebillard (2007); and the allegedly Manichaean influence on his doctrine, see Lamberigts (2001).

rhetorical approach to Pelagianism will be compared to that of other anti-Pelagian protagonists, such as Jerome, Orosius and Marius Mercator. This analysis will enable us to formulate some reasons why Augustine depicted the Pelagian movement as a novelty. It must be underlined that this article intends to be an introductory study for future research on this same topic, therefore several aspects and issues will not be directly studied in the following pages, but they will be listed at the end of this article as possible developments of this research.

ANTI-PELAGIAN TREATISES

In Augustine's first anti-Pelagian treatise, *De peccatorum meritis*, the novelty of the Pelagians concerns their innovative interpretation of Rm 5, 12, a perikope that according to the latter would not entail a biblical proof in favour of the existence of original sin—as Augustine contends—but, contrary to Augustine's exegesis, of the individual responsibility of each sinner.⁵ Another new doctrine introduced by the Pelagians, according to Augustine, is the difference between eternal life, the Pelagian fate of new-born infants died without baptism, and the Kingdom of God, restricted to the baptized.⁶ Further references to the novelty of Pelagianism can be found in the third book of *De peccatorum meritis*, which was written at a later stage. Augustine states that he wrote a treatise useful to the defenders of faith against the Pelagian innovations.⁷ However, at this stage Augustine still benevolently assumes that Pelagius simply reports the positions of other exegetes, while Pelagius was well aware of their innovative character opposed to the ancient tradition of the Church.⁸ The final section of the third book of *De peccatorum meritis* is a florilegium of pa-

5 “Hoc autem apostolicum testimonium, in quo ait: per unum hominem peccatum intrauit in mundum et per peccatum mors, conari eos quidem in aliam nouam detorquere opinionem tuis litteris intimasti” (Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis* I, 9, 9). For Pelagius' interpretation of this passage, see: De Bruyn (1988, pp. 33-34), while for Augustine's interpretation, see: Lyonnet (1963).

6 “Conantur paruulis non baptizatis innocentiae merito salutem ac uitam aeternam tribuere, sed, quia baptizati non sunt, eos a regno caelorum facere alienos noua quadam et mirabili praesumptione, quasi salus aeternae uitae aeterna possit esse praeter Christi hereditatem, praeter regnum caelorum” (Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis* I, 20, 26; I, 28, 56).

7 “Egisse aliquid, quo de his rebus a maioribus traditae fidei defensores contra nouitates eorum qui aliter sentiunt non inermes usquequaque consistenter” (Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis* III, 1, 1).

8 “Videsne, obsecro, quemadmodum hoc totum Pelagius non ex sua, sed ex aliorum persona indiderit scriptis suis usque adeo sciens hanc nescio quam esse nouitatem, quae contra antiquam et ecclesiae insitam opinionem sonare nunc coeperit” (Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis* III, 3, 6).

tristic authorities quoted by Augustine in defence of original sin, namely a passage taken from Cyprian's letter 64 (Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis* III, 5, 10), one from Jerome's commentary on Jonah (Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis* III, 6, 12), and one from Jerome's polemical treatise against Jovinian (Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis* III, 7, 13). Augustine's scheme is simple: his position is in accordance with the venerable tradition of the Church, while the Pelagian position represents a novelty, without any grounds in Church tradition (Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis* III, 6, 12; III, 7, 14; III, 13, 22).

In *De gestis Pelagii*, a treatise written after Pelagius' acquittal at Diospolis in 415, Augustine states that after the ancient heresies a new one has been invented, not by bishops, priests or clerics, but by some monks.⁹ In other words, not only the content of the Pelagian teachings is new, but also the *status* of those who preach them: Augustine is not facing a clerical but a lay heresy.

Augustine's strategy to depict the innovative danger of Pelagius and Celestius is a *leitmotiv* also during his heated debate with Julian of Aeclanum. In *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, Augustine focuses mainly on two aspects to show the novelty of Julian's statements, namely the latter's denial of the absolute necessity of baptismal grace for the remission of original sin (Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* I, 20, 22; II, 2, 3; II, 12, 25; II, 29, 51) and the Pelagian charge against Augustine's doctrine of marriage (Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* I, 35, 40; II, 2, 4; II, 23, 38). In both cases, Augustine defends his own position claiming that he is following the ancient rule of faith, while Julian is introducing a new teaching in the Catholic Church.¹⁰

In the subsequent treatise, *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum*, Augustine attacks 'the new heretics', the 'enemies of God's grace'.¹¹ Augustine defends himself from the charge of Julian that Augustine depreciated Christian marriage, by reply-

9 "Post veteres haereses inlata est etiam modo haeresis non ab episcopis seu presbyteris vel quibusque clericis, sed a quibusdam veluti monachis" (Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 35, 61). It is apparent that this passage cannot be applied to Julian of Aeclanum, who was a bishop, but at the moment in which Augustine wrote *De gestis Pelagii* Julian was not yet involved in the controversy.

10 "Haeretici noui, dilectissime fili Valeri, qui medicinam Christi, qua peccata sanantur, carnaliter natis paruulis necessariam non esse contendunt, damnatores nos esse nuptiarum operisque diuini, quo ex maribus et feminis deus homines creat, inuidiosissime clamitant. [...] Hoc ergo quia dicimus quod antiquissima atque firmissima catholicae fidei regula continetur, isti nouelli et peruersi dogmatis adsertores, qui nihil peccati esse in paruulis dicunt, quod lauacro regenerationis abluatur" (Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* I, 1, 1).

11 "Noui quippe heretici, inimici gratiae dei, quae datur pusillis et magnis per Iesum Christum dominum nostrum, etsi iam cauendi euidentius apertiore inprobatione monstrantur, non tamen quies-

ing that the real innovation is the positive acceptance of carnal concupiscence by Julian (Augustine, *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* I, 5, 9). At the same time, Augustine states that Julian's position that babies are born without sin, and that, therefore, baptism is not needed for the remission of original sin, is a novelty (Augustine, *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* I, 6, 11). In this treatise, we find several other references to the novelties introduced by Julian (Augustine, *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* II, 1, 1; II, 3, 5; II, 6, 11; III, 5, 15; III, 9, 25; IV, 4, 4; IV, 6, 12; IV, 8, 20; IV, 8, 24; IV, 9, 26; IV, 12, 32).

It is especially in the last two treatises against Julian, *Contra Iulianum* and *Opus imperfectum*, that Augustine's rhetorical strategy finds its wider implementation. These are mostly short hints in which Augustine rebukes his adversary for the novelties he introduced, however, these hints become a recurring refrain in Augustine's polemical strategy.¹² Among Augustine's several remarks, one seems of paramount importance, especially if compared with the attitude of the other anti-Pelagian theologians we will explore in the following pages. In the fourth book of *Opus imperfectum*, Augustine denies Julian's accusations of being a Manichaeen and of being worse than Jovinian. Against the juxtaposition of these two heresies, Augustine replies that he is unable to find any similarities between Julian and some of the old heresies: "it is as if you founded a new heresy precisely in order that, when we refuted you, we could not make you the equals of any heretics" (Augustine, *Opus imperfectum* IV, 122).¹³ Augustine repeats that there are huge differences between

cunt scriptis suis minus cautorum uel minus eruditorum corda temptare" (Augustine, *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* I, 1, 2).

12 Augustine, *Contra Iulianum* I, 3, 7; I, 3, 8; I, 5, 15; I, 5, 20, I, 7, 33; II, 1, 1; II, 9, 31; II, 10, 34; II, 10, 37; III, 1, 1; III, 1, 4; III, 1, 5; III, 3, 8; III, 17, 31; V, 6, 24; V, 12, 48; VI, 8, 22-23; VI, 10, 33. Augustine, *Opus imperfectum* I, 2; I, 6; I, 9; I, 67; I, 73; I, 86; I, 95; I, 106; II, 165; III, 29; III, 37; III, 61; III, 104; III, 183; IV, 43; IV, 50; IV, 75; IV, 134; V, 9; V, 39; VI, 1; VI, 3; VI, 5; VI, 6; VI, 22.

13 "Quasi propterea conideritis haeresim nouam, ut quando uos redarguimus, nullis haereticis adaequare possimus". There is a sharp difference between Julian and Jovinian, as Augustine states in *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* II, 23, 38. The common trait between Julian and Jovinian is, according to Augustine, the charge against the Catholics of being Manichaeans, see: Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* II, 5, 15; II, 23, 38; Augustine, *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* I, 2, 4, and Augustine, *Contra Iulianum* I, 2, 4. See also Duval (2003, pp. 367-379). In Augustine, *Contra Iulianum* III, 1, 5, Julian and his followers are equated to the Massimianists, a group of Donatists, since both boast for their limited number of followers. Even in this case, no doctrinal convergences are underlined by Augustine.

the Pelagians and the Manicheans, but that both should be vehemently rejected.¹⁴ Augustine thus stresses the irreducibility of the Pelagian position to any other heresies. We now turn to Augustine's presentation of the Pelagians in his sermons.

ANTI-PELAGIAN SERMONS

Augustine's anti-Pelagian sermons¹⁵ are sources of paramount importance to understand the way in which Augustine polemically constructed the rhetorical identity of Pelagianism. Sermons are delivered to the faithful, and readily accessible to a wide audience, while the theological treatises analysed before were read only by a small number of theologians. In other words, through sermons Augustine was able to spread his own image of Pelagianism to a huge number of Christians. In the collection of preserved sermons the label of Pelagianism as novelty appears only in a limited number of occurrences.¹⁶ Nonetheless, these passages are of particular relevance.

For instance, sermon 294, preached in Carthage, is probably one of the first anti-Pelagian sermons (413)¹⁷ and it clearly witnesses the way in which Augustine used the rhetorical contrast between tradition, defended by him and by his predecessors, and the absolute Pelagian novelty. The issues dealt with by Augustine are infant baptism and its relation with original sin. The first Pelagian novelty is the supposedly distinction between eternal life and Kingdom of Heavens,¹⁸ the same doctrine already criticized in *De peccatorum meritis*. It is a distinction completely dismissed by Augustine, who believes that there are only two options: either salvation in the Kingdom of Heavens, either damnation in the eternal flames of Hell. If the Pelagians grant eternal life to unbaptized babies, but not also the Kingdom of Heavens, reserved only to the baptized, then, Augustine infers, original sin is denied. However, due to the presence of original sin even in newborn infants, it is necessary to be baptized to obtain the salvation in the Kingdom of Heavens. Close to the end of the sermon, Augustine unexpectedly read to his audience a passage

14 See Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* II, 3, 9; II, 23, 38; Augustine, *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* II, 2, 2-4; IV, 3, 3.

15 The fundamental study on Augustine's anti-Pelagian sermons is Dupont (2013).

16 Augustine, *Sermo* 26, 8; *Sermo* 165, 5, 6; *Sermo* 174, 8, 9; *Sermo* 294, 3, 3; 20, 19; *Sermo* 299, 12 and *Sermo* 348/A, 3.

17 Sermon 294 has been traditionally ascribed to 413, see Dupont (2013, pp. 203-296).

18 "Hoc novum in Ecclesia, prius inauditum est, esse vitam aeternam praeter regnum coelorum, esse salutem aeternam praeter regnum Dei" (Augustine, *Sermo* 294, 3, 3).

taken from Cyprian's Letter to Fidus, as a proof in favour of his interpretation of infant baptism for the remission of original sin. It is the same passage quoted also in the third book of *De peccatorum meritis*. This quotation, according to Augustine, is necessary to counter those who maintain such an impious novelty,¹⁹ namely the Pelagians. In the passage quoted by Augustine, Cyprian states that baptism should not be denied to newborn babies, because remission of sins is not for their own sins, but for the sins of others,²⁰ namely, in Augustine's view, original sin. Therefore, the authority of tradition, embodied, in this case, by Cyprian is the rhetorical weapon used by Augustine to claim the adherence of original sin to church tradition against the Pelagian innovation.

Sermon 348/A is another important anti-Pelagian sermon, preached by Augustine in Hippo in 416. The importance of this sermon lies in the chronological period and in the context in which it was preached. Augustine delivered this sermon in 416, soon after the acquittal of Pelagius at the synod of Diospolis in December 415, when fourteen Palestinian bishops declared Pelagius orthodox. Further news reached Augustine in Africa: first, Pelagius, through Palatinus, an African deacon, sent a short text, probably his own self-defense, to Augustine, though without a proper subscription; second, unnamed criminals, Pelagius and his followers according to Augustine, attacked Jerome's monasteries in Palestine (Augustine, *Sermo*

19 "Rogo vos, ut paululum acquiescatis. Lego tantum. Sanctus Cyprianus est, quem in manus sumpsi, antiquus episcopus Sedis huius: quid senserit de Baptismo parvulorum, imo quid semper Ecclesiam sensisse monstraverit paululum accipite. Parum est enim quia isti disserunt, et disputant nescio quas impias novitates; et nos conantur arguere, quod aliquid novum dicamus. Ad hoc ergo lego sanctum Cyprianum, ut videatis quomodo sit intellectus canonicus, et catholicus sensus in his verbis quae paulo ante tractavi" (Augustine, *Sermo* 294, 20, 19).

20 "Propter quod neminem putamus a gratia consequenda impediendum esse a lege quae iam statuta est, nec spiritalem circumcisionem impediri carnali circumcissione debere, sed omnem omnino admittendum esse ad gratiam Christi: quando et Petrus in Actibus Apostolorum loquatur et dicat: Deus mihi dixit neminem hominem communem dicendum et immundum. Caeterum si homines impedire aliquid ad consecutionem gratiae possit, magis adultos et proventus et maiores natu possint impedire peccata graviora. Porro autem, si etiam gravissimis delictoribus et in Dominum multum ante peccantibus, cum postea crediderint, remissa peccatorum datur, et a Baptismo atque gratia nemo prohibetur: quanto magis prohiberi non debet infans, qui recens natus nihil peccavit, nisi quod secundum Adam carnaliter natus contagium mortis antiquae prima nativitate contraxit; qui ad remissam peccatorum accipiendam hoc ipso facilius accedit, quod illi dimittuntur, non propria, sed aliena peccata?" (Cyprian, *Letter to Fidus* apud Augustine, *Sermo* 294, 20, 19). On the importance of Cyprian in Augustine's anti-Pelagian fight, see: Gaumer (2016, pp. 257-318); Yates (2005); and Dupont (2017, pp. 16-26), who, however, highlights some differences between Cyprian and Augustine's doctrine of original sin.

348/A, 7).²¹ The situation is rapidly degenerating, and Augustine, although he has not yet obtained an official copy of the proceedings of Diospolis (Augustine, *Sermo* 348/A, 7), feels obliged to inform his people of the danger of this new heresy (*haeresim quandam novam*), that is spreading impious teachings against the most ancient doctrine of the Church (*ecclesiae antiquissimum fundamentum*) (Augustine, *Sermo* 348/A, 5). Although Augustine has already preached sermons and wrote treatises against this heresy, it is the first sermon in which Pelagius is explicitly named as heretic. In this sermon, the novelty of this heresy concerns mainly their exaggerated evaluation of free will, which supposedly would be able to keep God's commandments, even without God's grace (Augustine, *Sermo* 348/A, 8-14).

Augustine's representation of Pelagianism as novelty was thus not limited to his theological treatises, but was present also in his sermons. This homiletic presence shows that, according to Augustine, novelty was one of the most important features of Pelagianism and all faithful should realize that adhering to the Pelagian doctrine means renouncing the ancient faith of the Church.

AUGUSTINE AND THE OTHER ANTI-PELAGIAN THEOLOGIANs

None of the other prominent anti-Pelagian theologians, such as Jerome, Orosius and Marius Mercator, described the Pelagians as new heretics. These three differ from one another in the way in which they construct the origin of Pelagianism, but they share the belief that Pelagianism is not something new, but rather the contemporary spokespersons of ancient heresies.

Jerome, who fiercely fought against Pelagius in Palestine, wrote some anti-Pelagian works.²² The common trait of all these works is the representation of Pelagianism not as something new, but as the last heir of an unbroken chain of errors that began with the pride of the ancient Greek philosophers, especially the Stoics and the Pythagoreans, up to the Christian heresies of Manichaeism, Priscilianism, Jovinianism and, especially, Origenism. All these philosophers and heretics preached, with different words, but with the same sense, that human perfection, namely impassibility or impeccability, is possible in this mortal life, and this solely on the basis of human efforts. In this regard, the prologue of the *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos* is paradigmatic: Jerome refutes the Pelagian doctrine of apathy as being identical to the errant claims of the Stoics, the Peripatetics, Origen, Manichaeus,

21 See also Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 35, 66. However, according to Lössl (2004), it is not possible to conclude with absolute certainty that Pelagius was directly responsible.

22 On Jerome's anti-Pelagian activity, see: Caruso (2009); Jean-Jean (1999).

Priscillian, Evagrius of Iborá, Jovinian and the Messalians, “all of them assert that human virtue and human knowledge can achieve a perfection, and I do not mean in the sense of a likeness to, but equality with God” (Jerome, *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos* prol., 2). Furthermore, Jerome repeatedly used the expression *nova ex veteri haeresis* to describe Pelagianism, clearly indicating the ancient origin of this heresy.

A similar presentation of Pelagianism is present in Orosius’ *Liber apologeticus*, his only literary work against the Pelagian heresy. It is a short pamphlet in which Orosius vindicates the legitimacy of his actions in Palestine during 415. His rebuke of Pelagianism most probably is dependent on Jerome’s anti-Pelagian polemical works. Orosius states that heretics already dead, such as Origen, Priscillian and Jovinian, live again in Pelagius (Orosius, *Liber apologeticus* 1). He also attacks Pelagius of being the son of Jovinian (Orosius, *Liber apologeticus* 25). Orosius connects Pelagius to at least three of the heretics mentioned by Jerome: even though Orosius’ construction of Pelagianism is simpler than Jerome’s, nonetheless it is evident that he perceives Pelagianism not as something new, but, like Jerome, as the heir of old doctrinal errors.

Finally, Marius Mercator wrote two anti-Pelagian treatises.²³ In his *Commonitorium adversum haeresim Pelagii et Caelestii, vel etiam scripta Iuliani* he explains the origins of the Pelagian heresy. He linked the ideas of the Pelagians, especially of Pelagius and Caelestius, to the Antiochene tradition, in particular to Theodore of Mopsuestia. An unknown Rufinus, Syrian by origin, would have taught the ‘Pelagian doctrines’ to Pelagius himself, who would have been the first to fearlessly disclose such doctrines in public in Rome under pope Anastasius I.²⁴ It does not need further explanation that Mercator constructed this pedigree in order to denounce Pelagianism.

CONCLUSION

In sum, as a part of his rhetorical strategy, Augustine condemned all the major Pelagian leaders as innovators, both in his theological treatises and his sermons to the people. The main problematic novelties identified by Augustine are: the denial of original sin in the newborn infants, the distinction between eternal life and the Kingdom of Heavens, and the positive evaluation of carnal concupiscence, in particular by Julian of Aeclanum.

Augustine frequently insisted on the innovative feature of Pelagianism, and deems them as incomparable with any of the previous heresies. Differently from what the other anti-Pelagian theologians claimed, Augustine did not attempt to iden-

23 On Marius Mercator, see: Prete (1958).

24 Marius Mercator, *Commonitorium adversum haeresim Pelagii et Caelestii, vel etiam scripta Iuliani* 1.

tify Pelagianism as the heir of older heretical movements. Augustine's charge of novelty represents a new and different kind of rhetorical construction of Pelagianism, based upon the dialectic between his defense of the catholic tradition and their introduction of profane novelties, completely foreign not only to the teaching of the Divine Scriptures, but also to the writings of the Church Fathers. One of the most relevant applications of Augustine's anti-Pelagian rhetoric is contrasting the Pelagian statements with those of the Church Fathers, both from the East and the West,²⁵ that, in Augustine's interpretation, represent the immutable *depositum fidei*.²⁶

Of course, the charge of being something completely new helped Augustine in defending the traditional character of his teaching. If the Pelagian preaching is an innovation of the faith of the church, then it will not be possible to find any trace of them in the teachings of the Church Fathers, and, at the same time, if Augustine's doctrine is faithful to what his forerunners taught, it is possible to find traces of what Augustine preached in their writings. This is, in few words, the rhetorical reasoning of Augustine and the lens through which he read the works of his predecessors. The aim of this paper was not to establish whether Augustine was right in labelling the Pelagians as new heretics, or if the other polemicists, such as Jerome, Orosius and Marius Mercator, understood the Pelagian movement more correctly. The aim was to show what was one of the rhetorical and heresiological strategies used by Augustine against the Pelagians. This strategy, based upon the concept of *novitas*, was itself new if compared to the rhetorical strategies of his fellow anti-Pelagian theologians.

As noted at the beginning, this article intends to be an introductory research, therefore several aspects have not been deeply investigated, but left for future research. In particular, there are at least four points that deserved to be analysed carefully. First, both Augustine and the Pelagians, especially Pelagius and Julian of Aeclanum, pretended to defend orthodoxy and considered the other party as

25 Several studies appeared on Augustine's use of patristic argumentation, see, for example: Maschio (1986); Perago (1962-1963); Lamberigts (2010a); Lamberigts (2010b). According to Rebillard (2000), in the first phase of the controversy biblical quotations were more important than patristic quotations, while in the second phase the two sources had the same importance. This hypothesis has been recently questioned by Chronister (2014), who shows that from the beginning of the controversy Augustine used patristic authorities to prove his loyalty to the orthodox faith, as witnessed by both Sacred Scripture and patristic texts.

26 This same strategy is common to Pelagius and Julian of Aeclanum. Both used passages excerpted from the works of previous bishops to prove the traditionality of their own thought. This strategy is employed by Pelagius in his *De natura*, a work that predates the outbreak of the Pelagian controversy.

denying orthodoxy. It would be valuable to connect the argument of *nouitas* with that of orthodoxy, within the broader theme of the use of rhetorical technique in Late Antiquity.²⁷ Second, Augustine struggled hard to furnish arguments in favour of the traditional character of his own thesis quoting patristic authors, but modern research considers Augustine's patristic argumentation largely incorrect and that he himself was innovating. It would be worthwhile to further inquire whether Augustine was, at least partially, aware of the discrepancies and inconsistencies of his recourse to patristic authorities. Third, it would be interesting to understand how the Pelagians countered Augustine's attack and defended themselves from the charge of being innovators. Finally, future research will have to distinguish clearly between the Pelagianism of Pelagius and the one of Julian of Aeclanum, and to verify whether Augustine used the argument of *nouitas* for different purposes according to the rhetorical skills of his adversaries.

27 See the relevant remarks in Dodaro (2014, p. 22): "Similar questions could be posed to Augustine's treatment of the patristic authors cited against his position on original sin by Julian of Eclanum. Augustine's attempts to discredit Julian's texts are likewise founded, in part, in judgments governed by literary decorum. [...] Both Augustine and Julian understand that there are rules involved in determining orthodoxy, but they also know that there are two orthodoxies in play. They will disagree with each other and offer reasoned arguments over the validity of their use of texts by other authors, but each of them also hopes that, in a culture accustomed to specialist disagreements over grammatical questions, his own skill in defining grammatical orthodoxy may give him an edge in the contest to establish the boundaries of that *other* orthodoxy."

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