

BOOK REVIEW

Parole e scritte per costruire un santo: Sant'Antonio dei frati minori nei sermoni medievali (1232–1350). By Eleonora Lombardo. Pp. xiv + 500. Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani, 2022. ISBN 978-88-95908-24-3.

While much has been written about Anthony of Padua, covering his life, his preaching, and his wider legacy, comparatively little attention has been paid to medieval sermons preached *on* the saint. In this innovative study, the fruit of over a decade of careful research, Eleonora Lombardo builds on her previous work on Anthony to offer a comprehensive and detailed survey of the presentation of the saint in medieval sermons, accompanied by a most valuable *repertorium* cataloguing all 256 texts (227 sermons and 29 major variants) on which the work is based.

The introduction (pp. 1–23) sets out the rationale for the book, and the first chapter (pp. 25–71) offers a 'panoramic' view of sermons preached on Saint Anthony, including a very useful historiographical section along with background discussion of the texts included in the study, and their geographical and chronological distribution. The following five chapters offer detailed analyses of themes prominent within particular groupings of sermons. Chapter 2 (pp. 73–107) examines the relationship between Anthony and Francis of Assisi; Chapter 3 (pp. 109–45) focuses on Anthony's humility; Chapter 4 (pp. 147–79) explores the presentation of poverty in sermons on the saint; Chapter 5 (pp. 181–218) discusses the importance of wisdom in (largely Parisian) preaching on Anthony; and Chapter 6 (pp. 219–72) treats the relationship between poverty, humility, and wisdom in sermons on the saint preached during the crisis of Franciscan identity in the early fourteenth century.

Though each of the six chapters finishes with brief concluding remarks, the book has no standalone conclusion. This absence perhaps reflects the fact that, as Lombardo makes clear throughout this study, there was no single image of Anthony in medieval sermons. The author shows that there were some intriguing patterns in the material, but while certain themes, images, and sermon texts were re-used by multiple preachers, there is no effort here to impose a single narrative or attempt to describe a teleological development. Rather, this book brings together a wide range of often anonymous preachers, operating in a wide variety of contexts, and seeking to shape Anthony to suit their own particular circumstances. Lombardo recognises that this corpus of sermons tells us more about the preachers and their interests than about Anthony himself and argues from the outset that the majority of these texts were written for closed liturgical celebrations and for private study by Franciscans. Thus, the book is not primarily interested in reconstructing the dynamics of lay devotion or using sermons to explore his popular cult. Instead, the 'preached Anthony' is presented to the reader as a mirror reflecting the ways in which medieval friars 'conceived of the role of the *Ordo fratrum minorum* within the church and within society, their relationships with the ecclesiastical and political authorities, with the ruling classes and with the faithful' (p. 14). Read in this way, the corpus of sermons collected here represents a rich and largely untapped resource for the study of the Franciscan order itself.

Throughout the book, Lombardo locates individual sermons within their own specific contexts, and examines how preachers re-imagined and re-fashioned Anthony to suit their needs. For instance, though preachers always sought to present Anthony as a faithful and obedient son of Francis, they were also able to use the order's second saint to map out a form of Franciscan observance that was suitable and attainable in their own environments. Lombardo highlights an early sermon (no. 165) on Anthony by Jean de La Rochelle, likely preached for students, in which the saint's 'biographical experiences were assimilated with those of a *magister* or at least an educated brother

within the order', and in which the preacher's vocabulary evokes 'the studium if not the university' (p. 83). Embodying not only preaching but also study and learning more generally, Anthony could thus serve as an 'example of practical franciscanism' that made him more than simply a loyal and obedient follower of Francis. He was 'a son and a messenger, but also a *magister, doctor, et pater*' (p. 106) capable of guiding a new generation of friar towards study and preaching.

Anthony's facility in this role of exemplar reflected the contours of his own religious career. For example, Lombardo argues that the image of Anthony was ideally suited to efforts to justify the presence of friars in universities precisely because he had been a wealthy young man, and then an Augustinian canon, and then a mendicant and preacher. In sermons written against the backdrop of anti-fraternal controversy in the middle of the thirteenth century, Anthony was energetically celebrated as evidence that poverty made Franciscan preaching more effective (pp. 149–50). He was, indeed, a more useful champion of Franciscan intellectual life than Francis himself. Poverty only became a prominent interest of hagiographers of Anthony several decades later, so the material above offers a clear demonstration of the adaptability of *de sanctis* sermons as a genre within which the life and virtues of a saint could be deftly and quickly adjusted to meet a preacher's immediate requirements.

The capacity of Anthony to serve as a flexible proxy for Franciscan identity is clearest in the final chapter of this book, dealing with the bitter disputes over poverty that came to a head in the order in the early fourteenth century. Lombardo shows that Anthony was taken up and deployed by all parties to the dispute. For radical 'spirituals' he was readily associated with a strict and rigid interpretation of poverty (pp. 221–32). Preachers more sympathetic to the conventual position presented the poverty of Anthony as being tempered by humility, by the need for unity, and, above all, by obedience. Bertrand de la Tour, for instance, insisted that the abdication of property expressed in the vow of poverty was less important than the abdication of body and of will expressed in the vows of chastity and obedience (sermon 99, pp. 252–53), with Anthony being celebrated as an exemplar of this latter virtue in particular. The saint was also, however, presented as a dove of peace and a point of unity. Some Franciscan preachers turned to this kind of language, but it was also taken up by Robert of Anjou, one of the few preachers external to the order whose sermons form part of this corpus. In several texts (sermons 82, 156) Robert optimistically framed Anthony as a peacemaker whose example of perfect observance might be capable of uniting the disparate wings of the order (pp. 263–64).

That Anthony could be championed by preachers with such differing sympathies tells us something about the genre of *de sanctis* sermons and the plasticity of saints' legacies. For Lombardo, it also highlights something specific about the role of Anthony in Franciscan life and thought. Here was a saint who bridged the gap between the order's origins and its aspirations. He was closely associated with the early order without being weighed down by complex and polemical debates about the legacy of Francis and his first followers. And, Anthony was a learned preacher, readily associated with the work of education. The sermons discussed here reveal a saint who could be celebrated and imitated in Paris as well as in Assisi.


In addition to an extensive bibliography (pp. 273–305) and several indexes (pp. 483–500), the reader is also offered a detailed *repertorium* (pp. 307–481) of all known sermons on Anthony up the mid fourteenth century. For each of the 256 sermons, Lombardo lists the *thema*, the name (where known) and religious affiliation of author, the approximate date and place of composition, any rubric present in the manuscripts, the incipit, the explicit, a cross-reference to Schneyer, manuscript witnesses, printed editions, and bibliography. Schneyer recorded 138 *de sanctis* sermons preached on Anthony, so the corpus described here is a significant expansion, and includes some 48 sermons identified by Lombardo herself. Consciously sitting in the tradition of J. G. Bougerol's catalogue of sermons on Saint Francis of Assisi, this *repertorium* will be a formidable tool for scholars.

As a whole, this book provides an illuminating survey of medieval preaching on Saint Anthony, with richly supported discussion of a range of key themes and contexts. For instance, there is

excellent material here on the relationship between humility and wisdom, the concept of *utilitas*, the use of biblical typology to explain the role of Anthony and of Francis, the nature of obedience and the rule, and the spiritual aspects of poverty and humility. Some readers may find themselves slightly inconvenienced by the decision (explained on p. 19) to cite unpublished material by reference to the *repertorium* alone, rather than by referring to specific manuscripts and folios. However, this minor quibble does not detract from the value of this study, which will appeal to scholars from a range of intersecting disciplines. Readers interested in Franciscan history will find here a fresh and well-evidenced account of how sermons on the order's second saint reflect and give new insight into familiar contexts, developments, and disputes. Students of Saint Anthony will find this an essential work, offering a careful discussion of largely unpublished material that both complements and challenges the major *vitae* and well-known liturgical sources. In broader terms, sermonists, particularly those interested in hagiography, the Franciscan order, Parisian preaching, and virtues such as poverty, humility, and obedience, will find much to capture their attention in a book that combines a fine study of a large and relatively unknown corpus of *de sanctis* sermons with a new and indispensable *repertorium*.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/13660691.2023.2269072>

