Doctrina Christiana: Christian Learning in Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*

A DISSERTATION

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In the twentieth century, Augustinian scholars were unable to agree on what precisely the *De doctrina christiana* is about as a work. This dissertation is an attempt to answer that question. I have here employed primarily close reading of the text itself but I have also made extensive efforts to detail the intellectual and social context of Augustine’s work, something that has not been done before for this book. Additionally, I have put to use the theory of textuality as developed by Jorge Gracia. My main conclusions are three: 1. Augustine intends to show how all learned disciplines are subordinated to the study of scripture and how that study of scripture is itself ordered to love. 2. But in what way is that study of scripture ordered to love? It is ordered to love because by means of such study exegetes can make progress toward wisdom for themselves and help their audiences do the same. 3. Exegetes grow in wisdom through such study because the scriptures require them to question themselves and their own values and habits and the values and habits of their culture both by means of what the scriptures directly teach and by how readers should (according to Augustine) go about reading them; a person’s questioning of him or herself is moral inquiry, and moral inquiry rightly carried out builds up love of God and neighbor in the inquirer by reforming those habits and values out of line with the teachings of Christ.
This dissertation by Timothy A. Kearns fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Medieval and Byzantine Studies approved by Timothy B. Noone, Ph.D., as Director, and by Willemien Otten, Ph.D., and Tarmo Toom, Ph.D. as Readers.

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Timothy B. Noone, Ph.D, Director

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Willemien Otten, Ph.D., Reader

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Tarmo Toom, Ph.D., Reader
To my father,

Michael Joseph Kearns, “tall he stands”,

Who never throws books away.
Quas dederis solas semper habeis opes. - Martial, Epigrams, V.42.8
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Chapter 1

Introduction: Studying the *De doctrina christiana*

Since the *De doctrina* is not one of Augustine’s more obviously rhetorical or controversial works, one might think it easy to approach the book and easy to glean its message, purpose, and method. Moreover, given the scholarship that has been done in Late Antique studies these last forty years, one might also expect to find the necessary work already done on the *De doctrina*, which would facilitate understanding it and its writer in their historical and intellectual context.

But before consulting the literature, one might try to turn to the book itself. Perhaps it is in need of little interpretation to begin with. The impression that the book’s message and importance are easy to draw out from a good critical edition or a translation, with the occasional note indicating a possible allusion to Plotinus or some similar wording to a Stoic, is quickly dispelled. Augustine wrote Books I and II, and two-thirds of Book III, probably in short order during the first or second year of his episcopacy. Then, he put it down, not to pick it up again for thirty years. One might expect Augustine to be the sort of figure who picks up right where he left off, unchanged.¹ But this is not the Augustine that has emerged from modern study. Even some interested in Augustine’s underlying philosophical system, for example, Etienne Gilson,

¹ But even some recent students of Augustine have taken this kind of approach. See, for example, Walter Hannam’s thesis *Non intenta in eloquentia sapientia, sed a sapientia non recedente eloquentia. Augustine’s De doctrina christiana: Structure and Philosophical Method*, Dalhousie University (Canada), 1996.
recognized long ago that such an approach to Augustine failed to appreciate the man himself and the variety, growth, and depth of his thought.\(^2\) Did Augustine write this book half way, then do something else for thirty years, and then return to the book to finish it the same as he had intended it in his thirties? This and other questions I will try to answer below. But however one answers this question, we are confronted by a book that seems relatively even in tone, with an underlying plan that is carried out in its essentials from beginning to end.

Modern studies of the text do not often focus on issues like this.\(^3\) Many dwell in detail on certain distinctions he makes in Book I, between use and enjoyment mainly, and between things and signs, and others dwell on his rhetorical theory in Book IV. Others have much to tell us about signs, a major topic of Books II and III, and still others plumb the depths of hermeneutical theory throughout the book.\(^4\) One scholar has divided the contemporary study of the *De doctrina* into three areas: first, Augustine's distinction between use and enjoyment in Book I, second, his sign theory in Books II and III, and third, the *Rules* of Tyconius in Book III.\(^5\) This indicates how specialized the study of different aspects of this text had become even then: for one thing, he does not mention how much work has been done on Augustine's conception of Christian rhetoric in Book IV, the study of which has crisscrossed a number of disciplines.\(^6\)

\(^3\) Since I will shortly be reviewing much of this literature in detail, I present here only a summary for the purposes of my argument.
\(^4\) Having discussed what I take the major views on the *De doctrina* will be, I return later in this chapter to considering briefly how the study of the text has evolved.
\(^6\) The most useful starting point for this set of questions is *The Rhetoric of St. Augustine of Hippo: De doctrina christiana and the search for a distinctly Christian rhetoric*, edited by R. L.
In particular, I think attention should be paid to those questions that arise from the more or less agreed on facts of how Augustine composed the text, as well as from what we know about the text from other sources. Some of these are the same questions we must ask about any text. Often they are not interesting, but in this case they will turn out to be: 1. How can we tell that the *De doctrina christiana* is a single text? Augustine says it is, but should we take his word for it? A corollary of this is the more general question: what does it mean to say two texts are different texts? This is not an idle question, since I think we can put forward a tentative answer, one which also has interesting consequences for my study of the *De doctrina*. If the books on Christian learning can be considered one text, which I think they do, then what unifies them? 2. What is the audience of these books? What is the intended audience, which is to ask what audience did Augustine have in mind as he wrote the book, and what is the historical audience, which is to ask what audience actually ended up reading Augustine’s books on Christian learning? Were they the same or different? And, since we know Augustine changed both intellectually and as a social figure over those thirty years, did either of his audiences change? Some periods of history are marked by dramatic upheavals in certain quarters. Is the three decades from the 390s to the 420s one of them? If it is, then, not only the audience Augustine intended the books for and the audience that actually read them may have changed, likely for reasons related directly to Christian teaching and learning, but such audiences may well have changed in a way that tracks

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Enos and Roger Thompson (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008). Interest in these questions goes all the way back to Cayré and Auerbach, as well as the groundbreaking work of George Kennedy and James Murphy on ancient rhetoric generally. More on this later. I think much good has come from the in-depth discussions of textuality of the last few decades, and I also think that many of the issues at hand have been addressed in very intriguing ways by Jorge Gracia’s careful logical and epistemological analysis of texts and their meaning. See Jorge Gracia’s *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995).
or at least parallels the changes in the rest of their society. These are not so much questions that
I consider myself able to *answer* in these pages, even if I were able to answer them generally, but
they are questions that I must be constantly aware of, questions which I must at least address by
scratching the surface, even if that is all I can do.

But even to try to answer questions like these, I must rely heavily on the work of others,
without which mine would simply not be possible. I do take an approach slightly different from
some of those who have studied this work before me, but I hope that will not obscure my many
debts. To make clear what those debts are and the value I see in the work I am building on, I first
need to give an account of what has been said so far about the *De doctrina*. Since my focus is on
interpreting the text as a whole, I will first consider how scholars have done that and then I will
consider the history of the text’s interpretation in modern times.

How Have Scholars Interpreted the *De doctrina* as a Whole?

Many modern scholars have spoken of the *De doctrina christiana*; some famously.\(^8\) I
have said above that I do not think most of them are able to interpret the book as a whole in the
best way. Gerald Press made the point in 1980 that “there is no agreement about what the DDC
is actually about,” and the same is still true today, although largely scholars seem to have moved
away from some of these issues.\(^9\) Since a brief review of where scholarship stands will help the

\(^8\) The best guide to the literature here is Karla Pollmann’s “Doctrina Christiana (De-)”,
II.551-575.

\(^9\) Gerald Press, “The Subject and Structure of Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*”, Augustinian
Studies 11 (1980), 99-124, 100. James J. O’Donnell’s article “*De doctrina christiana*”, Augustine
reader see where I stand, I will undertake it here and refer to it throughout, as need arises. Any
survey like this must be selective, given the sheer quantity of work that has been done on *De
doctrina*. My focus throughout will be on understanding the *De doctrina* as a whole, so I turn my
attention primarily to those scholars and approaches that try to do the same. The literature
develops chronologically, so I will treat the broad movements in sequence. As it turns out, this
sequence mirrors the relative influence each account has had on thought about the *De doctrina*.

Christian Culture: Henri-Irénée Marrou and Peter Brown

What is likely the most influential view of the *De doctrina* derives from Henri Marrou
and his classic work *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*. The purpose of Marrou's
1938 thesis was to set out how late Roman culture evolved into that blend of classical and
Christian that so typifies the medieval intellectual world. For Marrou, the word "culture" came to
rest at the center of the debate: by it he means, not the German "Kultur", equivalent to
civilization, but the French "culture", meaning "the specifically intellectual aspect of a

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*through the Ages: an Encyclopedia*, edited by Alan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 278-280, is a good starting point, but O'Donnell takes a line difficult to follow: he does not clearly say what he thinks the book is about. He does suggest that the *De doctrina* represents a program for Augustine himself to follow.

10 Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 145 (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1938; reissued with a "Retractatio," 1949; 4th edition, 1958). I have found Mark Vessey an invaluable guide on the historiographical side of this question. I refer here both to Marrou's original and to Vessey's use and interpretation of it in his "The Demise of the Christian Writer and the Remaking of 'Late Antiquity': from H-I. Marrou's *Saint Augustin to Peter Brown's Holy Man*, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 6.3 (1998) 377-411. One of Vessey's strengths seems to be historiography, so I am happy to have him to follow, particularly in the case of Marrou whose thought grew and changed in remarkable ways, making it a tricky business to read through the last edition of *Saint Augustin et la fin* together with his “Retractatio”.
"civilization" and even more specifically the culture of the educated man. Mark Vessey is worth quoting at length:

The defining quality of medieval European civilization, according to Marrou, was its subordination of all forms of intellectual activity to the demands of the Christian faith, a principle he found enshrined already in Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*. In that treatise, more clearly than any of his other writings, the bishop of Hippo had expounded his mature conception of the ideal Christian culture, "its place in life, its goal, its technique, its methods" ([*Saint Augustin et la fin,*] 332). Marrou translates the phrase *doctrina christiana* as "Christian culture," without further qualification, insisting, against scholars who saw the work as a handbook for the clergy alone and thus of restricted application, that Augustine conceived of no other form of Christian learning for which rules could be given. . . Viewed in this light, the *De doctrina christiana* had the distinction of being at once the "founding charter of a Christian culture" ([*Saint Augustin et la fin,*] 413).  

Vessey makes the point that Marrou is concerned to explain what is essentially the old problem of the decline and fall of the ancient world, and that Marrou himself retracted some of his early statements and reconfigured his approach to late ancient culture: "that culture, as we see it in [Augustine], is not on the point of expiration: it has already become something else." Marrou, Vessey maintains, abandoned the old distinction between classical and Christian culture and replaced it with his notion of the "civilization of the Theopolis", the life of late antique men, from Constantine on, who, Christian and pagan, looked for a divine city and a spiritual life in a hierarchical world. Augustine, then, emerges as part of what Marrou calls a "byzantinisme latin", a culture that was tragically destroyed with the end of Roman power in the West and became something else entirely, namely the culture whose inheritors we are and from whose window we

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11 I follow Vessey on both points, "Demise of the Christian Writer", 385.
12 Vessey, "Demise of the Christian Writer", 385, 386.
look back on the past. Augustine's construction of Christian culture in the *De doctrina* is best seen as a part of this predecessor culture whose remains were put together in the Middle Ages into something they originally were not.

But, curiously, Vessey has little to say about Marrou's purpose in writing this and other works. Marrou was, as his most recent biography names him, "un historien engagé": he had many pursuits, from the teaching of French song to educational reform to political resistance to theological dialogue. He was an open critic of the direction philosophy had taken in his day, particularly of positivism, and he argued at length for the possibility of historical knowledge. For him, historical knowledge came from an act of faith; one must believe that one can learn from the world because to believe anything less would simply render life impossible to live. In *Théologie de l'histoire*, a book that must have arisen from reflection on his own work over the previous thirty years, Marrou argues that the Christian must not articulate some new system of apologetics that aims primarily to convert the hearts of others, but rather

Il faut travailler à se convertir soi-même, et cela d'abord sur le plan doctrinal, s'interroger sur ce que signifie notre profession de foi et très précisément de savoir si, et comment,

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14 "Ce tableau, je le répète, n'est pas tout imaginaire: c'est une simple extrapolation, car cette culture de la Théopolis, ce 'byzantinism latin', existe déjà, parfaitement constitué dans l'empire chrétien du IV siècle: c'est d'elle et de lui que témoigne Augustin." Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin*, 696.

15 Pierre Riché, *Henri Irénée Marrou historien engagé*, with a preface by René Rémond (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2003). I was put on to this aspect of Marrou’s thought by the chance finding online of a brief selection of passages from Marrou’s works covering some of the larger questions he was interested in. This little anthology has been my jumping off point: *Encyclopedie de l’histoire*, Historiographie du XXe siècle: Henri-Irénée Marrou (Accessed online on October 6th, 2012 at http://bcs.fltr.ucl.ac.be/ENC5/03.html).

16 On both points, see his *De la connaissance historique*, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1954).

17 Karl Jaspers, Marrou says, "ayant nettement dégagé le rôle de la foi en histoire, montre qu'elle réapparaît dans bien d'autres domaines de la connaissance, si bien que si on refusait d'y faire appel, l'action, la vie même seraient rendues impossibles, *omnia in hac vita nihil ageremus*." (*De la connaissance*, 129).
elle peut éclairer notre chemin, orienter notre conduite à travers la jungle touffue et ténèbreuse de l'Histoire.\footnote{Henri-Irénée Marrou, \textit{Théologie de l'histoire} (Paris: Le Seuil, 1968), 14.}

The purpose of the study of history, then, is conversion, but a conversion of the Christian sinner first and of the world second. It is here that a remarkable parallel emerges between Marrou and Alasdair MacIntyre, a contemporary thinker who, going beyond the simple study of the \textit{De doctrina}, tries to put it to use to solve philosophical problems: for both, the purpose of learning is moral inquiry, and the purpose of learning now is the Christian’s own conversion as much as, if not more than, the conversion of the world. I will have more to say about MacIntyre’s work shortly, in particular the use he makes of \textit{De doctrina} and how that use is relevant to what he sees as our contemporary philosophical situation, but an important point remains that is relevant here. MacIntyre and Marrou have spotted some of the same historical moments as of seminal importance. Both regard Augustine’s work in the \textit{De doctrina} as marking some definite turn, and both find Thomas Aquinas’s answer to and appropriation of Aristotle, particularly on the question of the eternity of the world, as marking another definite turn—and, for both, these turns are not merely landmarks in the history of thought, mulled over by students of the history of ideas; they are something closer to words whose echoes can still be heard, a song to which human beings are still able to respond, and a voice that the Christian can still use to speak to the world, humbly.\footnote{“Au temps de saint Thomas (et déjà de Synesios de Cyrène), la raison humaine butait sur une aporie: pour s'opposer à l'idée aristotélicienne de l'éternité du monde, il fallait invoquer la révélation pour affirmer que le temps avait commencé; aujourd'hui ce n'est pas sur une affirmation mais sur un problème que s'achoppent nos frères les hommes et le chrétien doit s'affirmer comme celui qui, s'appuyant sur la parole de Dieu, est le porteur, indigné, de la réponse à la question posée et cette réponse est une bonne nouvelle: oui, l'histoire a un sens, une valeur, une portée, elle est l'histoire du salut, \textit{Heilgeschichte}.” Marrou, \textit{Théologie de l'histoire},}
from him, but what is of note here is that MacIntyre is concerned to speak to modern man’s philosophical and moral situation, in a way that Marrou was also concerned to do. Other students of the work, however, have been less interested in this moral dimension.\textsuperscript{20}

If the \textit{De doctrina} is still something of an open book for Henri-Irene Marrou, it is certainly a closed one for Peter Brown.\textsuperscript{21} But precisely by viewing a closed book, Brown can, in some ways, see more than Marrou could. Vessey is a sure guide here:

Deeply sympathetic as he was to Marrou's vision of Augustine as a “‘late antique man’, confidently embedded in a late, late classical tradition in its final, Christian form,” the author of \textit{Augustine of Hippo} was anxious not to be cramped by it. . . . [Marrou’s account] brought with it certain liabilities, notably a classicist's understandable weakness for the intellectual life of the élite and--its corollary in this case--a view of the Spätantike which distinguished so sharply between the last exponents of the aristocratic \textit{paideia} and their monastic, “medieval” successors as virtually to detach the cultural history of the fifth and later centuries in the West from its antecedents. . . . [Brown] expands the French scholar's intellectualized, text-centered approach to Late Antiquity, to write a cultural history at once broader in social compass and far richer in narrative color and variety. . . . Where Brown and Marrou finally part company as guides to the world of Late Antiquity is in their manner of “living among texts.”\textsuperscript{22}

Marrou had paid little notice to two key things that, for Brown, were of colossal size: first, Augustine’s vast output in sermons to his people and the new view of style that such work entailed, and, second, Augustine’s reevaluation of classical civilization as a whole.\textsuperscript{23} Marrou had

\textsuperscript{20} Wolf Liebeschuetz, in his “The Birth of Late Antiquity”, \textit{Antiquité Tardive} 12 (2004), 253-261, discusses Marrou’s conception of Roman decadence, but he is concerned with little else. This is typical, even though not everyone is like this.

\textsuperscript{21} Peter Brown, \textit{Augustine of Hippo: a Biography} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967, second edition with epilogue, 2000). Brown ostensibly treats of the \textit{De doctrina} in Chapter 23, “Doctrina Christiana”, 256-266, but his previous chapters “Populus Dei” (240-255) and “Ubi Ecclesia?” (209-221) provide the firm grounding and begin many of the themes Brown will take up on the \textit{De doctrina}.

\textsuperscript{22} Vessey, “Demise of the Christian Writer”, 401-402.

\textsuperscript{23} Brown, \textit{Biography}, 263.
largely ignored the first point, focusing as he did on Augustine’s more literary works. On the second, Marrou also showed little interest, but, for Brown, the reevaluation of classical civilization derives from the most strikingly original parts of the *De doctrina*: Augustine’s division of the kinds of learning.\(^{24}\) Here, Brown says, Augustine has the modern insight that culture is largely relative, since it originates from language; pagan religion itself becomes just an agreed upon language for converse between men and demons. What remained of pagan culture, those things merely instituted by men, deprived of its quasi-religious character, and “[t]hus, at a stroke, much of classical literature, and indeed the habits of a whole society, were secularized.”\(^{25}\) The classical culture of Greece and Rome, then, emerges as merely the culture of one influential period and not an edifice to be valued on its own right for all time. Indeed, Brown goes on, the culture of the masses can be set on par with that of the Roman elite, in theory at least.\(^{26}\) And it is here that Brown’s emphasis on social history and his broad appreciation of the range of Augustine’s works make a difference: Augustine came from a half-educated family and, when he returned from his time abroad, he returned to a countryside of uneducated Christians and he soon found himself preaching to and teaching those very people in great numbers. This change of life is what lies behind Augustine’s changed view of the nature of culture.\(^{27}\) On the southern rim of the Roman world, Augustine realized that it is not just Cicero and Terrence that had made Rome what it was. He will later develop themes like this in the *De civitate dei*, but in the *De doctrina* he is more concerned to set the books of the Bible up as the new books on which both the culture of the elite and the broader civilization of the masses could be built—for late Romans took it for


\(^{25}\) Brown, *Biography*, 263.

\(^{26}\) Brown, *Biography*, 264.

\(^{27}\) Brown, *Biography*, 264.
granted that culture derive from a set of books; Augustine’s genius, Brown argues, was to see first that there was more to it than that and then, through that insight, he saw that the set of books could be changed.  

These points had eluded Marrou. Brown suggests this might have been because Marrou read Augustine as a classicist would, aristocratically. I might also suggest that Marrou read Augustine in this way because he had a larger purpose for his work, because he engaged in his scholarly work at least partly as a form of moral inquiry, for himself and for others. This sounds like a charge against Marrou, but it is not: in point of fact, such an approach is necessary to understand the book. I will argue later that Brown and Marrou provide essentially complementary views of one aspect of Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*, both of which have their place primarily in the right understanding of this book. To anticipate on one point among many, Marrou outlines the kind of audience that Augustine originally intended to read the book, and Brown indicates what kind of audience actually did read the book. In the thirty years that lapsed between starting and finishing the *De doctrina*, Augustine himself, I will also suggest, learned that there was a difference between whom he thought he was writing for and who was actually reading him and changed how he wrote accordingly.

Both Marrou and Brown, though, seem uninterested in taking up some of the most pressing issues in the text. Its peculiar character as one of the first systematic treatments of

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30 This is not to suggest that Brown does not engage in moral inquiry through his scholarship. It is merely to say that he does not seem to have programs beyond that scholarly work, visions for a better society, new theologies for the church in an age of anxiety. His gaze, so far as I can tell, seems fixed more firmly on the past than Marrou’s was.
hermeneutics goes unexplained. They seem little concerned that it was composed in two periods over three decades. Brown does not explicitly discuss what Augustine’s intended audience was, which is surely a relevant question. For whom did he write these four strange books? Both men are deeply interested in “Gibbon’s problem”, and both devote time to what became of the *De doctrina* in the Middle Ages: Marrou explicitly founds medieval civilization on it, and Brown implicitly uses it to throw light on the transition to the Middle Ages, although he, less abstractly, sees that transition as primarily social, one lived out in ordinary lives, more than as something first written out theoretically in books. Marrou and Brown both are right to see that what Augustine does in the *De doctrina* has broad implications for Christian civilization in the west. I will argue below, not that he thought late ancient civilization did not need changing---clearly he thought it did need changing---but that he intended, in the first part of the *De doctrina*, to carve out a space within that civilization for those who wish to live out the Christian life and, by the time he has completed the second part, he has realized both that his civilization has become essentially Christian and that his actual readers are subtly different from what he thought they would be. But, despite this change, Augustine still had the same basic purpose in mind for his *De doctrina*.

The Debate about the Subject of the *De doctrina*: Key Articles and Books

In 1966, Eugene Kevane produced a useful summary of the four competing scholarly views of what exactly the *De doctrina* is about: 1. a treatise on hermeneutics; 2. a textbook of

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31 For its place in the tradition of writing on hermeneutics, see Karla Pollmann, “Augustine’s Hermeneutics as a Universal Discipline?”, *Augustine and the Disciplines*, 206.
rhetoric, 3. a treatise on Christian culture, and 4. a treatise on education.\textsuperscript{32} Marrou’s view, obviously, is that it was a treatise on Christian culture, and Brown’s is close enough to that to equate them. Kevane himself argues that it is a treatise on Christian education, Christian \textit{paideia}. He outlines the main sweep of the text as one on education and then attempts to set the criterion for deciding among the four views by focusing on the word \textit{doctrina}: for him it is equivalent to how Werner Jaeger defined and articulated the notion of \textit{paideia}.\textsuperscript{33} He considers Cicero’s and Quintillian’s uses of \textit{doctrina} and argues that it is simply the ordinary way of translation the Greek word \textit{paideia}. Augustine, he concludes on this point, always uses \textit{doctrina} in the same sense that Cicero and Quintilian used it.\textsuperscript{34}

L. M. J. Verheijen largely accepted Kevane’s account of what the problem of understanding the \textit{De doctrina} actually is and how scholars can go about finding a solution to it.\textsuperscript{35} For Verheijen too, the key is the meaning of \textit{doctrina}, but he is concerned, not with how Augustine used the word elsewhere in his corpus; he thinks what matters most is how Augustine used the word in the \textit{De doctrina} itself.\textsuperscript{36} Noting the difference between some of the singular and plural uses, Verheijen is able to conclude that Augustine actually uses the word in a few different

\textsuperscript{32} Eugene Kevane, “Augustine’s \textit{De doctrina christiana}: A Treatise on Christian Education”, \textit{Recherches Augustiniennes} 4 (1966), 97-133. Many other views really end up being just different versions of these four; Kevane is right about that. For example, F. Eggersdorfer argues, in \textit{Der heilige Augustinus als Pädagoge und seine Bedeutung für die Geschichte der Bildung} (Freiburg: Herder, 1907), that the \textit{De doctrina} is primarily a manual for priests and deacons, a sort of professional handbook, which is close to the first view.


\textsuperscript{34} Kevane, “Christian Education”, 127.


\textsuperscript{36} Verheijen, “Le \textit{De doctrina christiana}”, 11.
senses throughout. This helps the reader see Augustine’s purposes: mainly, the *De doctrina*, he argues, is a treatise on the interpretation of scripture, but it does contain, in a digression at II.19.29-42.63, a “charter for Christian culture” on the lines of Marrou. Verheijen particularly stresses that the *De doctrina* contains important accounts of three of the four options mentioned above, interpretation, culture, and expression.

Gerald Press accepts only part of the terms of the debate set down by Kevane: he thinks scholars should not set *doctrina* center stage, but he does accept Kevane’s account of the four views of the *De doctrina*. Press criticizes both Kevane and Verheijen most. Verheijen’s criticism of Kevane he largely accepts, although he adds his own: Kevane’s philology is too poor; *paideia*, as Jaeger pointed out, does not have a simple definition and cannot have a simple one-to-one translation into Latin. And, if Verheijen criticizes Kevane for construing too broadly the meaning of *doctrina* and thus the content of the *De doctrina*, Press objects to Verheijen’s too-narrow account of what *doctrina* is. He draws on Marrou’s study of *doctrina* and *disciplina* in the Fathers to show that it is not enough to take the word’s meaning from the text that uses it; one must consider how it was broadly used and what the context for its uses was both inside and outside the text in question. More specifically, Press critiques Verheijen’s outline of the contents of the *De doctrina*. Verheijen says that part of Book II is a digression on culture, but the contents of the digression, says Press, are actually necessary to the clear purpose Augustine has in mind in that book, namely to show the reader how to resolve difficulties arising from

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37 Verheijen, “Le *De doctrina christiana*”, 11.
38 Press, “Subject and Structure”, 103-107, for his extended comparison and critique of the two.
unknown signs—for which it is clearly necessary to have a broad knowledge of subjects. In general, Press thinks Verheijen is misled by his own concern to find instances of the word *doctrina* in the text. But, interestingly, Press praises Verheijen for following Augustine’s own signposts for how to divide up the book—except in the case of where Verheijen sees a digression—but then proceeds, without offering evidence or a detailed critique, to reject Verheijen’s contention that the *De doctrina* is first of all a treatise on hermeneutics.

Press’s own account of the book is based on his study of the words *tracto* and *tractatio* in the text. He argues that these two words are more useful than *doctrina* for understanding what the *De doctrina* is about precisely because their meaning is more determine and limited: in rhetorical theory, *tractatio* means a treatment of a given subject. *Doctrina* is a blind alley: *tracto* and *tractatio*, however, recur “in the passages in which Augustine describes the subject and structure of the work and [have] a consistent (if somewhat general) meaning that both relates the work to the classical rhetorical tradition and reveals how the classical rhetorical theory has been transformed to meet the needs and serve the purposes of a new community and a new culture.”

From this perspective, Press thinks he can actually unify the four competing views: “In different senses of the word “about”, Augustine's DOC is about all [four]. It is a rhetoric in which exegesis plays a large part; like other ancient rhetorics (esp. Isocrates and Cicero) it purports to be or provide a comprehensive *paideia*; and as such it defines the cultural ideals of the new community.”

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41 Press, “Subject and Structure”, 103-107. Press continues on to offer his own account.
43 Press, “Subject and Structure”, 123.
Press's views, although important, ultimately seem too limiting and not informative enough. He is too limiting because he seeks to subordinate the whole of the *De doctrina* to rhetoric: for him, this book is essentially a manual for how to explain the scriptures to others in the form of *tractationes*, so that the book might best be titled "On Making Christian Treatises". But this does not seem to be Augustine's main purpose. Consider the preface. Augustine imagines people who might object to his work, among them those who think they already know the scriptures: "Quidam vero cum intellectis uti voluerint conatique fuerint Scripturas divinas secundum haec praecipta tractare neque valuerint aperire atque explicare quod cupiunt" (Pr. 2). But surely he does not primarily mean only those who have been unable to make treatises on the respective topics; these have been unable to open the scriptures and interpret them so as to explain what they wish to explain—that seems rather more general and could be taken simply to refer to their inability to interpret the scriptures well. The words *tracto* and *tractatio* do have the sense Press indicates, but that is only one among many, as he readily acknowledges. What he does not give here is a convincing reason why *tracto* and *tractatio* have to refer to the making of treatises and cannot mean simply dealing with the scriptures in the ordinary way for one’s own understanding and in order to explain them to others; this is, after all, the more ordinary sense of the words and since Augustine later says (IV.1) that the *De doctrina* will not be a technical treatment of rhetoric, it stands to reason that he would have meant the words in their ordinary sense. Furthermore, should we not count Augustine’s many sermons as treatments of the scriptures? Press’s view implies that they are not, which is an odd consequence given the focus of Book IV. Moreover, if Press is right, then readers do not study the Bible so as to understand it so as much they study it to explain it to others--another odd result, although not without some
foundation in Augustine’s account of love and service to others. Press's careful analysis itself undermines his view at least once. In referring to Augustine's treatment of signs, Press is at pains to make clear that “[t]o learn or understand the things of which these [words in scripture] are the signs is the goal of reading and interpreting. Our aim, then, is to discover (invenire) the thought and will of God through that of the writers of Scripture (2.6.7).”\(^\text{44}\) This is a good description of the clear purpose of the De doctrina, but it does not quite match up with Press’s own view: he needs the book to be about something more than this, about the making of treatises. Obviously, Press’s view has a great deal to be said for it and he draws attention to something that scholars focused too broadly on education had overlooked, but Press himself seems to realize that this is only part of Augustine’s more general goal.

The second count on which Press’s view is problematic is this: he does not provide a way of understanding everything in the text. His complete view is best summed in his statement (already quoted) at the end of the article. The De doctrina, he says, is about culture, exegesis, rhetoric, and education. “It is a rhetoric in which exegesis plays a large part; like other ancient rhetorics (esp. Isocrates and Cicero) it purports to be or provide a comprehensive paideia; and as such it defines the cultural ideals of the new community.”\(^\text{45}\) This is all certainly true, but were one to add Press’s capstone, that the purpose of the book is to teach how to make treatises on scripture, then it is clear that Press has not really succeeded in saying what he wants to say. It seems that tractatio has served him no better than doctrina served everyone else. And, furthermore, he is not interested at all in what Augustine thinks is the purpose of the making of treatises, although Augustine himself has much to say about it—to give only one example, “So

\(^\text{44}\) Press, "Subject and Structure", 114.
\(^\text{45}\) Cited above, note 60.
there are these three things which all knowledge and prophecy serve: faith, hope, and love”

(De doctrina, I.92).

What emerges from this consideration of the four views and their proponents is that, whatever else one can say about the De doctrina christiana, the interpretation of scripture will have to rest at the center of any account of it. Rhetoric will play a role too, but it will not be enough to consider whether and how Augustine’s views on rhetoric were revolutionary. Issues like those have been of interest to scholars for a long time, but before such accounts to be accurately given, a view of the whole work and its purpose is essential. And it is to this

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46 Erich Auerbach, in his Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and the Middle Ages, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), was not the first to be drawn to the De doctrina, although his study is one of the few on this topic known outside the world of Augustinians. Others before him had seen the value in Augustine’s observations on rhetoric, in particular how those observations were continuous with and at the same time discontinuous with the tradition of classical rhetoric. Press has a useful list of those who have tried to make this particular case, “Subject and Structure”, 99, notes 2 and 3. Mostly, this aspect of the study of the De doctrina has evolved away from the expectation that rhetoric can provide a complete answer to the basic questions of the book’s meaning and purpose. In that way, Press was probably one of the last to argue that rhetoric provides the key. Even Kathy Eden’s piece “The Rhetorical Tradition and Augustinian Hermeneutics in the De doctrina christiana”, Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric 8.1 (Winter 1990), 45-63, takes a kind of middle line between rhetoric and hermeneutics; the book is primarily about hermeneutics, she concedes, but its approach is that of a rhetorician’s approach to meaning: “the De doctrina . . . constructs its method of reading on a pair of oppositions which responds to the two principal points of controversy in the rhetorical interpretation of documents. The one, literal or corporeal (literalis, corporalis) vs. spiritual (spiritualis), transmits, in a version of the Pauline adaptation, the traditional opposition between scriptum and voluntas. The other, literal (propria) vs. figurative (translata, figurata), both preserves more nearly the terminology of its rhetorical past and continues its earliest function of accounting for ambiguity” (62-63). Most recently, for example, scholars of rhetoric have tended to focus on Book IV primarily and otherwise to turn their attention to problems other than what the De doctrina is actually about. See, for example, Enos and Thompson’s useful collection from 2008 of the most insightful articles on this topic, The Rhetoric of St. Augustine of Hippo: De doctrina christiana and the search for a distinctly Christian rhetoric (cited above, note 24). One gets the sense that such a collection was needed in order to redefine, for students of rhetoric, what the live issues are and what avenues are worth pursuing.
renewed sense that the discipline of exegesis and hermeneutics can provide the best answer to
the big questions about the *De doctrina* that I now turn.

**Hermeneutics**

The most important recent scholar on this point is Karla Pollmann. Her book, based on
her habilitationschrift, covers much ground, comparing Tyconius and Augustine across the
board. She makes the point again and again that no one before these two North Africans had
written treatises on hermeneutics in Greco-Roman antiquity.\(^{47}\) Her book length study of both
authors is foundational for any later work. She thoroughly summarizes scholarship and weighs in
on all the important points. She first examines the hermeneutics of heretics in the fourth century,
culminating in her account of Tyconius’ *Book of Rules*, which she sees as grounding
hermeneutics in ecclesiology primarily.\(^{48}\) She begins her treatment of the *De doctrina* by
situating it in contemporary fourth century intellectual history, with particular reference to the
work’s audience and critics,\(^{49}\) she next treats of the work’s literary classification,\(^{50}\) and then
proceeds through the whole of the *De doctrina*, selectively examining its content from the
perspective of hermeneutics and the related notions in philosophy and literary theory. What she
discovers emerges midway through her study: the purpose of the *De doctrina* is to establish
*caritas* as what she calls “the normative hermeneutical horizon” for all Christian interpretation of

\(^{47}\) Karla Pollmann, *Doctrina christiana: Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der christlichen
Hermeneutik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustinus* De doctrina christiana,
Paradosis 41 (Freiburg: Schweiz Univ.-Verl., 1996), 2-3, 32.
\(^{48}\) Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 65.
\(^{49}\) Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 68-87.
\(^{50}\) Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 89-104.
scripture. As a normative horizon, Pollmann sees three central aspects to this *caritas*: “1. *Caritas* includes taking, as a matter of ontology, the horizontal love of men for each other and the vertical love of man for God, in which God’s mediation for man plays a significant role. 2. *Caritas* implies both a practical-ethical and a cognitive-hermeneutical dimension, in which the practical emerges as the more important of the two. 3. *Caritas* is both immanent in the world and transcendent and it survives even beyond the Eschaton, continuous with this-worldly love.”

The structure of the book, Pollmann argues, is derived from Augustine’s use of the Platonic method of constructing a definition by means of *diaeresis*: this method of arriving at a definition divides the subject to be defined in two equal parts until the essence of the thing emerges. This accounts, she says, for his use of distinctions throughout. She focuses less on whatever his purpose might have been for setting up the distinctions in the way he does and more on what his distinctions entail and what the sources for them might be. In her treatment of Book IV, she stresses how Augustine is not only setting in place in a Christian framework techniques and terms from classical rhetoric but how central to his use of rhetoric is rhetoric’s task of building up love and destroying lust, in short, rhetoric’s ethical purpose. In all, Pollmann presents a detailed study of the *De doctrina* that answers many questions and provides ground for others to be asked. Andrew Louth’s review of Pollmann’s book is emphatic on her knowledge of the

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51 Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 125-126, my translation. I have expanded her German a little for the sake of clarity.
53 Her case for this can be presented most forcefully in a diagram, *Doctrina Christiana*, 90. Her diagram builds on a similar outline Press made, “Subject and Structure”, 116.
54 Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 89-104.
55 See her discussion of persuasion as the end of eloquence, *Doctrina Christiana*, 235-236, and particularly her account of his remarks on *delectatio* at 237-241.
details: summary is impossible since “so much of what the book has to offer is contained in its
careful and learned discussions of details of interpretation.” Louth’s view is echoed by the
reviews Pollmann received in *Augustinian Studies* from Charles Kannengiesser, Basil Studer,
and Frederick Van Fleteren in a special review section dedicated to her book.\(^{57}\)

But Louth is careful to note some issues with Pollmann’s work. The most important of
them is likely that she has little to say about the contents of Book I.\(^{58}\) She is happy to diagram
Augustine’s distinctions, but she does not give an explanation of them nor does she relate in a
helpful way the movement of Augustine’s thought in Book I to the rest of the *De doctrina*.
Furthermore, going beyond what Louth has to say, Pollmann’s central thesis seems to succeed
neither as an explanation nor as a synthesis. *Caritas* certainly is the normative horizon for
Augustinian biblical hermeneutics, but Pollmann does not build up her account of the *De
doctrina* on an explanation of why *caritas* plays this role and what that means for whatever
*doctrina christiana* is.\(^{59}\) Much less does she consider at length how *caritas* is related to the

\(^{56}\) Andrew Louth, Review of *Doctrina christiana: Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der
christlichen Hermeneutik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustinus De doctrina
christiana* by Karla Pollmann (Freiburg: Schweiz Univ.-Verl., 1996), *Journal of Theological
Studies* 50.1 (April 1999), 347.

\(^{57}\) All three in-depth reviews are found, together with Pollmann’s response, in *Augustinian
Exegese”, 109-117, Frederick Van Fleteren, “Toward an Understanding of Augustine’s
Hermeneutic”, 117-130, and Karla Pollmann, “To write by advancing in knowledge and to
advance by writing”, 131-137. These reviews and her response are a mine of details and
questions on what still (largely) remain live issues in the study of late antique hermeneutics and
the *De doctrina*.

\(^{58}\) Louth, Review of *Doctrina Christiana*, 346.

\(^{59}\) On the terminology employed here, “normative horizon”, Pollmann refers in her book and
some articles to A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and
Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 149-154. Pier Franco Beatrice uses this
graded order of things, or to the systematization of the disciplines, or to the stages of wisdom, against which the whole of Books II and III are set. She seems more interested in those aspects of *caritas* that can be exploited in a hermeneutics of scripture. And this is a well-placed emphasis that covers many things about the *De doctrina* that needed to be covered: my contention is only that such an emphasis does not adequately capture the purpose, method, or structure of the *De doctrina*.

Nor does Pollmann herself entirely disagree on this point. In a 2005 article, she turned to address what her book-length treatment had not resolved: the business of figuring out what the *De doctrina* is all about. Here, she proposes a bold solution. Augustine intends to outline in the *De doctrina* a universal discipline, “the only justifiable intellectual occupation for a Christian”: “biblical interpretation is the one true (Christian) discipline, comprising all others and giving them a perspective.” This discipline, she says, comes with several restrictions, the most crucial among them being ethical. Augustine’s notion of *caritas* is “only truly fulfilled in practical application and fulfilled by appropriate (i.e. selfless) conduct”, and so, since *caritas* is the normative horizon for Augustine’s hermeneutics, that hermeneutics is thereby restricted by what “is basically an ethical criterion”. “Augustine says repeatedly that all successful biblical interpretation must result in ethically good behavior: love towards God and one’s neighbor. . . .

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same terminology in his article on “Hermeneutical Presuppositions” in *Augustine through the Ages*, 426–431.

60 Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 137-143.
61 By the time of her response to the reviewers in *Augustinian Studies*, she seems not quite to have come to this yet. Nor did the reviewers exactly push her toward. They were concerned with other matters.
63 Pollmann, “Universal Discipline”, 231.
64 Pollmann, “Universal Discipline”, 212-213.
The intellectual effort at interpretation is thus subordinated to a wholly ethical perspective . . .

Pollmann has much else to say in this article. My concern here is simply this: Has Pollmann given a way of understanding the De doctrina that integrates all of its contents, its well-known structure, and its key insights?

Very nearly, she has. Her article sums up and adds to her monograph’s treatment in just the right way, answering the chief concern expressed above about her first study; what her Doctrina Christiana had in details, she now brings in broad strokes. But, ultimately, she may not have been quite successful. To see why, note what she does not say: she does not say how scriptural exegesis is subordinated to caritas; she only says “successful biblical interpretation must result in ethically good behavior.” That this is so can scarcely be denied. But how Augustine thinks interpretation is to result in good behavior is the heart of the matter. In a way, the fact that she does not answer the question of how exegesis is subordinated to love allows the debate about the De doctrina to slip back into its old wheel ruts: some may say exegesis is subordinated to love through education (Kevane redux), others through the exercise of rhetoric for the sake of one’s fellow man (a la Press), still others through the building of Christian culture according to the values of love of God and neighbor (Marrou reloaded). Scholarship has not progressed in this particular way, I admit, but it very well could—it also has not resolved itself around a consensus following Pollmann’s account, but it is likely too soon to tell on that score anyway. That Pollmann’s account leaves at least one important thread untied can be seen in a

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66 Not that I wish only for consensus. But consensus can be achieved and often actually is, if nothing else because matters on some topic are settled enough for the interest of scholars to shift elsewhere. Part of the reason for this lack of consensus on some of the important issues is simply a lack of progress in the operational theater of the history of ancient hermeneutics. Both
simple way: how, according to Pollmann, does the study of scripture “result in ethically good behavior”? Indeed, it is only after Pollmann’s two important studies of the book that we can be sure enough of standing on firm ground to ask this question. Before, too many things were still unclear. In that way, my study and any subsequent studies must rely heavily on Pollmann’s work.

But, that being said, there is an answer to my question and it is just this: the study of scripture results in ethically good behavior because the interpreter, and the audience for which he is interpreting—often himself—engages in moral inquiry by means of the study of the sacred text. In the coming pages, I will show how Pollmann’s account builds up to, but does not quite arrive at, this point. I will show how the notion of moral inquiry allows all the book’s contents to be unified, even its digressions, under a single purpose and structure. I will show how that very structure derives from what Augustine says scripture has to teach just as much as from any logical methods of distinction and definition from Plato and the Stoics. I will also show how Augustine’s remarks throughout the book on the practice of virtue and Christian ethics, which

Kannengiesser (“Response to Pollmann”, 103-105) and Studer (“Augustinus und Tyconius”, 112) make this point, which Pollmann readily concedes (“To Advance by Writing”, 133). My work cannot hope to remedy that, but it can hope to help better set the terms of the debate and provide students of Augustine with the best way of understanding the role hermeneutics played in his thought and, perhaps, in the thought of many others in antiquity.

Pamela Bright actually gets fairly close to the right answer on this point, except that she is making the case for the Confessions, not for De doctrina. She seems to have been drawn by the personal aspects of the story Augustine tells and how that story relates to his progressive understanding of scripture; what she did not see is that De doctrina is intended to teach the reader how to do that very thing. See her essay “Augustine: The Hermeneutics of Conversion” in Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity, edited by Charles Kannengiesser (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1219-1233.

I will explain this term and its use later, but in general, as it apparent, I take it from MacIntyre. It is the central concept in his entire project. Interestingly, how he uses the term and whether there is such an activity at all has largely gone unchallenged by his critics.
Pollmann rightly stresses, emerge as the one of the unifying strands of the whole work, as examples of how the Christian student should undertake moral inquiry in his own life.⁶⁹

That Pollmann does not answer such a question is only one issue with both her works on the subject. The second is deeper: she does not devote enough attention to the work’s composition, its unity, and its social and intellectual context. We may stand by our judgment that the *De doctrina* does possess a basic, *prima facie* unity, but it does seem that we can go further than that; if nothing else, the fact that there has been such dispute over what that unity might be should give reason for pause.⁷⁰ Pollmann is concerned with other things, particularly questions of source, genre, and hermeneutical theory. Pollmann is specifically faulted by Charles Kannengiesser for setting up an abstract system without considering the man Augustine was, what such a man intended to do with this system, what the *mentalité* was of the men for whom he

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⁶⁹ Something like this has been said before, by Walter Hannam in his thesis (cited above n. 22) and in a summary of it in article form published as “*Nodo unitatis et caritatis*: The structure and argument of Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*, *Florilegium* XV (1998), 145-165. Hannam finds the *De doctrina*’s structure to be one of ascent toward wisdom; Books I-III aim to describe a method of *conversio*, Book IV that of *confessio*. This is certainly true, although I disagree with his analysis on many details. There are a few reasons why I think mine is ultimately better: first, my notion of moral inquiry, taken from MacIntyre, incorporates *conversio* and *confessio* into one; second, setting aside whether these terms are more faithful to Augustine, it is clear that they do not elucidate the meaning and purpose behind Augustine’s book in the way that mine does; third, I have some reason to think that *conversio* and *confessio* are not actually closer to how Augustine might have thought of this book: he uses neither of the words there; fourth, Hannam suffers from the same fault that nearly every other interpreter of the *De doctrina* has evidenced, presuming a structure internal to the book when at least some of the clear historical evidence suggests that this structure can hardly be presumed.

⁷⁰ Several scholars have found it prudent to divide their study of the *De doctrina*. Press does this (“Subject and Structure”, 100), as does Torma Toom in his dissertation, *Thought Clothed with Sound: Augustine’s Christological Hermeneutics in De doctrina christiana* (The Catholic University of America, 2001). Both maintain that it is a single treatise, but neither one is concerned, given their focus to show why, and both do seem to find reasons why it is more convenient for their purposes to assume it is not one.
intended it, and that of those who actually read it.\textsuperscript{71} Some work, not least by or under the direction of Kannengiesser himself, has begun to throw light on these questions, and my goal is to continue and build on what has already been done here.\textsuperscript{72}

Before I continue, I should make clear that most of the studies I have discussed and will discuss do seem to see that Augustine’s project is ultimately pointed toward building up love in oneself and in others. This has not escaped scholarly notice. My point is primarily that the ethical aspects and orientation of Augustine’s books on Christian learning have not been given their due consideration. Sometimes scholars say that this is mainly a work on hermeneutics and then very soon after say, almost casually, that the study of scripture is ordered to love.\textsuperscript{73} Both of these are true and important things to say about the \textit{De doctrina}, but both must be set in the right order: even from this cursory look at the literature on the book, it seems clear that Augustine thinks of the study of scripture as one of the main ways Christians should go about growing in love. The

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\textsuperscript{71} Kannengiesser, “Response to Pollmann”, 107, is worth quoting at length: “Pollmann establishes a solid basis grounded on handbooks and other school material of late Antiquity, of which she provides an inventory with admirable skills, but she asks no questions about the hermeneutics themselves, which is the more unfortunate as the latter were, in this case, 'militant Christians.' Their spiritual journey and their intellectual combat for the survival of the Church interferes inevitably in their hermeneutics... Pollmann and, as it seems, a great many Augustinian experts tend to ignore such an eventuality, eager as they are to understand the achievement of Augustine as, in Pollmann's term, a "Universalhermeneutik," integrating differences between ancient traditions and constituting a system which transcends those traditions of diverse origins. Readers who candidly let themselves be introduced into the question of Tyconius's reception in DC by the sole chapter of K. Pollmann ([\textit{Doctrina Christiana,}] 196-244), would never get a glimpse of the problematic issues at stake.” This could equally well be said of her more recent work.

\textsuperscript{72} See C. Kannengiesser, “The Interrupted \textit{De doctrina christiana}”, \textit{De doctrina christiana: A Classic of Western Culture?}, edited by Duane Arnold and Pamela Bright (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 3-14. Other articles in that useful volume, itself in a series Kannengiesser edited, aim to shift scholarly focus to some of the more historical questions, rather than those of purely how different concepts relate and whence they derive.

\textsuperscript{73} As Moreau does, \textit{La doctrine chrétienne}, 15.
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place that love occupies in his understanding of Christian learning shows that the activity of studying scripture is not separate from, or only loosely connected with, a Christian’s inquiry into himself: it is that inquiry. So far, no major study has been devoted to making this point.

*De doctrina christiana* and Philosophy

Nor are these the only reasons we need a new account of the *De doctrina*. Others are more far ranging and important even for the intellectual life of our own time. Although it has not been widely commented on, Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* lies at the heart of an important movement in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. Alasdair MacIntyre has spent three decades arguing that philosophical inquiry generally, and moral inquiry specifically, cannot be carried on without a coherent and consistent tradition to be shared by all philosophers.  

In response to the situation we find ourselves in, the philosopher, MacIntyre says, must reject the dominant mode of philosophizing in our own day, which is a product of the greater project of the Enlightenment; the philosopher must do this either by exalting the will to power, as Nietzsche did, or by returning to and renewing the classical tradition. But this classical tradition is not and

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75 Hence the name of a key chapter in *After Virtue*, “Nietzsche or Aristotle?” 109-120. By the “classical tradition”, MacIntyre means to refer generally to the traditions of moral inquiry before the Renaissance, particularly the Aristotelian philosophy that dominated the medieval Islamic, Jewish, and Christian intellectual milieu. See *After Virtue*, 112-120.
cannot be merely antiquarian.\textsuperscript{76} MacIntyre argues that the most sophisticated exposition and defense of this tradition was offered by Thomas Aquinas, who welded together the Aristotelian tradition embodied in Aristotle’s accounts of moral and philosophical inquiry, with the Christian tradition, which found its most fundamental account of moral inquiry in Augustine’s \textit{De doctrina christiana}. Nor is it enough to be a Thomist, on MacIntyre’s view. The Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition must be renewed wholesale. But on what basis? In \textit{Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry}, MacIntyre turns to the roots of the Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions. He sees Augustine's \textit{De doctrina christiana} as lying at the heart of the definition of moral inquiry for the Thomistic tradition.\textsuperscript{77} This book sets reading, he says, at the center of the Christian life, a kind of reading which not only reveals God and sacred things to the reader, but reveals the reader to himself; in this reading, the principles and narratives the interpreter finds in scripture become means whereby the interpreter can subject himself to criticism.\textsuperscript{78} MacIntyre goes on to draw the

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\item \textsuperscript{76} Among other reasons, this is because a “moral philosophy . . . characteristically presupposes a sociology” (\textit{After Virtue}, 23). The moral philosophy of Aristotle presupposes the polis, for example, but contemporary philosophers cannot.
\item \textsuperscript{77} He does not quite put it this way, in part because he treats Augustinianism, here, primarily as it relates to and is a part of Thomism, not as much on its own terms, since Augustinianism is one of the warning rivals Aquinas encountered in his education (\textit{Three Rival Versions}, 81). But it is clear that MacIntyre thinks the kind of reading the \textit{De doctrina} enjoins is the kind of reading that led to the formation of the integrative Augustinian education that characterized the early universities. It is precisely that integrative ability that puts Augustinianism and Aristotelianism at odds (\textit{Three Rival Versions}, 102-103).
\item \textsuperscript{78} See \textit{Three Rival Versions}, 82-87, and Alasdair MacIntyre, \textit{God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition} (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 21-32, although his focus is more on Augustine’s methods and philosophical arguments, not on exegesis. MacIntyre does not discuss the sources of this view of reading or even how it came to be a practice carried out in the Christian east as well. He incorporates Jean Leclerque’s account of Augustinian reading in \textit{The Love of Learning and the Desire for God} (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), but he does not trace it further. In a way this is acceptable, in a way not. It is acceptable since MacIntyre’s purpose is to construct a broad understanding, not chase down every detail. It is not acceptable because it might make the reader
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outlines of the influence the *De doctrina* has had on western Christian moral inquiry, particularly in the twelfth century with Hugh of St. Victor and in the thirteenth with Thomas Aquinas, among others. He describes how he thinks the social and educational context of the High Middle Ages posed problems for this Augustinian inquiry and how that inquiry changed and appropriated new matter and methods in order meet those problems.\(^{79}\) In his latest book *God, Philosophy, Universities*, MacIntyre makes clear the importance of these historical claims for his contemporary project, or rather what he sees as the contemporary project of those operating within the Catholic intellectual tradition. The *De doctrina christiana* provides, as it were, the foundation of many of the ways in which western Christians engage in moral inquiry.\(^{80}\) That moral inquiry is at the center of the *De doctrina* is one of MacIntyre’s crucial historical claims. Since his arguments are so consciously rooted in history, it is imperative for him to have the right account of the books and movements he sees as important. Like other philosophers I will soon think that this kind of reading was an invention of Augustine, or that it was characteristic of western Christianity primarily. Perhaps a historical note would have been in order. The *sortes biblicae*, to take one example among other more sophisticated reading practices, predate Augustine and the garden of *Confessions VIII*; indeed, Augustine is partly motivated to take up the book by the story of Anthony of Egypt. Claudia Rapp details this and many other practices like it in her “Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes: Aspects of Scriptural Holiness in Late Antiquity” in *The Early Christian Book*, edited by William Klingshirn and Linda Safran (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 194-222. For an account of the history of reading, see *A History of Reading in the West* edited by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, translated by Lydia Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), especially M. B. Parkes’ chapter “Reading, Copying, and Interpreting a Text in the Early Middle Ages”, 90-102. \(^{79}\) *Three Rival Versions*, 93-103. MacIntyre particularly stresses the social pressures and the need for educated administrators in the new royal and ecclesiastical palaces and courts. \(^{80}\) Again, it is important to note that this general kind of moral inquiry is not peculiar to western Christianity. What MacIntyre might say, though, is that Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* can usefully be taken as the work most characteristic of this kind of inquiry among Christians. Of course, he is concerned with moral inquiry in the Latin Middle Ages and in its “successor” states down to our own day. In those lands, Augustine’s account was more than merely the most characteristic.
discuss, Cochrane and Gilson, who are in many ways like MacIntyre, he does not articulate a complete account of the *De doctrina*, but neither does he only rely on the best of the current literature on the work. He provides a brief look at the book and moves on. He does not note its problematic nature nor the trouble that scholars have had in classifying and describing it. MacIntyre, then, can give us a look at what he thinks the *De doctrina* is about, but his will be provisional at best. More even than others, MacIntyre needs a more complete and grounded account of the *De doctrina*.

A Brief History of the Scholarly Reception of the *De doctrina christiana*

But surely this major work of Augustine’s has seen more use and commentary than I have summarized above. That is true, and my goal now is to give a brief look at that variety of questions that have been asked and answers given. This will also help in placing the modern understanding of the *De doctrina* on its own historical footing. Partly, this will suggest a picture of the trends in the study of the text that will suggest why so few accounts of what the *De doctrina* is actually about have been given; partly, it will also make clearer why even those who have set out to explain it as a whole have rallied into the various camps that they have. Furthermore, if my account above of the main views of what this book is about is right, then we should expect to read the history of its study in a way compatible with those main views, since views of what a text is actually about exert much control over how people actually read it and what they do with it. Below I will argue that the history of the study of the work does in fact conform to the account that, following Kevane and others, I have given of it above, namely that
the scholarship on what the *De doctrina* is actually about can usefully be grouped based around four theses: either that the work is about education or about culture or about rhetoric or about interpretation. To make this history, I will not, and cannot, cite every work on the book, nor every work that says something about it. But I can, and will, use a variety of studies that I take to be representative of aspects of the modern research and writing on the four books on Christian learning.

First, the modern study of the *De doctrina* is built upon the edition of the French Benedictines from 1679, the Marist edition. The editors had little to say about the book itself, but their choice of placing it in the third volume at the head of Augustine’s exegetical works makes clear what they believed its purpose was and what place they took it to have in his thought. The more detailed study of the work seems to have begun in the eighteenth century with men like the Lutheran Johann Matthias Schröckh, noted for the fact that he read Catholic as well as Protestant historians, who devoted space to it in his monumental thirty-five volume *Christliche Kirchengeschichte*.81 The work, according to Schröckh, is primarily useful for preachers, who will find its account of speaking well suited to their needs, but the book, he thought, was not well named, since the title does not fit with what the book is actually about.82 This general view was picked up in English and American circles, specifically in Joseph and Isaac Milner’s 1809 *History of the Church of Christ*,83 and in one of the early translations (1844) of part of the *De doctrina*, that by Oliver Taylor; Taylor thought only Book IV worth translating, given that the

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rest of the book seemed off topic, and he intended his translation primarily to be a help to young preachers, as did several other evangelicals who approached the text in the next sixty years. This emphasis on rhetoric was largely that of Protestant ministers and preachers. This remained the focus of work even in France, although for different reasons: between 1840 and 1860 a few editions with introductions, notes, and commentary appeared, treating the book as an account of Christian rhetoric. One, Alfred Sadous, was a Hellenist, philologist, and translator, with broad interests in literature and style. The other, A. F. Maunoury, was a priest who began his career teaching classics, then was appointed to a chair in rhetoric, and ended his life as an extensive commentator on scripture. These classicists were undoubtedly drawn to the *De doctrina* less because of a need for advice in congregational preaching and more because they shared the broad interest in antiquity, literature, and rhetoric of the early nineteenth century France academics. In Germany, there was a growing interest in Augustine: the Lutheran C. H. Bruder, who had made concordances of the Old and New Testament and would later make corrected editions of the philosopher Spinoza’s works, made also new editions of *Confessions*, *De doctrina*, and *Enchiridion ad Laurentium* from 1836 to 1838, emending and correcting the text of the Benedictines. He praises the seventeenth century Danish theologian Georgius Calixtus for having brought this important text, the *De doctrina christiana*, to the attention of

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86 Maunoury was a well-known enough late nineteenth century commentator on scripture to have an article on him in an early edition of *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.
Protestants in 1629, and, at the same time, he laments the state of the present editions, into which many corruptions, emendations, and interpolations had come.\textsuperscript{88} Following Calixtus, Bruder divided the book up along what would become the usual lines. Books I-III are about exegetical and dogmatic theology and Book IV about homiletics.\textsuperscript{89} From Calixtus, he has clearly drawn a deep appreciation for the book, particularly for its ethical aspect. Bruder quotes him approvingly: Augustine shows in this book

\begin{quote}
“quo modo populus Christianus omnia ad salutem necessaria docendus sit, unde ea haurire, et quibus adminiculis scripturas quae ista cuncta suppeditent, interpretari oppor\textipa{t}eat, sed etiam qua ratione quae proponuntur eferri debeant, ut animos auditorum apte subeant et efficaciter commoveant.”\textsuperscript{90}
\end{quote}

By the end of the nineteenth century, as elsewhere, Augustine and his works had begun to figure in the major scholarly histories and encyclopedias. For these, \textit{De doctrina} was considered an important work, but the sense one gets is that most students of Augustine in those days thought they understood this particular book well enough, whatever their take on it was.

Already from these few observations, we can see differences emerging in how students of Augustine read the work: English and American Protestant preachers and teachers turned to the \textit{De doctrina} most often for practical advice and shunned what seemed out of tune with their times, whereas the Benedictine editors, a century and a half earlier, had read the work as one on biblical hermeneutics primarily, an integral part of Augustine’s corpus, and at least some German Lutherans and earlier theologians were concerned to interpret the work as it relates to

\textsuperscript{88} Bruder, \textit{De doctrina}, iii-iv: for example, “ita factum, quod non mirum, pater clarissimus librariorum et incuria et inscitia quam maxime corrumperetur” (iii).
\textsuperscript{89} Bruder, \textit{De doctrina}, iv-\textit{v}.
\textsuperscript{90} Bruder is clearly quoting Calixtus but he gives no citation, \textit{De doctrina}, iv.
progress in the moral life, in a way that did justice to its account of exegesis, rhetoric, and the Christian life.

With the renewed historical interest in the roots of Christianity in the late nineteenth century, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church began to be published in England and America, containing in its second volume the first complete English translation of the *De doctrina christiana*.\(^9^1\) Philip Schaff’s comments on the *De doctrina* are brief (514): it is a “compendium of exegetical theology to guide the reader in the understanding and interpretation of Sacred Scripture, according to the analogy of faith.” Here he takes what will emerge as one main line, but note that he has nothing to say about rhetoric. Scholars will say things like this before the serious study of the text has begun, as Schaff does here, and scholars will continue to say things like this down through and past the controversies over what the text is actually about, as others do now.\(^9^2\) Another witness to this trend toward the study of ancient Christianity, one relevant to this study, is P. Monceaux’s six volume *Histoire litteraire de l’Afrique chrétienne*\(^9^3\), an important but by no means definitive first step in contextualizing Augustine’s work.

At this point, three things began to happen: first, scholars began to study Augustine’s thought in detail and they turned to all kinds of matters that had not been studied before; this meant that many studies came to focus narrowly on some set of Augustine’s ideas, or on the relations that the ideas of one book have to those of another, or even on one broad idea that is

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\(^9^2\) As, for example, Frances Young does around 2004 in the text quoted above, note 93.

taken to have a controlling force on Augustine’s thought and later influence; second, those interested in bigger questions turned their attention to answering those questions in the form of long sweeping books that seek to explain things like the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages, or from the classical mindset to that of the Christian, or even from the mindset of all ancient men to that of the modern West; and, third, accompanying all these, scholarly views begin to fall into the four camps described above. As one might expect, Augustine makes his way into many of the big books, of which we have already seen one from this time, namely Marrou’s--and these are the kinds of questions that seem originally to have motivated men like Peter Brown, who then devoted their lives to understanding what they felt their predecessors, with their big books, had failed to grasp in enough detail.

To take the first kind of material, there is simply too much of it to summarize. This is partly because, as anyone knows who has spent time with the massive literature on Augustine, there is considerable repetition. On the *De doctrina*, the key articles of the 1910s and 20s (there were few in the 30s) will make clear how interest in this text turned narrow. J. Pschmadt sought to highlight Augustine’s account of rhetoric in Book IV, 94 Thérèse Francey traced the provenance of some of Augustine’s “idées littéraires” in the *De doctrina*, 95 and Charles Sears Baldwin argued that the Augustinian rhetoric articulated in Book IV constituted a break with the sophistic theory and practice of the early centuries AD and so returned Christian eloquence to a

more solid Ciceronian foundation. Marrou’s thesis was published in 1938, and it covered a much broader field than just the *De doctrina*, as many other books on Augustine in those days did, so we can see that both movements of scholarly focus go together. This bald summary should not give the impression that only a little was being done. By any historical standard, more work was being done on Augustine in the 1920s than had ever been done before. But much of it does not bear direct relevance to the study of the *De doctrina*. In the decades to come, our understanding of Augustine would grow substantially across the board and then redouble its growth from the 1980s on.

The 1940s too saw more of the same kind of research, focused, reflective, situating Augustine in his time and place. There was no big book on the *De doctrina*, but there were some on Augustine himself. In addition, the Bibliothèque Augustinienne began publishing its volumes, a series with French translations and outstanding notes and introductions. At least two of those big books on Augustine himself are worth a little consideration here, if nothing else as examples of their kind and examples of what implications books like these have and do not have for my study of the *De doctrina*. Charles Norris Cochrane’s book, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, published on the eve of the Second World War, and probably the first book in English to take late antiquity seriously, gives a wide view of what he saw as the fundamental problems of the intellectual life of the classical world and how Christianity emerged as and at the same time discovered in itself the solutions, in seed form, to those problems. In short, classical culture suffered because it could not find a firm ground for reason and humanism, and Christianity

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healed it by providing such ground for reason in the revelation of God to man, which both reveals the creator together with his principles at work in the world and at the same time reveals man as a creature, not burdened by the limits his nature imposes, but set free by them for a humanism founded on the person of the logos become man, Jesus Christ. Cochrane looks beyond the classical philosophical tradition. He turns to Thucydides and Herodotus and other historians and poets. What he thinks he has found is this: classical historiography and literature failed because neither one could discover the true cause of both human existence and human motivation. Christianity thus abandoned classical literature and turned to find truth in the logos as revealed through the sacred scriptures. Augustine, Cochrane makes clear, saw that the Bible was certainly not an open book, and so that if Christians wished to find truth in it, they would need a method whereby to find it. Cochrane at this point turns to the De doctrina. Augustine was clear-sighted enough to see that we must clear up verbal difficulties and difficulties that arise from what the text seems to teach. He perceived that words could be obscurers of meaning just as much as they could be conveyors of it, and thus he did not take the text of the scriptures in a naively literal way. Nor did he pursue allegorical interpretation in an unbridled manner. Augustine sought to use a true knowledge of things and languages to limit meaning; just as well, he drew, Cochrane argues, on the teachings of the pagan liberal arts to make the biblical texts subject to criticism then current in the schools. But all this was only of limited value. In the spirit and through the spirit alone was the meaning revealed. This is because, Cochrane points out, the real purpose of the scriptures for Augustine “is to reveal the means whereby we may attain to a

98 The following summarizes a certain part of Cochrane’s account, Christianity and Classical Culture, 474-490.
just and happy life.” Under these conditions, the study of history then becomes the exposition of values, which is itself, *sapientia*, wisdom, and which discovers wisdom in history. Cochrane does not make this explicit, but it is clear that, for his Augustine, this *sapientia* discovered through scripture is what leads every individual man on to God. After this, Cochrane turns his account to history and prophecy and thence to the long desideratum of classicism, namely an adequate basis for humanism, which Christianity, he says, provides because it conceives history as the embodiment of the logos and thus as the revelation of personality, the personality of God which unites and divides. Cochrane follows the thread further through this unity and division on to Augustine’s account of the most basic divisions and unities among men, those of the two great cities.

Rather than discuss the merits of Cochrane’s account of Augustine or of classical culture and its successor, I would only like to note here how he uses the *De doctrina christiana* and what this means for the scholarship of his time. Cochrane has given nothing like a complete account of the *De doctrina*, which is clearly beyond his purpose, nor has he even treated the work as the least bit problematic from the standpoint of an interpreter. I mentioned above that many authors seem to presume that they already have an adequate understanding of the *De doctrina*. This is true of Cochrane. What he does say about the *De doctrina* is that it occupies a central place in Augustine’s answer to the problem of classical culture because it outlines in clear terms how the Christian should find in history as revealed by God through the scriptures the revelation of true values for human life, which constitute wisdom, and those values, through the personality of Christ, reveal the two great cities of men. He thus fits the *De doctrina* between Augustine’s late

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De civitate dei, and his early dialogues, grappling as they do with the problems of classicism as embodied in Cicero, Vergil, and the libri platoniciorum. On Cochrane’s view of the place of the De doctrina in the long arc of Augustine’s thought, I can only say a little. What is of most importance here is that, as I will argue in my fourth chapter, Cochrane is essentially right that the De doctrina sets at the center of the Christian intellectual life, which itself is centered on scripture, the exposition of values, the growth in wisdom, and both as the means for living a happy life. Cochrane would benefit from many of the details that I offer below about the text itself and its composition and what that can tell us about Augustine, but I do not think my account would have much to correct in his overall view of the work.

It would be difficult to survey all works from the next seventy years similar in breadth and erudition that were to be written on Augustine’s place in the western tradition, those making mention of the De doctrina. Most of these, so far as I can tell, treat of the book well enough for their purposes, and I certainly know of none that base an important part of its account on a misreading of the four books on Christian learning. Nevertheless, it will be worthwhile to stop shortly over another kind of study, those that purport to give an account of Augustine himself, the details of his work rather than how his work fits into a larger scheme. Of these, one very influential was written at the end of the 1920s by Etienne Gilson, Introduction à l’étude de saint Augustin, which went through editions down through the 1960s and was translated into many languages. Again, as with Cochrane, I cannot review much less critique Gilson’s account of

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Augustine. What I can do, though, is see how he understands the *De doctrina* as part of Augustine’s thought.

And like Cochrane, Gilson finds the *De doctrina* to be a central work for the African bishop. Early on, Gilson makes a point crucial for understanding this text: Augustinian intellectualism, to borrow a phrase of Cayré\(^{101}\), has as its end, not the good of the understanding, but the good of the will, of the whole man. It is wisdom that leads us toward this good, which is the enjoyment of God himself. Partly, wisdom does this through rules by which we judge, “regulae numerorum, regulae sapientiae” (Gilson cites *De libero arbitrio* II.10.29). I will later make mention of what these *regulae* are in the context of the *De doctrina*. Gilson has much to say of the relationship in Augustine of science and wisdom. “Wisdom asks us to face the divine ideas and in doing so directs us to the divine and universal; science makes us turn toward things and in doing so subjects us to creatures and restricts us to the limits of the particular.”\(^{102}\) Wisdom, Gilson sees, is on the same plane of the divine ideas as number is.\(^{103}\) If the *regulae* for the interpretation of scripture are divine ideas, then the study of scripture emerges as a means to true wisdom, wisdom directing the reader by means of a divinely inspired text through the divine rules that, since they are a means to true wisdom, are themselves revealed in the text. But “since the wise man does not always stay on the level of his wisdom, he is happy to find the support of authority available to him in his moments of weariness.”\(^{104}\)

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\(^{102}\) Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, 118-119.

\(^{103}\) Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, 128.

\(^{104}\) Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, 230.
I feel how weak must be my truncated, headless account of Gilson’s prolonged meditations on Augustine. Still, what is essential we can see: science does not lead us aright, but wisdom, revealed through the divine rules, draws us up to our eternal homeland through the study of scripture, which study seems itself to reveal the rules for such study. Rather than ask the pressing follow-up questions about this, for example, to what extent does Gilson think wisdom and number are on the same plane for Augustine, I will simply leave it where it is. Any digression would take me too far into matters with which I simply cannot deal here. But Gilson too, like Cochrane, does not provide a full account of the De doctrina. What he does provide, though, several key insights that strike veins running throughout Augustine’s corpus, is certainly worthwhile. He is right, I will argue below, to see a relationship between Augustine’s rules for interpreting scriptures and the divine ideas, however obscure that relationship might be.

To sum up here, neither thinker, Cochrane nor Gilson, nor any other like them, provides a full account of the De doctrina, and most do not even treat the book as problematic. What such works have to say, therefore, is relevant to my study but only of secondary importance, useful to me for the broad insights they give in general questions, but most useful to me as a tool for understanding the modern reception of the book.

From the 1950s on, work on Augustine began to grow at a considerable pace, with the founding of more journals specifically devoted to it, e.g. Augustinianum in 1961, such that it is no longer useful to give a historical account of work on the De doctrina; I must summarize by topic. The expansion in Augustinian studies tracks the broadening of research throughout the academic disciplines. On the textual tradition itself, one important discovery was made in 1959: Green found what may be a fourth century manuscript of Books I and II and of the De doctrina,
which I will discuss in detail below.\textsuperscript{105} Also, Joseph Martin’s edition of the work appeared in 1962 in the Corpus Christianorum series\textsuperscript{106}, and William’s Green in the Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum a year later.\textsuperscript{107} Both of these editions, however, have been severely criticized, and it is clear that we still lack a scientific edition of the text.\textsuperscript{108} There has been some debate about the nature and implications of Augustine’s prologue to the \textit{De doctrina}.\textsuperscript{109} In other areas, scholars of a more philosophical interest like Robert Markus began to turn attention to many of the subsidiary matters in the \textit{De doctrina}, like Augustine’s theory of signs; such interest has progressed through the 1980s down to our own day.\textsuperscript{110} This theory, articulated mostly in Book II, had long attracted sporadic notice, but now began to exercise genuine influence.

Historical interest in Augustine’s account of rhetoric and hermeneutics also became more earnest. One Spanish scholar, M. Aviles Batina, building on the work of others, spent eight years

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\item W. M. Green, “A fourth century manuscript of St. Augustine? (Leningrad QV. 1/3-‘first edition’--inter 396/426--of the \textit{De doctrina christiana})”, \textit{Revue Bénédictine} 69 (1959), 191-197.
\item For example, Manlio Simonetti, “Note sul testo del \textit{De doctrina christiana} di Agostino”, \textit{Augustinianum} 35.2 (1995), 549-565. These editors, he said, chose to ignore each other’s work; they also disregarded many manuscripts and left out too many variants. See also, C. Schäublin, “Zum Text von Augustin, \textit{De doctrina christiana}”, \textit{Wiener Studien} N.F. 8 (1974), 173-181. These criticisms were so effective that they made it into the Augustinian encyclopedia; see Kenneth Steinhauser, “Manuscripts”, \textit{Augustine through the Ages}, 529-530.
\item See Robert Markus, “St. Augustine on Signs”, \textit{Phronesis} 2 (1957), 60-83, and more generally, his collection of essays on the topic \textit{Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity} (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996). Much of the work of the past decades was summed up and commented on in Giovanni Manetti’s \textit{Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity}, translated by Christine Richardson (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).
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in five articles detailing how Augustine did and did not put his hermeneutical principles to work in preaching and teaching. The articles by Kevane, Press, and others fit in here, except that their main purpose was not to go into the details of subordinate points, but to try to argue about the main purpose and subject of the work, which, as I pointed out, they thought had been lost in all the tangential discussions of matters like the distinction between use and enjoyment. At the same time, a few dissertations were written in German on the *De doctrina*, emphasizing it as a treatise on rhetoric, but they were to exercise little influence: for example, one, by Steffen, gives an account of Augustinian eloquence, particularly on what kind of thing eloquence actually is for Augustine and the key role it plays in the *De doctrina*. The most important big book on the *De doctrina christiana* in German actually turns out to be Pollmann’s habilitationschrift. In an effort to bring much of this disparate work together in order to reassess the *De doctrina* at the close of the twentieth century, Charles Kannengiesser organized a conference on the work, which resulted in two volumes, the first covering everything from early manuscripts to the relationship between salvation and rhetoric, the second consisting of papers on the nachleben of Augustinus.

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111 In order, they are: M. Aviles Batina, “Algunos problemas fundamentales del *De doctrina christiana*”, *Augustinus* 20 (1975), 83-105, “Prontuario agustiniano de ideas exegéticas”, *Augustinus* 20 (1975), 297-338, “Estudio de diez sermones agustinianos”, *Perficit* (Publicación Mensual de Estudios Clásicos: Textos y Estudios), Second Series 7, 92-94 (1976), 33-71, “Prontuario agustiniano de ideas retoricas”, *Augustinus* 22 (1977), 101-149, and “Predicación de san Augustín: La teoría retorica agustiniana y la práctica de sus sermones”, *Augustinus* 28 (1983), 391-417. For earlier work, for example, see J. Oroz Reta, “El *De doctrina christiana* o la retorica cristiana”, *Estudios Clásicos* 3 (1956), 452-459. Here, Oroz Reta’s concern is somewhat broader, since he wants to show, like others, that the best way to understand the *De doctrina* is as a treatise on rhetoric.


113 Of course, Pollmann herself draws extensively on the literature on many of the subsidiary points, which she often clarifies. For example, see Cornelius Mayer’s important article “Prinzipien der Hermeneutik Augustinus und daraus sich ergebende Probleme”, *Forum katholische Theologie* 1 (1985), 197-211.
the *De doctrina* in the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{114} Pollmann’s book was published the same year. Also in the same year, the next important edition of the *De doctrina* appeared, that of R. Green in 1995 for Oxford Early Christian Texts.\textsuperscript{115} Since these four volumes appeared, few scholars have sought to answer the question of the subject and structure of the *De doctrina*.\textsuperscript{116} Or at least those who have tried to do so have ended up redeploying some of the now standard views: for example, Manlio Simonetti’s translation with introduction and notes takes up the hermeneutics line and is concerned both to see this work as a bridge to the Middle Ages and to propose it as still an important manual for young students of scripture\textsuperscript{117}; also the edition and translation with introduction and notes of Moreau, Bochet, and Madec, for the Biliotheque Augustinienne, while in many ways the most helpful resource on the *De doctrina*, presents the book mainly as a work on hermeneutics, with little emphasis on its moral aspects.\textsuperscript{118}

This, then, is where the study of the text stands.

\textsuperscript{114} De doctrina christiana: *A Classic of Western Culture*, edited by Duane Arnold and Pamela Bright (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), and *Reading and Wisdom: The De doctrina christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, edited by Edward D. English (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).


\textsuperscript{116} There is a notable exception: in 2004, Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, argues in a few sentences that the *De doctrina*’s “essential purpose is to explain what a Christian theory of hermeneutics is all about. It is about knowing the right way to approach the divine realities which give Christian faith its foundation and original profile. … [Scripture’s] consistent and accurate interpretation implies a total dedication of its readers’ faith, hope, and love, in other words the actual accomplishment of the Law” (1156). This seems true enough, however vague and brief.

\textsuperscript{117} Augustine, *L’istruzione cristiana*, translated with introduction and notes by Manlio Simonetti (Rome: Mondadori, 1994).

\textsuperscript{118} Augustine, *La doctrine chrétienne, De doctrina christiana*, edited, introduced, and translated by Madeleine Moreau, with notes by Isabelle Bochet and Goulven Madec, Bibliothèque Augustinienne, II/2 (Paris: Brepols, 1997).
In the next chapter, when I introduce and use some terminology from the field of textual studies, I will provide a way to organize and understand the various approaches to the De doctrina, both those directly related to my question and many of those subsidiary areas of interest, like Augustine’s account of use and enjoyment. I do this so as to see in the clearest way what good these studies have contributed to their various disciplines and also so as to situate my own study in the right disciplinary context. This will emerge from how I have set up this investigation and how I proceed with it in the second chapter; in other words, I have tried to frame my understanding of the literature on the De doctrina in a way that draws from the text itself rather than the other way around.

Textual Interpretation

My thesis, then, presents a reading of Augustine’s De doctrina christiana, which means that state of the field of textual interpretation generally is not without relevance for this project. It is already well known that the theoretical underpinnings of the study of texts are controversial, to say the least. Even the most straightforward views are challenged and frequently dismissed as naïve, oppressive, or radically unintelligible. These developments are not without import for the study of Augustine’s hermeneutics. It is clear that any study of that hermeneutics must take a stand on certain key issues, and that the stand one takes will influence all that follows.

120 Pollmann herself notes the confusion in the state of the field at the beginning of “Universal Discipline”, 206. There, she provides one standard definition of hermeneutics and exegesis, citing Gadamer and others.
Recognizing that these issues are of fundamental importance, and that they are some of the thorniest facing historians and philologists, I propose in this thesis to use what seems to me to be a negotiable middle ground in the form of what I have found to be the most useful of recent approaches to textuality, that of Jorge Gracia. Gracia has articulated this theory in two books: *A Theory of Textuality* and *Texts: Ontological Status, Identity, Author, Audience*. In general, the theory is surprisingly straightforward, although it does challenge some assumptions; its chief appeals are its simplicity, clarity, comprehensiveness, and the fact that, on this theory, texts turn out to be very nearly what we would expect them to be. But Gracia has written primarily in an effort to build on what thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, and Riceour have taught us about texts, their limits, their meanings, and the problems attendant on all three. As such, his theory is particularly useful on matters like the limits of authorial intention, the cultural factors that help determine meanings, and the ways in which understandings of texts legitimately vary across readers, traditions, and cultures. I will be using several of Gracia’s insights to help set up and solve problems throughout my study of the *De doctrina*, and thus I will have occasion to lay out the bare bones of his theory on a few key points, for example, interpretation and authorial intention in the next chapter. For the most part, Gracia has set me to asking questions I otherwise would not have and he provides definitions and accounts of concepts that will give me a firm footing on matters where I otherwise would have had to state my results more suggestively. To reiterate, I have wished to find in Gracia’s theory of textuality chiefly something that will help me solve some of the important problems in Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*. As the reader

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will see, whatever Gracia’s merits and demerits may be, I have certainly found him useful for my purposes, mainly by clearing certain matters up and keeping terms well defined. I have tried to steer clear of controversies on matters like the hermeneutic circle and what things can count as texts.  

In short, then, I will try to occupy a certain pragmatic middle ground in contemporary debates about hermeneutics. Chiefly, I do this by employing Gracia’s theory of textuality and using it, not as the only right way to understand texts and their features, but as the most useful way for me to lay out how one can understand them in the context of a project that seeks to draw out partly how Augustine himself understood texts. This pragmatism will, I hope, save me from straying too far from the text I am considering here.

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122 But how can I justify using the account of textuality developed by a specialist in high scholastic and Latin American philosophy to elucidate the work of a fourth century bishop of Africa? Gracia takes himself, although he sees no need to make this painfully explicit, to be a part of the same tradition of which Augustine is one of the seminal figures. Gracia is a Catholic philosopher, but more than that: he has articulated his theory of textuality in general and has applied it in particular to the interpretation of revelation in his book *How Can We Know What God Means? The Interpretation of Revelation* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). Furthermore, Gracia is one of the few philosophers to have written on what a tradition is and the problems that surround the notion of tradition itself; see his *Old Wine in New Skins: The Role of Tradition in Communication, Knowledge, and Group Identity*, The Aquinas Lecture 2003 (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2003). Briefly, Gracia rejects that view that traditions are collections of beliefs in favor of the view that traditions are collections of actions. For him, a tradition is an action related to a group of people that certain of those people have done and plan to do again and, crucially, an action “significant for the identity of the group and regarded as such by its members” (*Old Wine in New Skins*, 89). Gracia, then, like MacIntyre, sees himself as engaged in the same set of inquiries that Augustine was engaged in fifteen centuries ago. This means that the concepts and arguments that Augustine makes Gracia will be familiar with and will, in many cases, have taken account of. It also means that both men face similar problems on key areas of the Christian faith, for example, the interpretation of revelation, on which both have written a good deal. This at least gives a prima facie reason for thinking my use of Gracia here is legitimate.

123 If James J. O’Donnell is right, in his review of Averil Cameron’s *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2.7.1, that “to refrain from ‘doing theory’, at
My Thesis

It will be useful here at the end of this chapter to state my thesis in a simple and clear way. My answer to the question of what the *De doctrina* as a whole is about has three parts.

1. Augustine intends to show how all learned disciplines are subordinated to the study of scripture and how that study of scripture is itself ordered to love.

2. But in what way is that study of scripture ordered to love? It is ordered to love because by means of such study exegetes can make progress toward wisdom for themselves and help their audiences do the same.

3. Exegetes grow in wisdom through such study because the scriptures require them to question themselves and their own values and habits and the values and habits of their culture both by means of what the scriptures directly teach and by how readers should (according to Augustine) go about reading them; a person’s questioning of him or herself is moral inquiry, and moral inquiry rightly carried out builds up love of God and neighbor in the inquirer by reforming those habits and values out of line with the teachings of Christ.

   Moral inquiry is not the subject of the *De doctrina*; instead, the subject is Christian scriptural study, which is by its nature aimed at moral inquiry. So, succinctly put, moral inquiry is the *telos* of the study of scripture.

Conclusion

least a bit of it, seems to be to side with the troglodytes”, then I hope at least to avoid appearing to live in a cave.
This chapter has shown that we have several things to gain from reappraising Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*. No current account of the book answers all of the basic questions the text raises. Much work had focused on ironing out certain key details and, even though consensus has certainly not been reached on questions like Augustine’s distinction between use and enjoyment, nevertheless, the scholarly discussion has moved from its early concern with matters like that to the broader concern of how to understand the *De doctrina* as a whole. Marrou and Brown played a central part in this, and Pollmann has given what amounts to the best account of the book currently in the offing. But as I pointed out she does not tackle many important matters and, even in what she does address, she does not explain what appears to be the heart of Augustine’s books on Christian learning: how does the study of the scripture relate to our growth in morals, our growth toward wisdom?

Before I turn to elaborating my answer to this question, I need to discuss in detail the unity of the *De doctrina*, the text as text, and the historical and intellectual context of its writing. This will mean a careful look at what we can know about what Augustine composed, how he composed it, why, when, for whom, who read it, and how they all understood the *De doctrina*. Broadly, then, I turn next to text and context. Both are illuminating. Moral inquiry emerges from the context, not as a theory drawn from classics and imposed upon Augustine’s book, but as an important component of the lives of Augustine himself and of the men and women who read the *De doctrina christiana* in his day.
Chapter 2

*De doctrina christiana*: Texts

Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* is presented in modern critical editions cleanly, as a single text about a single subject.¹ This is not an unreasonable way to present the text, since it can be taken to be a single text about a more or less unified subject and that is certainly the best way for the ordinary reader to take it. The trouble with presenting it this way is that much of the interesting and important detail is obscured. Many scholars have exercised themselves at some length to understand the *De doctrina*, but so far as I can tell almost no one has spent significant time on the details of the stages of composition, Augustine’s conception of his task, his intended audience, the actual audience, or how these last three change from one stage of composition to the next.² That they would change seems obvious: during the years from 397 to 426, Augustine grew in innumerable ways as a thinker, and if some are right, he forged in that time the

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¹ The standard editions are these: first, the text in volume 34 Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*; second, Joseph Martin’s edition in the Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 32 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1962); third, W. Green’s edition in the Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 89 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1963); and, fourth, the edition in the Oxford Early Christian Texts series, edited with notes and a translation by R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

² Some have expressed interest in or done work on certain aspects of each of these questions, for example, Pollmann treats of the potential audience of the *De doctrina* in her *Doctrina Christiana*, 69-76, but these topics have not been treated in enough depth. R. P. H. Green (*De doctrina christiana*, xii-xiii) says that no one has made any serious headway on these points, and that no one, as yet, has been able to make a convincing case for any substantial differences between what Augustine wrote in 395-6 and what he wrote in 426-7.
framework of western intellectual life for the next fifteen hundred years. The treatment of issues like these turns out to have profound implications in two directions. First, in one direction, they help bring into clearer focus key elements of Augustine’s intellectual life, specifically how he thought of himself and how his attitude to Christian learning matured. Second, in the other direction, these issues can help contemporary scholars see how in one man a set of ideas can grow and change without losing their initial force or being substantially rejected. Instead of merely providing his readers with an account of learning and moral inquiry, the careful philologist and philosopher can see in Augustine’s work on what would become the *De doctrina christiana* the example the bishop of Hippo himself left of how moral inquiry is to be constructed and carried out.

**Where to Begin?**

Often studies of this sort, with these kinds of goals, begin with a treatment in brief of the relevant parts of the author’s life and thought, the work’s place in both, and then move to a chronological consideration of how he composed the text to be studied, which is usually rather like a running commentary. In the case of the *De doctrina*, this would, I think, make my task

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3 This has often been said, but what I take to be its classical formulation is due to Charles Norris Cochrane in his *Christianity and Classical Culture*, particularly Part III, “Regeneration”, 359-516.

4 An excellent example of this, for which the method works admirably well, is C. W. A. Whitaker’s *Aristotle’s De Interpretatione: Contradiction and Dialectic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). This is also, in my opinion, actually the kind of study that James J. O’Donnell produced in his two-volume commentary *Augustine: Confessions, Text and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Even a glance at the “Prolegomena” is
more difficult than it needs to be and my points less clear than they should be. Why? First, the most important points I have to make here are about, not any particular detail of the work, but the whole thing and how that whole thing does or does not hang together. Second, such a method would take me far into the secondary literature on many points, like O’Connell’s view of Augustine’s Platonism, and even the generalist would end up finding many things to fault me for leaving out, e.g., a thorough discussion of Plotinus or of the Greek background of exegesis. Third, it would end up taking too long and involving too much repetition. To make the points I need to make, I would have to say the same things over and over just to keep the reader reminded of what is relevant among all the details--and the De doctrina is a mine of details.

Instead, I prefer to approach this work beginning from our current text and going back to what Augustine wrote.\(^5\) Partly, I start with our current text because Augustine intended us to have largely what we do have, so it was, for him, the finished text of his four books on Christian learning. Beginning there also allows me to talk about the De doctrina generally before getting into the specifics of my take on some of the issues that have interested scholars. At the heart of the De doctrina is the principle of the double-love of God and neighbor, which, I argue, serves as the norm for the moral life, the interpretation of scripture, and the organization of learning itself; my overview of the contents and structure of the contemporary text of the De doctrina will show this. But this overview will serve another goal too. Once I have the broad interpretive outline, I will argue that certain seams emerge in the work as we have it, certain changes in method, focus,

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\(^5\) My conception of this method is drawn from Gracia, although not from a particular place in his A Theory of Textuality. I have put this together as what seems to me to be the best way, given his account, to approach a text.
audience, and the author’s conception of his task in writing such a book, and that these seams are keys that will help us move further back in time from our contemporary text to the texts that Augustine composed. That will lead me, in the next chapter, to ask questions about the broad context: the circumstances attendant on Augustine’s original conception of the idea for such a book, the place of such a work in his intellectual life to that point and beyond, the method he chose with which to pursue his idea, his intended audience, and his conception of his relationship to that audience, among other things. I will argue that we should distinguish four texts of the *De doctrina christiana*, and I will then undertake to study each of the four in turn, beginning with the first to be composed and ending with the text we have. Then, in my fourth chapter, I will treat specifically of what I claim is the unifying idea behind all four: Christian learning as moral inquiry.

So, I will begin with an overview of the text of the *De doctrina christiana* as it is presented to modern readers in critical editions. This version of the text I will call, following Gracia, the *contemporary text*, “the text that is available to us in the original language in which it was produced.”\footnote{Gracia, *Theory of Textuality*, 75.} This text is contrasted with the *historical text*, “the text the historical author actually produced.”\footnote{Gracia, *Theory of Textuality*, 74.} In fact, we do not usually have a single contemporary text, but rather several texts representing several textual traditions; indeed, in the case of many Pre-Modern texts, there were several historical texts--this is true of the *De doctrina*. For ease of reference, here, unless otherwise indicated, “contemporary text” will refer loosely to “a family of texts that
are related in various ways and may be more or less historically accurate.” Specifically, I largely follow the text of R. Green in his edition of the *De doctrina* in the Oxford Early Christian Texts series.⁹

My overview of the *De doctrina* will make clear both the content and organization of the book generally. ¹⁰ It will also show the principal divisions of the work and illustrate the principle that is both the source of Christian learning and the key to how Augustine organizes it.

**Overview of the *De doctrina christiana***

First, I go to the heart of the book. In his treatment of how to resolve ambiguous metaphorical signs, surely the most difficult and challenging part of interpreting revelation, Augustine says that anything in the scriptures that does not literally teach love must be taken

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⁸ Gracia, *Theory of Textuality*, 76. The accuracy of contemporary texts depends on “how close they are to the historical text.” Contemporary texts are “more or less historically relevant, depending on how influential they have been.” Their accuracy is “not necessarily and directly proportional to their historical relevance” (76).

⁹ Green, *De doctrina christiana*, cited above, n. 1. From here on, unless otherwise indicated, my references will be to this text. I follow Green’s numbering for sections within books. His differs from the traditional chapter and section numbers, but I have preferred to follow him since his text has many advantages over others: an excellent translation, helpful introduction, and clear, mostly sensible numbering of sections. The older texts try to preserve what appear to me to be artificial chapter divisions on top of the usual section numbers. Green’s text clarifies things, although I do disagree in certain cases with his numbering. This lack of order in even the numbering of sections is a symptom of the general lack of agreement and progress on how best to understand the *De doctrina*.

¹⁰ Everyone who writes on the *De doctrina*, it seems, produces a summary of some sort. This point will actually turn out to matter later on in determining things like the classification of the text: that a text is easily summarizable can tell us something about its nature. The main summary that is meant to be useful to scholars as a reference, that of Enos and Thompson’s volume *The Rhetoric of St. Augustine* (11-32) is actually rather unhelpful, being too unsystematic and detail-heavy in coverage.
metaphorically to teach love (III.33-34). Scripture, he goes on, enjoins nothing but love and censures nothing but lust and moulds men's minds accordingly (III.35). The whole purpose of the scriptures, he had already said, is to teach and enjoin love and to destroy and condemn lust (I.84). These combine in an interpretive principle he draws from scripture itself, indeed the words of Christ (Matt 22:35-40): “A doctor of the law, asked him, tempting him: ‘Master, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets.’” If the chief purpose of the scriptures is to build up love and tear down lust, and if every passage that does not literally teach how to build up love or tear down lust must be taken to teach one of those metaphorically, then Augustine has provided an account of why one should read scripture and how one should go about it, both of which are based on what Christ himself says is the central teaching of the law and the prophets and on what is clearly the heart of the Christian message itself: the love of God and neighbor.¹¹

¹¹ As Cameron has pointed out in his Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine’s Early Figurative Exegesis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 247, Augustine summarizes this chain of reasoning in De catechizandis rudibus 4.8 in a long sentence explaining to beginners the hermeneutic approach to scripture that he has arrived at after writing the first draft of the De doctrina.
Preface. Augustine does a few things in the preface, but the most important, indeed the one that the others are subordinated to, is that the man who teaches how to interpret a text is better than the one who simply teaches a particular interpretation.

Book I, Exegesis (I.1-3). All interpretation of scripture depends on two things: discovery of truth and expression of that discovery; this distinction is the central hinge on which the whole of the *De doctrina* is constructed. When bearing in mind what Augustine takes the purpose of scripture to be, one can see that discovery of the truth emerges as analogous to the love of God. This is because the truth, like God, is sought for its own sake, in the same way that God is loved for his own sake. One's discoveries of truth are expressed, not for their own sake, but for the sake of one's neighbor, the listener. This expression of the truths discovered, then, is analogous to the love of neighbor for God’s sake. A like analogy will appear many times below. What is clear is this: the most important distinction of this text on how to interpret scripture bears a clearly analogous relationship to the central thing that scripture itself is meant to teach. Surely, that is not a coincidence.

What to make of this, though? At this point, I am merely noting that there is an analogy between the central precept Augustine thinks scripture teaches, namely that one should love God completely and one’s neighbor as oneself, and the very structure he raises for all of Christian learning, which is aimed at teaching that double-love and making it effective in the lives of Christians. This precept to love God and neighbor appears as the center of the circle of the Christian life in general, which is clearly the import of what Christ says, and also as the center of

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12 Here, I have left off providing detailed notes and citations for each point. I find such things unsightly and I think they make reading such a summary harder. Right now, my goal is to show the whole and its structure. (I have followed this procedure except in cases where I mention something out of place in the text, either earlier than it appears or later.)
the circle of Christian learning and teaching, *doctrina christiana*, which, I am suggesting, is
the import of Augustine’s construction of Christian learning based on an analogy with love. I
will have much to say about this central analogy later, but, for now, it is enough to use it. In fact,
this analogy provides a neat way for me to present what I take the basic structure and
organization of the *De doctrina* to be.

*Learning* (I.4-6). All learning is either of things or of signs. Learning serves faith, hope,
and love, he later says (I.92). The analogy with his central doctrine and what he thinks is the
central doctrine of scripture holds here too. Learning of things is analogous to the love of God
because things are learned for their own sake, and learning of signs to the love of neighbor for
God's sake because signs are learned for the sake of things. Signs for the sake of things is a
theme he will pick up again at crucial points.

*Things* (I.7-9). All things are to be enjoyed or used, and some things can both use and
enjoy. What is to be enjoyed makes human beings happy. This is the Trinity alone. Everything
else is to be used. This distinction is less an analogy with the double-love of God and neighbor
and more a mirror image of it: the two loves are actions that require objects, and the things to be
used and enjoyed are those objects, distinguished on the basis of the same criterion as the
actions.

*Faith: God, the One Object of Enjoyment* (I.10-21). God’s nature cannot be grasped by
human minds, but the word “God” does bring to mind a being more excellent than all others.

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13 I do not mean to limit the scope of the *De doctrina* to some particular Christian doctrine or
precept. Rather I see love as the organizing theme around which Augustine builds up his system.
Love is first because it is the goal and means of learning, *doctrina*. Michael Cameron makes this
point in his *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 220: “For Augustine, all truly spiritual reading of
scripture radiates from this center”, the double love of God and neighbor.
Here, he gives a step-by-step account of God’s nature and his relationship to human beings. At each stage, we can see distinctions made on the basis of the same analogy. The love of God is analogous to God’s nature, which cannot be spoken of without paradox, and the love of neighbor to the faltering way in which human beings do speak of God--only made possible because God has admitted “the homage of the human voice”. He is the highest form of life, which is not subject to change. All life, including that of a rational mind, is subject to change, but wisdom, which is the standard of truth, itself is unchangeable. This is God. His nature as unchangeable wisdom, the standard of truth, is analogous to the love of God, and the changeable rationality of human beings, which aims at and has as its source the wisdom of God, is analogous to the love of neighbor. To enjoy God, human beings must purify their minds in order to perceive wisdom in creation, the progress of which purification is like a voyage to a far homeland. The vision of the purified mind, which human beings aim at, is analogous to the love of God for his own sake, since it is aimed at for its own sake like the journey's end, and the journey to a far homeland to the love of neighbor for God's sake, since the journey is undertaken, like the love of neighbor, for God's sake.

*Faith: Progress in Enjoyment (I.22-30).* Wisdom is that homeland, but has also made itself into the road to that homeland by taking on a human nature and giving us a pattern of life. But this wisdom does not look like wisdom to human beings, so it was made known through preaching. Once again, the analogy appears. The wisdom of God in Jesus Christ is analogous to the love of God for his own sake, and the preaching of that wisdom is analogous to the love of neighbor for God's sake because preaching, like scripture, is only a means to the end that is God.
Hope: Perseverance in Progress (I.31-38). Since they are not yet purified, human beings need to persevere in hope. What gives them hope is Christ's resurrection, the promise of a future reward, the glorification of the church as Christ's body, the unity of the church that is made manifest in this life, as well as its internal order, and the purification toward wisdom that is apparent in that unity and order. One is to be purified in the church, first through the forgiveness of sins when one begins on the road, and second through the forgiveness of any sins one commits on the journey. These give human beings hope, and considered in this way, they point toward hope and exist for the sake of it, even if not exclusively. The sources of hope are therefore analogous to the love of neighbor, oriented toward something else, the hope itself to the love of God, toward which hope's sources are pointed.

Love: Means of Progress (I.39-85). The perfect way is to love God with the whole heart, soul, and mind in concert with one's neighbor. The just man helps others love God for his own sake and each other for God's sake. The perfect way, considered in itself as a way, not as an end, is not analogous to, but rather is the love of God for his own sake, and that the just man teaches others to love God and neighbor is the love of neighbor for God's sake. Human beings are not to enjoy one another, but only to use one another in love, to enjoy each other in God. When one loves something, if he relates that thing to his permanent goal, which is God, then he can be said in a metaphorical sense to enjoy that thing, but if he holds fast to a thing and makes it the goal of his joy, then he is said to enjoy that thing in the literal sense. Only God is to be loved for his own sake. Here, loving God and loving neighbor are simply defined in terms of use and enjoyment. To enable human beings to love the one thing that must be enjoyed and to love those things that together with them can enjoy it, for this purpose God set up the whole temporal dispensation as a
sign pointing toward him. Something like the analogy appears here too. The world itself is not quite analogous to the love of neighbor here, but only because God can scarcely be said to be analogous to himself. The world is to be used and related to God, as the love of neighbor is, and God himself is to be embraced for his own sake, as the love of God is.

_The Exegete (I.86-92)._ The interpreter who understands the scriptures will be able to build up, by his understanding, this double love of God and neighbor in himself and in those to whom he expresses his understanding. As we saw in other cases, so here: building up this double love in himself is clearly analogous to the love of God for his own sake and building it up in others to the love of neighbor for God's sake.

_Learning Serves Love (I.92-95)._ All learning serves faith, hope, and love. Of these, only love will remain and increase in the next life. Learning at the service of faith, hope, and love is analogous to the love of neighbor for God's sake, and the fact that love alone remains is analogous to the love of God for his own sake. This ends Book I.

The analogy between Augustine’s central distinctions and the double-love of God and neighbor illuminates the whole of Book I. The reader takes away an account of things that relates all things and how we conceive of them to the central teaching of scripture; he has used Christ’s moral teaching to interpret the cosmos and everything in it.

_Book II, Signs (II.1-9)._ There are two kinds of signs: natural and given. Natural cause something other than themselves to be known without any intention of so doing. Given signs are those living beings give to each other to show their thoughts or feelings. Of these given signs some are written down. Of those written down, some are scripture. The distinction between natural and given signs also appears to parallel loosely Augustine’s central analogy. Natural
signs may be taken as analogous to the love of God for his own sake because they signify of themselves, they have their ability to signify built in, and given signs may be seen as analogous to the love of neighbor for God's sake because they signify by convention; they have their ability to signify only from something else, only with reference to something outside themselves. The point here is that natural signs take themselves as sources of meaning, whereas given signs take something other than themselves as sources of meaning. By not quite fitting the pattern, this distinction illustrates what the central relationship is at the heart of Augustine’s analogy: one thing that refers to itself and another thing that refers to the first. He makes little of this, but it can help us.

*Scripture’s Role in the Ascent toward Wisdom (II.10-23).* To undertake the journey toward wisdom, the interpreter must first be moved by the fear of God to discover his will. Second, he must be docile to what he reads in the scriptures and believe it. Third, he comes to the knowledge, through the scriptures, of the double-love of God and neighbor and how far he himself is from that goal; this leads him to deplore his state and pray for God's aid. Fourth, in courage, he turns from the love of earthly things to those of heaven. Fifth, he sees God's light everywhere and knows that he himself cannot bear it. Sixth, he purifies his vision so as to see God by learning to prefer nothing to truth. Seventh, he attains wisdom. Such is the itinerary of the sojourn toward wisdom in a homeland far away. This is the first major portion of the text that articulates a doctrine that does not seem to have an analogous relationship to the double-love of God and neighbor, but even this is clearly related to it, as the road through love of God and neighbor to God himself.
The Third Stage: Interpretation of Scripture (II.24-31). At the third stage, in order to learn love and his lack of it from the scriptures, the interpreter reads only the approved books, strives to understand first those that speak plainly of faith and morals, and then those that are obscure. The analogy resurfaces here. The passages that speak plainly of faith and morals are analogous to the love of God; those that are obscure are analogous to the love of neighbor.

Source of Difficulties in Texts: Unfamiliar or Ambiguous Signs (II.32). Written texts are difficult either because of unfamiliar or ambiguous signs. The movement of his ideas and how different distinctions parallel the central analogy is becoming clearer. Unfamiliar signs are analogous to the love of God for his own sake because the sign's referent is unknown primarily in itself, and ambiguous signs to the love of neighbor for God's sake because here the sign's referent is unknown primarily in its relation to other things.

Signs: Literal and Metaphorical (II.32-33). Signs are either literal, when they signify the thing they were invented to signify, or metaphorical, when the thing they signify itself signifies something else. Here again, we see the analogy. Literal signs are analogous to the love of God for his own sake, and metaphorical signs are analogous to the love of neighbor for God's sake.

Unfamiliar Signs: Literal and Metaphorical (II.34-72). A good knowledge of one's own language and the languages of scripture helps to resolve difficulties arising from unfamiliar literal signs. The interpreter must investigate unfamiliar metaphorical signs partly through knowledge of things, partly knowledge of signs. The analogy obtains here too, in the same it did above in the distinction between literal and metaphorical signs.

Knowledge Needed: Things and Signs Instituted by Humanity (II.73-103). Human beings pursue knowledge either of things instituted by human beings or observed by them. For
understanding scripture, the exegete must study, not superstitious or frivolous human practices, which is most of them, but only those that are useful. Knowledge of things and signs instituted by humanity is analogous to the love of neighbor for God's sake in the same rather loose way that given signs are.

Knowledge Needed: Things and Signs Observed by Humanity (II.104-137). He must also study things observed by human beings, for example history, astronomy, and logic. Knowledge of things and signs observed by humanity is analogous to the love of God for his own sake in the same way that natural signs are.

Knowledge Subordinate to Love (II.138-151). Students must remember that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Knowledge is analogous to the love of neighbor, good only for the sake of something else, and the love that builds up all things is analogous to the soul’s love of God for his own sake. Here ends Book II.

As in Book I, Augustine makes all of his major distinctions, and many of his minor ones, which I lack space to treat here, in ways analogous to the love of God for his sake and the love of neighbor for God’s sake. This too cannot be mere coincidence. I should say here, though, that I have left out much in this summary. Any commentator who has spent much time with this text develops a certain relish in the details and examples Augustine provides, so ideally I could give more of a sense for these in my summary, but space will simply not permit. My goal, therefore, has been to organize what Augustine says strictly in the terms that he himself gives. That is the main reason why such a survey can produce something manageable.

Book III, Ambiguous Signs (III.1-2). Ambiguities in scripture are ambiguities either in literal or metaphorical usage. Ambiguities in literal signs seem to follow the same movement and
are loosely analogous to the love of God for his own sake because the literal sign does not itself point to some further sign; ambiguities in metaphorical signs are analogous to the love of neighbor because the metaphorical sign always does point, not to a reality, but to some yet further sign, as the love of neighbor must point toward and be subordinate to the love of God.

*Ambiguous Literal Signs (III.3-19).* Those in literal usage are of punctuation, pronunciation, case, etc. Here his focus on practical matters like reading aloud pulls him away from any neat classification scheme based on an analogy with love.

*Ambiguous Metaphorical Signs (III.20-32).* Regarding metaphorical signs, one must first be careful not to interpret metaphorical signs literally. Here and shortly afterwards (III.35), Augustine makes distinctions about mistakes and evil deeds. The distinctions he makes are themselves modeled on the main reasons for which human beings fail to love God for his sake and neighbor for God’s sake. One way to be mistaken about things and signs is to take what is actually a sign as if it were a thing; for example, an animal sacrifice as if it really were expiation for sins. Another way to be mistaken about things and signs is to take what are actually things, the sea, for example, as if they were really signs, of Neptune, say. These are the errors of the Jews and Greeks respectively. The analogy makes clear the meaning here: to take signs as things is like loving one’s neighbor and the world for his or her own sake, instead of loving both for God’s sake; to take things for signs is like loving God for the sake of one’s neighbor and the world.

*Literal and Metaphorical: the Interpretive Key (III.33-34).* One must also be careful, he reiterates, not to take literal signs to be figurative. Anything that cannot be literally related to good morals, which is love of God and neighbor, or the true faith, which is an understanding of
God and neighbor, must be taken metaphorically, so that it can be so related to one or the other. What literally teaches good morals or the true faith is clearly analogous to the love of God, and what metaphorically teaches good morals or the true faith is analogous to the love of neighbor, since it is always aimed at the clear teachings of scripture and is subordinate to them.

Passages That Contradict Our Current Practices or Beliefs (III.35-49). Next, Augustine treats of how we can know whether a passage is figurative or literal. First, he discusses those passages that detail some deed or custom that is not in keeping with our current social practice—that is, some passage that does not seem to teach what we believe to be true on some moral issue; often, we ourselves are mistaken about what is right. Similarly, we often fail to apprehend some truth of the faith because of our prejudices. Here, we must remember that scripture only enjoins love, condemns only lust, and asserts only the Catholic faith, so a deed, custom, or truth can disagree with our current practice or beliefs and not necessarily need to be taken figuratively. Therefore, one must take the deeds and customs in scripture in the right way, so as to find in them the message of building up love or destroying lust that they actually convey.

Since his focus is now on advice to the reader about how best to interpret texts, and he is not primarily providing a framework of knowledge or doctrine, it seems unlikely that the progression of his remarks can easily follow the neat double analogy as before. What is surprising, however, is that right at this point, where it seems reasonable to expect him to abandon the use of the framing analogy, Augustine opens his discussion of when passages relating to good morals should be taken figuratively or literally by dividing love and lust each into two kinds, both of which directly parallel the central analogy, and which he then uses to frame how he treats of each successive instance of types of passages relating to good morals.
Good Morals: Love and Lust (III.37-38). Here, Augustine defines love and lust, to make clear to the reader how love is built up and lust destroyed. Under lust, which is the impulse to enjoy anything other than God, Augustine categorizes all sin: wickedness is harm one does to oneself, and wrongdoing is harm one does to others. These two parallel the works of love: self-interest is what love does to benefit oneself, and kindness is what love does to benefit others. These divisions of good and evil deeds clearly parallel, as so often before, the double-love of God and neighbor: actions that benefit or harm oneself are done for their own sake, and those that benefit or harm others are done for the sake of something else; this seems true because, presumably, wrongdoing is done, as it were, for the sake of wickedness, an evil committed against another man is done for the sake of some evil one commits against oneself; for example, murder done out of pride.

Good Morals: Passages in Accord with Our Culture’s Idea of Good (III.50-54). He next treats of passages that tell of deeds and customs according well with our own practice. These should be related to either self-interest or kindness. If a passage deals with building up the realm of love literally, then there is no need to take it figuratively.

Good Morals: Commands (III.55-57). Then, he treats of commands: those that enjoin self-interest or kindness or forbid wickedness or wrongdoing should be taken literally; those that forbid good or enjoin evil should be taken figuratively.

Good Morals: Different Spiritual Stages of Readers (III.58-59). Augustine goes on to make the general point that often people at different spiritual stages will and can legitimately interpret the same passage in different ways.
Good Morals: Purpose of Such Differences in Practice and Meaning (III.60-75). In general, the reader must realize that these differences in customs and manners were placed in the scripture to make us see that a practice we reject can actually be good and a practice we embrace can be sinful. It is clear from the above that most of the Old Testament can be taken both literally and figuratively. Whenever we find agents acting contrary to the Gospel, we should glean the figurative meaning, but not think that we ourselves can legitimately act that way.

The True Faith: Finding the True Meaning of Ambiguous Metaphorical Passages (III.76). Once we have figured out that an ambiguous expression is to be taken figuratively, we should use our knowledge of the true faith from Book I, which is our understanding of God and neighbor, things to be used or enjoyed, to find the true meaning. We use, therefore, our account of good morals to decide whether an ambiguous passage is figurative or literal, and if we decide it is figurative, we should use our account of things to find the true meaning.

The True Faith: Explanations of Metaphorical Passages (III.77). The words in any expression that we discover to be figurative will turn out to be figurative because they refer either to things that are similar or to things that are connected in some other way.

The True Faith: Similarity among Things (III.78--break). But things can be similar in a myriad of ways, so the same expression is likely to have a different meaning in different places.

At this point, Augustine broke off his work in 397 to move on to the Confessions. He returned to the De doctrina thirty years later when he set to do a review of all his works for his Retractiones.

Truth Governs Multiple Meanings: From the Meanings of Things to Figures of Speech (III.79-90). The meanings of a particular thing may be either contrary to one another or just
different. Some things signify more than one thing depending on the context, and in many cases the interpreter can perceive more than one meaning in the same words of scripture. He may interpret the text in any way consonant with the truth, although he should try to get at the meaning the author intended. Scripture also employs rhetorical figures, so the interpreter should make sure he knows them and can use them to resolve ambiguities in meaning.

Rules for Finding Meanings Related to the True Faith: Tyconius’s Rules (III.91-132). Augustine then presents Tyconius’s Rules and turns them to his own use. Tyconius meant his rules to be a kind of gateway to mystical understanding. Augustine suggests them instead as rules of thumb useful for interpreting correctly many of the common ambiguous figurative expressions in scripture. For the most part, Augustine restricts himself to giving one of Tyconius’s rules, providing a little commentary on how to use it, and giving examples.

Learning, Prayer, and Holiness Required for Understanding (III.133-140). Students must learn to recognize the kinds of expression in scripture and to pray for understanding. To the holy, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. He has reached the end of Book III.

At the point where he broke off working on Book III, Augustine had set himself up to discuss, in presumably a level of detail similar to his account of how to determine whether a passage is figurative or not, which is done by relating it to good morals, the interpretation of those passages that are found to be figurative by means of his account of things, but he does not seem to have picked this up again when he wrote the rest of the book thirty years later. He does pick up right from his discussion of the multiple meanings that a thing can have, but he does not provide an account clearly oriented toward using the true faith, which is an understanding of things, namely God and neighbor, to find the true meaning of figurative passages. Instead, when
he takes the book up again, he turns the discussion to more ordinary matters like the potential for different interpretations arising from figures of speech. His use too of Tyconius’s *Rules* does take up something like the account of things and their similarities, but his approach to them does not fit with the system he had articulated before. Most importantly, he seems to have left off discussing primarily those ambiguous metaphorical passages that our account of good morals has convinced us must be taken literally. What he says in III.79-132 is much broader than that.

*Book IV, Expression of Truth: Truth Adopted to Humanity (IV.1-3).* Truth needs to be made convincing, and for that, we must employ the art of rhetoric. The Christian orator must communicate what is good and eradicate what is bad; he must prefer wisdom to eloquence, things to words. As I pointed out when he made this distinction initially in Book I, expression of the truth, adapting truth to the needs of the audience, is analogous to the love of neighbor for God's sake. One loves the truth and tries to convince others of it for truth's sake just as one loves neighbor for God's sake.

*On Learning Eloquence (IV.4-13).* Christians should not neglect the study of rhetoric. But they should also not use the methods of the schools. The most effective method is reading the works of excellent writers.

*The Ideal Christian Orator (IV.14-15).* The Christian orator must communicate the good, eradicate the bad, win over the antagonistic, rouse the apathetic, inform the ignorant, give facts if information is needed, provide argument if listeners need clarification, and exhort those who need to be moved.
The Real Christian Orator (IV.16-24). But since few can manage all this, it is better to be wise than eloquent. Best of all is to draw on the scriptures for eloquent and wise words. A man’s learning in the scriptures is directly proportional to his wisdom.

Eloquence of Scripture: Style Fits Subject Matter (IV.25-63). The scriptures, far from ineloquent, display an eloquence such that the words the sacred writers use seem to be those that fit their topic best. This account of style does seem to pick up on his earlier use of the central analogy. The style of the sacred text appears to be analogous to the love of neighbor and the subject matter of the text to the love of God. This is because the style always serves the subject matter in scripture; the subject matter, wisdom in God, is what is sought for its own sake. This section contains long and detailed rhetorical discussions of many biblical passages.

Aims of the Christian Speaker: Understanding and Obedience with Delight (IV.64-86). The aim of the Christian orator is to be listened to with understanding, with pleasure, and with obedience.

Prayer Needed to Express Truth Well (IV.87-95). To reach this goal, many good things can be said in a speech, and since the orator can never know exactly what people need to hear, he should pray for God's help before speaking. Teaching only benefits the soul when brought about by God.

Norm of Christian Style: Form Should Fit Matter (IV.96-150). For the Christian orator, all matters spoken of are of great importance. He should use whatever style most fits his aim, whether speaking for the goal of understanding or obedience; he should not aim to delight for its own sake, only in order to assist him in instructing or moving to action. As when he spoke of the
style of the scriptures above (IV.25-63), form is analogous to the love of neighbor, and matter to the love of God. Here, Augustine gives extended examples from ecclesiastical writers.

*Most Eloquent Expression: The Speaker's Life (IV.151-160).* More important than a speaker's words is his life. He must live what he teaches; then he can use all three styles, without seeming impudent. An important part of this is satisfying his audience with things rather than words, thinking that a thing is better expressed only when it is more truly expressed; a speaker’s accounts of goodness are most truly expressed in his own deeds.

*Using Others’ Speeches (IV.160-163).* The most important good is the edification of the audience. To that end, a speaker may legitimately use the speeches of another, if he finds himself inadequate to the task.

*Pray for Wisdom in Composition, Grace in Delivery, and Thanks for Gifts (IV.164-166).* Anyone who preaches should pray beforehand for wisdom in composition and grace in delivery. He should then thank God for his gifts, so that he who boasts may boast in the one “whose hands hold both us and our sermons.”

In Book IV, Augustine is clearly less systematic than in Books I-III.78. He is more concerned with examples, with practical experience, and with giving useful help, than he is with basing his main points one after the other on an analogous relationship with the central teaching of scripture. He does use that analogy, but mostly as it was already developed in distinctions from the earlier books.

An Objection
Before I provide any analysis or put my results to use, let me anticipate a criticism of this summary. I have seen, someone might say, precisely what I was looking for. Since so much of what is to come is based on what I take this summary to show, I cannot sidestep such a concern. It will not do much as a response merely to say that seeing these distinctions in light of the central analogy arose from my reading and commenting on the text several times; I will need to explain my methodology more. I do admit, though, that once I had recognized the bones of this structure in the work I did go looking for more evidence. My principle at that point, however, was to admit only those analogous relationships which I took to fit unmistakably; those distinctions and movements of the text that did not fit, for example his long account of literal ambiguous signs, I have put into the summary as long as they seem to be important distinctions for the rest of the book, and I have left out only those that neither fit my scheme nor prove to be important for the rest of the book. This, I think, minimizes my chances of forcing too many analogies on incompliant material, while at the same time allowing me to make my central claims clearly and forcefully. So, my main response to such an objection is what I have just done, namely to give an account of how I came up with this, what I have included, and my criteria for doing so. This and the evidence that emerges from the text itself, which I have already pointed out in detail, deprive such an objection of most of its force.

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14 I read the text twice, making general preliminary notes; then I read it again, making detailed summaries for each of the four books, about forty pages on each, accompanied by a plethora of quotations on relevant points; then, I reduced my one-hundred and sixty page summary of the entire text to a thirty page summary of all the main movements of thought in the text; then, I reduced this thirty page summary to ten pages, then, wrote a three page summary of that; finally, once my central point had emerged, I rewrote the last summary to take clear account of what I had discovered.
But there is other evidence too: other summaries, ones that do not see what I have seen here, still focus on the same points, one after the other.\textsuperscript{15} Two oft-used summaries produced for the sake of reference set most of the major points I made above as topical headings under which other less important material is organized.\textsuperscript{16} Pollmann too agrees extensively with the summary I have given here.\textsuperscript{17} Her concern is in a way deeper in the accounts that she provides of the structure of each book, so there is a lot more to hers than I have here. This is a result of what I pointed out above: my summary aims to communicate the whole, not detail the parts--but I will get to that too in the next chapters. This general agreement as to the major distinctions and divisions of material makes even clearer that I have not merely seen what I wished to see.

Analysis of the Structure of the \textit{De doctrina}

What Augustine sets out in the books on Christian learning he does so, not in order to give an interpretation of a sacred book, but in order to teach the reader how to interpret sacred books for himself. At root, then, Augustine aims to teach the reader a skill. Like every skill, this one presumes a whole range of others, some about which Augustine has little to say, some about

\textsuperscript{15} Gerald Press pointed out (in “Subject and Structure”, 100) that “there is not even an accepted table of contents for the \textit{De doctrina}, nor, in my opinion, has anyone so far published a thorough and perspicuous outline of it.” Part of my goal in this chapter has been to provide exactly that.

\textsuperscript{16} See “Synoptic Outline of Saint Augustine’s \textit{De doctrina christiana}”, by Stacia Dawn Neeley, D. B. Magee, and Lisa Michelle Thomas, in Enos and Thompson’s \textit{The Rhetoric of St. Augustine}, 11-32, and Isabelle Bochet, “Structure du \textit{De doctrina christiana}”, \textit{La doctrine chrétienne}, BA 11/2, 53-60. Both miss the crucial shift in topic, from good morals to the true faith, right before the break in composition; otherwise, their summary agrees with mine on which points are most important, even if they do not see the central analogy.

\textsuperscript{17} See Pollmann, \textit{Doctrina Christiana}, on the structure of Book I, 121-126, on the structure of Books II-III, 149-158, and on the structure of Book IV, 225-228.
which he has much to say, and some about which he has nothing to say. The details of this will concern me later. Here, two observations are in order.

First, the skill of interpreting scripture is really two skills: one, the skill of finding the text’s meaning, and, two, the skill of expounding that meaning to others. His account of how readers should find the meaning of the sacred text is derived from the very texts it is aimed at explaining: the double-love of God and neighbor.

Second, this skill is itself subordinated to that same love, the principal teaching of scripture. He does explicitly say in Book I that the one who has love has no need of the scriptures. His presumption, though, is that most do not have love and are, therefore, in dire need of the scriptures. His account of the two purposes of learning, building up love in oneself and in one’s neighbor, is derived from the double-love of God and neighbor. Many of his even more straightforward distinctions take something from, or are directly analogous to, this double-love. The chief product, then, of all Christian learning is not primarily researches and books, knowledge and sermons; the chief product of all Christian learning is the very thing that is the source of Christian learning and gives order to it: love. One might think of the action of interpreting the scriptures as the main way human beings have of habituating themselves to wisdom, to happiness, the enjoyment of that one good that can never be lost, God, who is himself Wisdom---all of which is, for most of us, made known by and made possible through the study of scripture. This is much like the way a classical painter may be said to be habituating himself to beauty through every aspect of his work, except that the wisdom that is the goal of learning is also the proper end of all human beings and so vaster by far than any representational art. For Augustine, all representation, indeed, is subordinated to communicating this one wisdom.
Whatever differences may arise between the results of the two stages of the work’s composition, it should be clear that such differences do not undermine the essential unity of the work. Augustine did have a plan, which he broadly completed thirty years after he had begun, and what he added fits well within that plan. My point is primarily that, by studying what that original plan actually was, and observing the underlying structure, we can begin to understand precisely how the work of those two stages of composition are unified in the text we have and at the same time how the work of each stage differs from that of the other.

The Four Texts of the *De doctrina christiana*

To relate all this to how he actually composed the text, here are the facts, as we know them, regarding his composition of the whole *De doctrina christiana*—the source for most of this is *Retractationes* (II.4)\(^\text{18}\): he began the work most likely in his first year or two as bishop of Hippo, from 396 to 397, possibly from 395; sometime in 397, with his letter 37, Augustine may have sent Books I and II of the *De doctrina* to Simplicianus in Milan for his review and feedback; after that or before that—we do not know—he continued his work up to Book III.78, probably leaving off sometime in 397, maybe to turn to the *Confessions*, maybe for other reasons; after that, he seems not to have worked on the book until, in 427, near the end of his life, he got to it in his effort to reread and correct his works, following a loosely chronological plan; at this point, he reread the work, possibly corrected it, and then completed it, principally adding Tyconius’s *Rules* and his treatment of rhetoric. The evidence for all this, as well as the scholarly

\(^{18}\) For the most comprehensive overview, see Moreau, *La doctrine chrétienne*, 9-14.
disputes surrounding the various issues, I will return to in the next chapter. (Generally, I will argue that we are right to take these points as true.)

In the overview above, I pointed out some differences between one part of the text and another in Augustine’s use of system and how he handles certain matters, but it is clear too that he does not fundamentally alter the goals of the *De doctrina*, as expressed in Book I. Apparently, his approach changed from the days of his early episcopate to the end of his life, but not everything changed, and not even necessarily the most important things. This is only reasonable since we know that he took up the book again while putting together his *Retractationes* and then finished it at that time. Surely, he would not have finished it if he thought it was a fundamentally ill-conceived book. Among his extensive oeuvre, we do find more than one unfinished book, and it was hardly unknown for Augustine to find a book unfinished and leave it as it was.¹⁹

The *De doctrina* may be one text, but that point clearly covers up much of what can be inferred about the text. The contemporary text is unified, and this is the text that Augustine wanted us to have. The contemporary text is not, however, the *only* text. This is clear from a few observations about the nature of textuality: texts are always the product of a historical event or a series of events—–or as Gracia says, “texts are produced by authors in complex historical circumstances out of materials that surround the authors and are prompted by the needs and desires of those authors”²⁰; texts always have meanings that are limited by many factors, chief

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¹⁹ A quick glance at his list of works shows this: *De immortalitate animae* is incomplete, *De genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* is obviously incomplete, as well as *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum*, *De dialectica*, and *De grammatica* (if this one is his). I have left out any of the works about which there is dispute whether it is incomplete.

among them, author, audience, context, society, language, text, and cultural function; and, what is important for my purposes elsewhere in this thesis, the author’s understanding of each of these factors, as well as his understanding of the meaning of the text, can and often does change with time, both while he or she composes the text and after the text has been composed. The last is relevant for my purposes because of the special place that biography has when dealing with a historical figure of great importance. Even if it does not matter to the meaning of Books I-III.78 what Augustine as an old man thought of them, it certainly matters to students of Augustine and the late ancient world. The study of the works of men like Augustine must be more than merely textual interpretation. To be more than that is the cultural function that the practice of scholarship has in western postmodern societies. So, despite the fact that my thesis is primarily an account of the De doctrina, it can never only be an account of that book.

The contemporary text, as we have it, is one text, certainly. But what are the historical circumstances in which that text was produced? There are at least two broad sets of circumstances, those surrounding Augustine’s first work on the book, and those surrounding his work on the Retractationes and his completion of the De doctrina. Historically, the first stage clearly did result in a text, albeit an incomplete one. He left the text unfinished and moved on, but the text itself he clearly retained a copy of in some form. So, the first text of De doctrina christiana was Book I-III.78. This is particularly important to bear in mind given the well-known phenomenon of the early publication of the texts of famous men in the pre-modern period;

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21 Gracia, *Theory of Textuality*, 108-127, treats in detail of each of these. I will return to his discussions later, as they prove relevant.
Augustine himself complains of this regarding his *De trinitate*\(^{22}\); such things motivated many a writer to return to delayed project. And this text does imply a conception of its intended audience: both less educated Christians, laymen or clergy, who might learn directly from the book, and more educated ecclesiastics, bishops and intellectuals, who might use such a book to instruct others. (I will return to these questions in detail in the next chapter.) But to what extent any men of this sort ever saw the whole of this first draft is another question. Such, then, was the first text of what would later become the *De doctrina*.

Nor was this the only text that circulated before Augustine’s completion of the work. The bishop of Milan, in 397, probably received a copy of the *De doctrina* that contained only the first two books (including the preface), sent by Augustine himself with a cover letter, possibly by way of a master scribe in Carthage.\(^{23}\) Since Simplicianus clearly valued Augustine’s work, he would have kept the book as part of the episcopal library in Milan, where it presumably stayed for a while and was likely copied and distributed. And since we know that educated literacy was mainly a social activity in late antiquity, it seems likely that, for many of Augustine’s contemporaries in Italy, the first two books of the *De doctrina* were all they ever heard or read.\(^{24}\)

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\(^{22}\) He explains, in a letter to Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, (*ep.* 137) that he intended to finish the whole fifteen books on the trinity and then go back and thoroughly check them before publishing it abroad, but some of his eager young friends obtained a copy of his unfinished and uncorrected work and published it in his name. He tried to finish it quickly and do his best to check it for errors, but he was more concerned to get out the complete text so he was not able to do as much work on it as he had hoped.

\(^{23}\) See, among other sources that I will come to in due time, Kenneth Steinhauser’s “Codex Leningradensis, Q.v.I.3: Some Unsolved Problems” in *De doctrina christiana: A Classic of Western Culture?*, edited by Duane Arnold and Pamela Bright (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 33-43.

\(^{24}\) The best signposts on these issues in Latin literature are two classics, Walter Ong’s *Orality and Literacy* (London: Methuen, 1982) and, for an account of the background to this question in the Second Sophistic, George Kennedy’s *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (Princeton:
It is possible that Augustine had only worked up to the end of Book II by the time he sent a copy to Simplicianus, but for now my only point is that the edition prepared for the bishop of Milan counts as another, I will say the second, text of the De doctrina.

Broadly, Augustine worked in two stages. It is not merely, though, that he worked on the book at two different times, 396-7 and 427, and so produced two different texts, I-III.78 and III.79-IV. He did produce two different texts in his first and second stages of writing, but that is trivially true: most texts, certainly any more than a sentence long, are made up of other texts. The question is whether and to what extent the two texts he produced are essentially related. On whether they are so related, I have argued above that they are, and since no one really doubts this, I take the point to be established. The chief question is, then, to what extent Augustine’s two texts are essentially related, that is, related in such a way as to make up another text, one that is not exclusively either of them but rather a combination of both. Putting this question aside for the moment, it is not just that the texts he produced at different times were different as texts. It is more that the man who worked on this text in each period must have been a different man in at least some ways from the man who worked on this text in the other period, just as the periods too were different from each other, and that those differences in the man and his times serve to explain the differences that appear in the two parts of the text. This follows from the claim above

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25 Gracia, Theory of Textuality, 14. Gracia is right to point out here that texts are mainly constituted by signs, since, even if many long texts consist of other texts arranged to convey a specific meaning, those texts within the text must themselves be constituted by signs.
that texts are products of historical circumstances involving the author and are prompted by the author’s needs and desires in those circumstances. He must have approached writing the book at least slightly differently, for it seems unlikely that an author like Augustine would not have shifted in his views on what Christian learning is after three decades. As I will point out below, about the time of the composition of the first draft Augustine would be undergoing a profound change in his understanding of how people could arrive at faith and rightly ordered love. He must also have had different enough interests. An old bishop facing Pelagianism would have different interest than a young bishop facing the Donatists. These suggestions that we should expect the first draft to different in important ways from the late additions are drawn from the wider knowledge of Augustine’s life and times. More specific to the De doctrina, I will argue that he did value different sorts of things in a work of this kind at the different stages of composition, and that he did have different ideas of what the reader might take away from such a book.

In the second stage of writing, Augustine actually produced something like two texts: first, the additions he made to Book III and all of Book IV; second, the text in its final form.26 One might object that the text of the additions he made to Book III and all of Book IV is not on

26 Three points here. First, since he may have changed parts of Books I-III.78, he may well have produced more than two texts, although talking that way does not get the scholar much, for the reason that follows. Second, the text’s final form is any text that does not differ essentially from the text Augustine completed and considered complete in 427. The distinction between essential and accidental difference in texts helps make clear why two different manuscripts of the same text, which are likely different on at least a few points, really are of the same text; their differences are accidental, not essential. This also indicates why I have not discussed to what extent Augustine may have edited the De doctrina in 427. The consensus seems to be that he did not edit his works in substantial ways (Alan Fitzgerald, “Retractationes”, Augustine through the Ages, 723-724). That is enough to suggest that whatever edits he may have made did not affect the text’s essential meaning.
the same level as the other texts that actually had audiences. But his additions and Book IV had a historical audience too, even if trivially so: Augustine himself—an author always is an audience for his own work, even if he is not mainly writing for himself. More generally, though, as part of audience of Books I-III.78 was clearly learned ecclesiastics, so too the intended audience of this second stage of writing the text appears, at least implicitly, to have shifted. His focus on the practical details, the hand rules he provides, the extended examples, all seem to suggest that he no longer has quite the same audience in mind as he did for the first books. This is not the sort of thing one would write for an audience of the great, Jerome, for example; it is more like a book intended for men such as his biographer Possidius was or Vincent of Lerins, educated but simpler, products of a different, more strained time. But again, I will return in detail to these question in the next chapter. So, therefore, these two texts emerge, first, Augustine’s additions to Book III and all of Book IV, and with them, second, the final form of the text.

The Four Texts in the Secondary Literature

27 Gracia makes the point that an author always shifts between the roles of audience and author as he or she composes the text (Theory of Textuality, 113, also 76-83). This is clearest in the simple case when an author writes and goes back to read what he or she has written. James J. O’Donnell has argued, in fact, that the De doctrina was mainly written for Augustine himself (“De doctrina christiana”, Augustine through the Ages, 280). That seems overly pessimistic. 28 Since I am following Gracia, I should note that technically the term “historical text” refers to the text that the author actually produced by whatever means he produced it, so, in Augustine’s case, either by his own hand or that of a scribe. If Augustine wrote it out himself, then the autograph is properly the historical text. In this sense, the only relevant historical text we may possess is the St. Petersburg MS. of Books I and II, sent to Simplicianus. The final form of the text of the De doctrina was first made as a historical text by Augustine or his scribe in 427.
All four texts have been of interest to scholars, but, among them, two texts have received the most attention, Books I-III.78 and Books III.79-IV, although most have ended up dividing the contemporary text into Books I-III and Book IV. I have proposed, tentatively, that there is a significant difference between these two parts, not just in content, but in form too. One thing that my account can explain that other commentators have so far been unable to explain, or uninterested in explaining, is the state of scholarly commentary itself. If my account above is correct, and if it is true that few scholars have noticed the seams in Augustine’s text and thus there has been little investigation of them at length, then one would not be surprised to find scholarly focus and debate divided along the very seams in the text that I have drawn attention to. And that is precisely what one finds: a large portion of the debate surrounding the nature and purpose of the *De doctrina* can be understood as the attempts of scholars, preferring one of these two key texts over the other, to understand the whole on the terms of one text--some even seem to focus on only Books I-II, the excerpt sent to Simplicianus. That both these two texts were composed under very different circumstances and apparently different, albeit mutually supporting, purposes simply goes undiscussed--or if it is discussed, the writers presume that the *De doctrina* is a tightly unified whole.\(^29\) In some cases, indeed, those interested in one text largely ignore the work of those interested in the other, and they themselves either relegate the understanding of their less favored text to a few short bits, drawing from very old scholarship, or they make a few generalizations about it and then promptly say they will discuss it no more.

To see this, I will briefly review some of the secondary literature. Take a recent dissertation on the *De doctrina*, that of Torma Toom, who argues that the way to understand

\(^{29}\) See, for example, C. Schäublin, “*De doctrina christian*: A Classic of Western Culture?”, Classic of Western Culture, 47-48; as well as, Moreau, *La doctrine chrétienne*, 14-22.
Augustine’s hermeneutics is through his Christology.\textsuperscript{30} Toom is at pains to divide the text at its main joint: he refers to the unfinished \textit{De doctrina}, I-III.78, and the completed \textit{De doctrina}, III.79-IV.\textsuperscript{31} He will not discuss either Tyconius’ \textit{Rules} or the whole of Book IV because his concern is Augustine’s hermeneutics, not Tyconius’, nor is his concern Augustine’s account of rhetoric.\textsuperscript{32} His account of Augustine’s hermeneutics as Christology, or at least analogous to Christology, is centered squarely on the unfinished \textit{De doctrina}, the text that I have shown to be systematic. Toom says in the same place that he believes the \textit{De doctrina} is a unified text, but he has no need there to justify this. In the systematic early text, Toom finds a system of hermeneutics based on Christology, but he does not even try to find it in the unsystematic final stage of writing. Consider next the work of Gerald Press, who has done much to move the debate forward on the nature of the \textit{De doctrina}. Like Toom, he ends up focusing on one of the two key texts of the \textit{De doctrina} and subordinating the other to it. For Press, Book IV provides the way to understand the whole; he carefully outlines and defines the programmatic terms Augustine uses at the beginning of Book I, but he defines them, as I argued above, too narrowly and in a way that does not seem plausible. The very thing that Toom draws attention to Press must brush past on his way to the epoch-making Book IV. Nor does Pollmann succeed in escaping this pitfall: her Habilitationsschrift treats Books I-III in a very detailed manner, but she has only a little more to say about the whole of Book IV than she does about how Augustine puts Tyconius’ \textit{Rules} to

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{30} Torma Toom, \textit{Thought Clothed with Sound}.
\textsuperscript{31} In this, he follows Kannengiesser, “\textit{Interrupted De doctrina christiana}”, in Arnold and Bright, \textit{A Classic of Western Culture}, 1-13. But, here, Kannengiesser is actually discussing why the text was unfinished. Usually, scholars who are not discussing what it was unfinished for a while have little to say about the fact that it was unfinished for a while.
\textsuperscript{32} Toom, \textit{Thought Clothed with Sound}, 6-7.
\end{footnotes}
And this despite the fact that Book IV is the longest of all four books of the *De doctrina*. These are only a few, late examples, but for my present purpose they suffice to make clear, if not what scholars have always thought about the *De doctrina*, at least what they have been thinking lately about it.

Recent work on this book often seems to have taken one of the two key texts and either used it to interpret the whole *De doctrina*, or to have presumed that the work has a unity and then promptly turned to investigations of whichever text appears most interesting from a certain perspective. My account of the four texts of the *De doctrina* may help to explain this state of scholarship and makes clear both the limitations and the relevance of much of the previous literature. Toom’s work, for example, is an excellent study of the theological underpinnings in Christology of how Augustine undertook to organize his earliest account of exegesis and learning. Therefore, instead of merely responding to and critiquing such work, I can show how much of it fits into the overall account of Augustine’s work over thirty years on Christina learning.

What Augustine Means

There is at least one more important question about my summary and results that I need to respond to before I can move on. The question is this: To what extent did Augustine intend his series of distinctions to be based on analogies with the double-love of God and neighbor? I have

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33 Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 215-244 on Book IV, 196-215 on Tyconius’ *Rules*. And bear in mind that she had already written more than thirty pages on the *Rules*, as the second part of her book, after her look at exegesis among heretics and before she turned to the *De doctrina*. 
said above that it could scarcely be a coincidence, but does that mean I am committed to thinking that Augustine had this elaborate scheme of analogies parsed out in his mind? First, I will make the general point that ancient rhetoricians, of which Augustine was one, reveled in these kinds of structures and were taught to find them in texts they read and build them into texts they wrote. There is nothing controversial here, certainly not on the extent of Augustine’s training or his use of that training, and, indeed, this partly explains the wealth of commentary and interpretation on some of his more obviously rhetorical books like *Confessions* and *De civitate dei*. In other words, he could very well have intended to make his scheme more or less as I have presented it.

Second, there is some indirect evidence that he may well have intended just what I have discovered. As his thought developed, he would similarly look for and find analogies to the doctrine of the Trinity, not in the structure of *doctrina* and its true goal, but in creation itself, particularly in the interior life of the human being. He does this first in *Confessions* (XIII.11) very soon after his first draft of the *De doctrina*. And in his *De trinitate*, begun in 399 or thereabouts, he finds in the created world thirteen analogies to the Trinity, out of the total of twenty-two analogies that he will call attention to throughout his works. Given the importance Augustine will attach throughout his life to the double love of God and neighbor, it would not be unreasonable to suppose, or surprising to discover, that here in the *De doctrina* he had already found and used analogies to that doctrine to orient learning, *doctrina*, which had been his

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35 Stephen McKenna discusses these in his introduction to his translation of the *De trinitate*: St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, introduction, translation, and notes by Stephen McKenna, The Fathers of the Church, 49 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), xv. See also R. Williams, “*De trinitate*”, *Augustine through the Ages*, 845-851.
preoccupation since his youth, toward love so as to make love the source, the goal, and the means of all Christian pursuit of wisdom.  

Third, questions about what the author intends and what the text means will come up at any point in a thesis like this, although usually only when either the explanation offered becomes implausible or radically differs from the current consensus. Since such questions will arise, it will be useful here to consider ways to resolve some of these dilemmas a fleshed out theory of textuality can tentatively suggest. That means giving a basic account of what the meaning of a text might be, what relationship the author might have to that meaning, what interpretation may be, and what functions interpretation may have. I have noted above that I find Gracia’s account of textuality the most useful in the present context, and since readers may not be familiar with it, I provide below a short synopsis of the relevant points. Of course, my synopsis does not do justice to Gracia’s work, but it is enough to be useful here. Also, such a theory, tentative though it may be, cannot but be controversial. My purpose here is to use it to help me explain Augustine. As a general framework, it proves remarkably able to do the work that I need it to do. That is what recommends it to me. In Chapter 3, one of Gracia’s notions, that of a text’s cultural function, will help me clarify the difference between the first draft of the *De doctrina* and Augustine’s late additions, so this is not an elaboration of theory merely for its own sake.

“A text”, Gracia says, “is a group of entities used as signs, which are selected, arranged, and intended by an author in a certain context to convey some specific meaning to an

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36 His account of love implied in his use of it to structure Christian learning bears a clear relationship to a discussion in *De trinitate* (IX.12.17-18): there, he argues that love proceeds from the one who is seeking his object of desire, and though this movement toward the object is not properly called love, because love is that “by which that which is known is loved”, this movement toward the object of desire is “something of the same kind” as love (IX.12.18).
The meaning of a text “is what is understood when the text produces understanding”--which implies that the meaning of a text is a certain content, if you will, and the understanding of a text is an action; I point this out because we often use “meaning” and “understanding” interchangeably, as I have above, but technically they are different. And so “to understand a text is to grasp its meaning.” Whether two acts of understanding are the same, then, is dependent on whether the two texts understood are the same, so that, if the meaning grasped is different, then the acts of understanding are different and so are the texts. The understanding of a text, therefore, is not a text; textual understanding is a matter of the signs of the text and their arrangement, the meaning of those signs in that arrangement, the audience, and the audience’s act of understanding. Since understanding has its object as the meaning of a text and to understand a very different meaning is simply to understand a different text, it makes sense to think of essential and accidental differences in meaning. The limits of a text’s meaning “are to be considered in terms of an essential core of meaning rather than including everything that may be understood when one says one understands a text.” Now, “the implications of the meaning of a text are derived from the meaning [of the text] on the basis of other principles and, therefore, are something different from the meaning.” The factors that limit a text’s meaning are: author, audience, context, society, language, the text itself, and its cultural function. “The author understand the text to have a certain meaning; but by writing it in a language already in existence, the author cannot be held exclusively responsible even for the meaning he or she

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42 Gracia, *Theory of Textuality*, 111.
understand the text to have. And in many cases, the author is not fully aware of the meaning of
the text. Audiences, as part of the society that develops and uses the language used in the text,
again have a role to play, but it is also not an exclusive role. Context is important in so far as the
meaning of a text depends to a great extent on the circumstances that surround it. And, finally,
the text itself imposes some limits of its own."\textsuperscript{43} The factor that sets the terms for all the others,
however, is cultural function: “A culture, then, understood as a community of persons who share
certain values, beliefs, and rules of behavior, determines the functions of texts”, the roles those
texts are to play in the life of the culture, for example, scientific texts, placards, handbooks,
literary texts, etc., “and those functions in turn establish the overall parameters of meaning.”\textsuperscript{44}

Now, we come to the understanding of a text, that is, how we can be said to understand a
text, and what it means to say someone has or has not understood the text. To understand a text is
to grasp its meaning. Since meaning has limits, so does understanding, and, since the limits of
meaning depend ultimately on cultural function, so do the limits of understanding. Because the
functions of texts differ, we should not apply the same limits to every text. “From this it follows
that, not only may there be contradictory understandings of some texts, neither of which are
misunderstandings, but also that audiences may understand texts differently and even better than
their authors.”\textsuperscript{45} We should, therefore, “take understandings to be true if they accurately grasp
the meaning of texts and false if they do not.”\textsuperscript{46} Likewise, an understanding is “more or less
objective to the degree that it is a product of the subject’s consideration of the object and thus

\textsuperscript{43} Gracia, \textit{Theory of Textuality}, 123.
\textsuperscript{44} Gracia, \textit{Theory of Textuality}, 124.
\textsuperscript{45} Gracia, \textit{Theory of Textuality}, 123.
\textsuperscript{46} Gracia, \textit{Theory of Textuality}, 145.
dependent on the object, that is, the text and the other factors external to the subject.”

This provides, then, a simple, ready way to see what textual understanding is, as well as what makes understandings of texts true or false and how objective these understandings might be.

The term “interpretation” is used in three ways in the contemporary literature, often in different ways by the same author in the same context; indeed, Gracia argues that confusion on many issues like these, particularly a poorly defined and interchangeable set of terms, is the part of the cause of the current state of disarray in the study of hermeneutics. Sometimes, the interpretation of a text simply means the understanding of a text; other times, it means “the process whereby one develops an understanding of the text”; at still other times it means a text produced in order to explain another text. Here, following Gracia, I will use “interpretation” in the third sense: an interpretation of a text is another text that is added to the first text in order to explain the first text. The function, therefore, of an interpretation is “to produce acts of understanding in an audience related to the interpretandum.”

What I am writing here, then, is strictly speaking an interpretation of Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*. An interpretation may itself have at least three functions: first, the *historical function*, in which the author of the interpretation “aims to recreate in the contemporary audience the acts of understanding of the historical author and historical audience of the historical text”; second, the *meaning function*, in which the author of the interpretation aims to produce in contemporary audiences acts of understanding that may go beyond that of the historical author and audience, “revealing aspects

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of the meaning of the text with which their historical author and historical audience were not acquainted\textsuperscript{52}; third, the *implicative function*, in which the author of the interpretation aims to produce in contemporary audiences acts of understanding whereby those audiences understand the implications of the meanings of a text\textsuperscript{53}; clearly, these three are not mutually exclusive. The interpretation whose function is historical, one of the most common kinds among students of the ancient world, is not strictly a textual interpretation because it aims to produce knowledge of processes and events that go far beyond the text being studied; the historical function focuses, not on what the meaning of the text is, but on what the historical author and audience thought it was, neither of which fully determine the meaning of the text. More generally, though, it is important to note that interpretations should be judged, according to this account, not as true or false, but as more or less effective at fulfilling their functions; truth and falsity apply to the understanding of the text.

Returning to my original question, the answer, on these terms, is now clear: Augustine need not ever have intended this scheme of distinctions to be based on analogies with the double-love of God and neighbor for such relationships to constitute part of the meaning of the text. Whether Augustine intended this scheme or not it is clear that, after a certain point, namely when he returned to the book after thirty years, he no longer followed the line of thought that led him to make such distinctions based on such analogies.

The Aims of This Study

\textsuperscript{52} Gracia, *Theory of Textuality*, 154.
\textsuperscript{53} Gracia, *Theory of Textuality*, 154.
One side-benefit of making this digression will be immediately apparent: it allows me to make clear precisely the terms in which I understand the work I am pursuing here. Briefly put, I aim to fulfill aspects of all three of the above-mentioned functions of the interpretation of a text. First, to fulfill one aspect of the historical function, I aim, in this chapter and the one that follows it, to produce in my contemporary audience acts of understanding that are as close as I can make them to the ones that Augustine himself had of the whole of the De doctrina and as close as possible to the ones that his historical audience, the audience that actually read his book, had; Augustine, as we will see, had a certain audience for whom he intended the De doctrina, and this may or may not have been the audience that actually read the book. I say “one aspect” since I can only produce acts of understanding related to the fundamental questions I am asking, not acts that take in every aspect of the text---as I pointed out in Chapter 1, my purpose is to understand the book as a whole rather than the whole of the book. Second, to fulfill key aspects of the meaning and implicative functions, I aim, here and in my treatment of the context in the next chapter as well as in my treatment of moral inquiry in the De doctrina in the chapter after that, to help us understand what the text actually means on those central matters that have emerged from my reading of it, which may or may not go beyond the meaning that was clear to Augustine and his readers, as well as a few crucial parts of the implications of the meaning of Augustine’s text. But, of course, none of these functions is ever so discretely performed, and each always accompanies the others, although it is useful to have them laid out up front for clarity’s sake. None of these functions can I hope to perform fully here; at best, I can suggest how the reader might go about arriving at the appropriate acts of understanding and hope that I have made the right suggestions.
One of the points of making this clear here is that it can then easily be seen which studies and secondary works on the *De doctrina* are actually relevant for my investigation: in general, the answer is only those that seek to fulfill the same aspects of the same interpretive functions that my study fulfills. Clearly, those that mean only, for example, to understand how Augustine’s account of rhetoric arose from the interaction of Christian and classical approaches to texts will be treating of a different, and not necessarily overlapping, set of questions from my own. The long movement of ideas and how Augustine responds in the *De doctrina* to various currents in ancient thought is relevant to my account of what the text meant to him and his readers only in so far as it helps me answer those large but limited questions that I have set myself to answer. To take another example: those accounts of and disputes about Augustine’s theory of signs, in so far as they engage in textual interpretation, fulfill functions that also usually do not overlap with mine. To detail Augustine’s theory of signs, as well as answer the larger question of what the *De doctrina* is actually about would be to try to fulfill more than one aspect of historical function, as well as several aspects of the meaning and implicative functions, neither of which are the aims of my study.

I can count myself to have succeeded here if I have made a compelling case for what the *De doctrina* is about and what its essential meaning is. Augustine’s account of astrology, his early Neoplatonism, his view of the fall of the soul, the ancient sources of his distinctions, e.g. in Stoic logic or one of Theophrastus’s books, and many other topics, since they are not necessary to make my case, I will not discuss at any length.

This Study’s Method and the Four Texts of the *De doctrina*
What is next in order is a brief summary of what I take the four texts of the *De doctrina* to be and how each relates to how I pursue my goals in this study. The first text of the *De doctrina*, the first draft, was written in the mid-390s, covering all of Books I and II and up to III.78. It has a systematic structure in which all major distinctions and developments are related analogously to what Augustine takes the central teaching of scripture to be, the double-love of God and neighbor. What the various conditions surrounding Augustine’s writing of this text were, particularly those of his own intellectual life as well as those of the situation in ecclesiastical politics of North Africa in the mid-390s, I will discuss in the next chapter. This first text I will call Augustine’s “first draft”.

The second text of the *De doctrina* was that of what one scholar has called his “first edition” of the book. This text was likely produced for Simplicianus of Milan and for the educated elite of Milan, of which Augustine had himself been a part about a decade before, and which he presumably remained in contact with through his interim work as a Christian intellectual before becoming a priest and then a bishop. Only a careful look at the historical context of this text and its production can shed light on why it was produced and under what conditions. I have reserved this discussion also for the next chapter.

The third text is that of Augustine’s late additions to the *De doctrina* from Book III.79-IV. This part of the text was written in the late 420s as part of Augustine’s overall project to reconsider his works. Above, I have shown that the character of this text differs from that of the first draft, particularly in that Augustine seems to have eschewed a systematic approach. He now focuses on examples and handy rules, rather than on a balanced ordering of distinctions related to
the ultimate teaching of scripture. This text is clearly part of his late oeuvre and as such has many of the distinguishing marks of the later Augustine’s thought. I will call it his “late additions” to the *De doctrina*. My next chapter considers these first three texts in their respective contexts.

After a treatment of the historical context of the first three texts, I turn, in my fourth chapter, to a discussion of the fourth text of the *De doctrina*, which is the final historical text that Augustine passed down to us. I walk through the text briskly to show that what unifies it is the subordination of all Christian learned activity to the study of scripture, which is itself ordered to moral inquiry. This text is distinctly interesting precisely because it contains both systematic treatments of some matters and more rule-based approaches to others, both extended examples and well-balanced philosophical distinctions. Such a character marks the *De doctrina* among all of Augustine’s works as a project which he undertook as a young man and completed to his own satisfaction only when he was old. He does not reject or even drastically rewrite his earlier systematic approach to Christian learning, but neither does he continue it. One thing that may emerge from later work on this text is just how Augustine’s changing attitude to such an undertaking itself constitutes an act of moral inquiry and thus an example for those who followed (or follow) in the Catholic tradition.

Conclusion: The Emerging Centrality of Moral Inquiry

Here, I have raised many questions, and, although I have suggested a few answers, I have not argued for them at length, but have sought to set them all together as part of my picture of the
whole text itself. I will turn to the details of my historical argument next, beginning with the first of these four texts that Augustine composed. It is there that I will make my most substantive points about how his understanding changed over those thirty years and how both those changes and the points he makes in the text itself contribute to how we understand the tradition of moral inquiry of which Augustine is a seminal figure. To do these, I will draw on as much of the literature as I can, although, since not much has been said about these four texts as texts, I will need to argue for several new conclusions at length (things that I have found were previously overlooked).

And how does moral inquiry fit into my investigation of the historical questions? I can only say a little here, but from the summary itself, even without further analysis, it is apparent that moral inquiry for Augustine bears some deep connection with Christian learning and scripture. Learning itself and the text of scripture Augustine sees as oriented solely toward the journey toward wisdom; again and again I have shown that even the structure of his discussion is based on a normative moral horizon, to change slightly Pollmann’s phrasing.\footnote{Pollmann, \textit{Doctrina Christiana}, 121.} This means that Christian learning properly so called leads to a student’s investigation, not just of scripture and the deeds and customs related in it, but also, and chiefly, of himself and the deeds and customs that he and his own culture sanctions and condemns. This is moral inquiry at its best. To show this, I will first need to establish my own account of the book’s composition and structure by something more than a mere overview of its contents. To do that, I now turn to the context of the four texts of the \textit{De doctrina christiana}. 
Chapter 3

Three Texts of the *De doctrina*: Context and Relevant Content

This chapter considers the context and relevant content of three of the texts of the *De doctrina*. The next chapter will consider the fourth text, namely the contemporary one we have. Since that is largely the text Augustine intended us to have, it makes sense that, in so far as we detail the book’s content and purpose as a whole, we should do so by considering the contemporary text itself, the text as we have it in modern editions, as a whole, which is a witness of the final historical text that Augustine composed.\(^1\) That I cover in the next chapter, wherein I argue that we are best to conceive Christian learning in Augustine’s eyes, the Christian pursuit of knowledge broadly defined, as aimed at scripture and subordinated to moral inquiry.

So, I now turn to Augustine’s life and thought, particularly the intellectual, social, and political circumstances in which he composed the first part of the *De doctrina*, in which he sent a part of that work abroad, and in which he, after thirty years, returned to complete it. Even the most basic knowledge of Augustine and his influence will make clear that in such a summary as this it is impossible to do justice to the breadth of modern scholarship on his life and times. I must be highly selective, therefore, both in what I choose to discuss and in what authors I choose to rely on. In general, I have followed Peter Brown’s account of Augustine’s life and the social

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\(^1\) The “historical text” is, again, the text as it was written down by its author in his or her own time and place. There was more than one of these.
and political circumstances surrounding it.\textsuperscript{2} Using any other biography as my anchor would, it seems to me, only take me further from the scholarly consensus that Brown helped to form on many aspects of Augustine’s life. By agreeing, for example, with James J. O’Donnell or Serge Lancel on some disputed point, I risk entering into debates that are beyond my purpose here and will likely help me little in making my case on the \textit{De doctrina}. There does not seem to exist a standard book on Augustine’s thought. To remedy this, I have had to keep Brown’s biography and a few standard works at my elbow. I certainly say more than appears in any of them, but what I do say more I have tried to justify with references to his texts or to other parts of the literature. On Augustine’s theology, I have looked to Carol Harrison’s \textit{Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity}\textsuperscript{3}; the most often used book among older studies seems to be Gerald Bonner’s \textit{St. Augustine: His Life and Controversies}, but it is now too dated.\textsuperscript{4} Where I have had occasion to discuss directly philosophical questions, which is not often, I have relied on John Rist’s \textit{Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized}; I have gained much from Rist’s account that is not easily documented.\textsuperscript{5} The story I tell here parallels Michael Cameron’s account of Augustine’s early exegesis in his \textit{Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine’s Early Figurative Exegesis}, except that my focus is less on the details of how Augustine interpreted and more on the broader picture of why he interpreted and how scripture fit into his search for wisdom. In many respects, the most useful source of all has been \textit{Augustine through the Ages: an}

\textsuperscript{3} Carol Harrison, \textit{Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
Encyclopedia, with its short but well-documented articles on most topics. But all on points, these works have been mere guides, and I have referred to them only where what I say seems to require evidence beyond what I can give here. To do anything else, given the size of the literature on Augustine, would seem to be unmanageable.

Building up to Christian Learning: Augustine’s Life and Thought before the First Draft

Augustine was concerned with learning, in some form or other, for most of his life. His parents sent him to the best schools they could afford, his father even making sacrifices to see his son succeed as a man of letters. As a member of the curial class of their small town, Patricius, his father, must have seen that, whatever benefits curial membership may have brought a century

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7 For convenience I will refer to the first text of the De doctrina, that consisting of Books I-III.8 composed in 396-7, as his first draft. I will refer to the second text, that consisting of Books I-II sent to Simplicianus in Milan in 396, as the excerpt for review or, as I will argue below, the first edition. The third text, consisting of the last part of Book III and all of Book IV, I will refer to as the late additions. The fourth text, which is more or less equivalent to our contemporary text, I will refer to simply as the final draft or De doctrina, to show its primacy in any consideration of the meaning or implications of both the whole and any of its parts.
8 My two chief texts of Augustine here are his Confessions and the two books of his Retractaciones. I have almost always followed Peter Brown’s lead, but I have added more detail when it seemed right. Pamela Bright has an essay in which she draws out how Augustine, in Books X-XIII of the Confessions, builds up hermeneutical principles aimed at conversion, at moral inquiry (“Augustine: The Hermeneutics of Conversion”, Handbook of Patristic Exegesis, 1219-1233). My account in what follows is basically an attempt to do, in a brief way, for Augustine’s life and work up to the De doctrina what Bright does for the Confessions. Hers and mine overlap a good deal because she is reading what is the offspring of all Augustine’s labor till the Confessions, written right after the De doctrina, and I am reading all his labor till the De doctrina with an eye to what it will bring forth.
9 Brown, Biography, 18, citing Confessions II.3.5; see also the chapter on education, 23-28. Quotations from Augustine’s works will be taken from the Fathers of the Church series, published by The Catholic University of America Press, unless otherwise indicated.
and a half before when local aristocracies played a key role in the Roman system of government, the most straightforward way to promote the son of a middle class decurion in the late fourth century was through literary education. A good education would mean a fair chance at a posting in the imperial bureaucracy, which because of the kind of work the empire needed done was then the main way of promotion for young men of (relatively) modest means. And so, Aurelius Augustinus was put to studying. His early attitudes to education and his teachers are well known: he did not much like them (Confessions, I.9.14, I.10.16, but especially I.13.20-31). Later, despite having gone through the slow days of recitatio and emendatio, of being a subdoctor to younger students, and finally a magister, Augustine would return to something like the views he had as a child. The masters were oppressive, he would say, the rules were pointless and pedantic, and such studies were only to be undertaken by boys with nothing better to do, although, even then, he thought that such studies should be undertaken in an entirely different way from the grammatici of his time, a way he would make articulate in the De doctrina, implicitly in his first draft (II.46, 132-134) and explicitly and pointedly in his late additions to the text (IV.6-9). His experience of how men acquire erudition was always tainted with the pride, fastidiousness, and wrath of the schoolmasters of his youth.

12 As portrayed, for example, in Pseudo-Dositheus, Interpretamenta, III.2, a text from the second or third century, but likely to be an accurate enough description of what Augustine experienced. For a detailed study of the location with the most evidence available, Egypt, see Rafaela Cribiore, Gymnastics of the Mind: Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).  
13 Brown, Biography, 305; he cites De civitate dei I.36.17-22.
But that very education, carefully purchased by his father’s thrift, was also to give him, as he well knew, the tools he needed to become the man he did become.\(^{14}\) He later would think one did not need all the pedantry and grueling exercises of the schools, but those very things had formed him, and one wonders whether he could have achieved what he did, either as a thinker or a man of letters, without that long apprenticeship to words.

Implicitly, he knew this. He shows us so in the *Confessions* when he tells the story of his first reading of the *Hortensius* of Cicero, an exhortation to philosophy, the book that put in his heart a real love of wisdom and a desire to seek it far and wide (*Confessions* III.4.7). By that time, whatever else, he had accepted his place at nineteen in the scheme of education in his day. He had loved Latin and hated Greek; he had wept with Dido, as he was supposed to do (*Confessions*, I.12.19)\(^ {15}\), and, seemingly, found himself less drawn to the classical authors fashionable in his day, the Silver Age satirists and poets, like Juvenal and Statius, than to the great old authors of late republican Rome and the Golden Age, Sallust, Cicero, and Vergil.\(^ {16}\)

Augustine almost begins the *De doctrina* (I.8, 21) telling his readers that they are wayfarers, a point which Sallust had made for radically different reasons at the beginning of his *Bellum Catilinae* (2) four centuries before, a work which, like the *De doctrina*, seems directly aimed at

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\(^ {15}\) For his relationship to Vergil, see *Augustine through the Ages*, “Vergil”, 865-866.

\(^ {16}\) Servius and Claudian are excellent examples of this. Both are more interested in Juvenal and Statius than were men in the third century. This was partly because these would be the authors educated people read beyond their schooling, since all were taught Terence and Vergil in school. See Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 428ff. On this point, I think the article on “Classical Authors” in Augustine, *Augustine through the Ages*, 202-205, does not quite have the story right. The influence of the Silver Age on the fourth century had been studied long before the recent interest in late antiquity, for example, by C. S. Lewis in his *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 44-66.
the moral life of its readers. Augustine, then, almost begins with Sallust, but he may well actually have begun with Martial. In his first paragraph of Book I (I.1), Augustine says: “Omnis enim res quae dando non deficit, dum habetur et non datur, nondum habetur quomodo habenda est.” The sentiment is the same as Martial’s in his “Quas dederis solas semper habebis opes” (Epigrams V.42.8), although the words are changed. But we know it was one of the commonest practices to teach students to reword the lines and paragraphs of the old masters, and this at least might be what Augustine has done here. This is complicated by the biblical lines he gets to next; Augustine rarely just alludes. His education is apparent on the De doctrina’s first page. About this time, in the 370s, his older contemporary Jerome began trying to write simple Latin for simple men, but found that he could not escape his education; a refined style was so ingrained: his flask, he said, retained its odor. Augustine too would retain the fragrance of his education throughout his life. One important study of Augustine’s life has shown how much he read and reread Cicero and how those re-readings influenced some of his major and minor

19 See Augustine through the Ages, “Classical Influences on Augustine”, 206-213, especially 207-209. This article has one of the longest bibliographies in Augustine through the Ages.
20 As far as I know, no one has mentioned these two allusions in print before. As the reader will see, I have found many instances below in which Augustine uses material from his earlier work in his composition of the De doctrina. This is somewhat to be expected, as Kannengiesser knew when he predicted that other sources would be found (Handbook of Patristic Exegesis, 1157).
21 Jerome, in a letter (10) to Paul, an old man to whom he was sending a copy of his Life of Paul the First Hermit, he says: “on [this Life], to accommodate the less erudite readers, I have labored much to bring down the style to a more ordinary level. But somehow or other, though it be filled with water, the flask preserves the same odor which it acquired when first used” (Jerome, Letters, translated by C. C. Mierow, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 33 [Westminster, Maryland: Paulist Press, 1963] 52.)
works. The point is that Augustine was always in dialogue with his education. So, when he discovered the *Hortensius* and thus was set aflame with the love of wisdom, we might be surprised to hear that he turned, not to classical literature, but to the Christian Bible. Therein, it seemed to him, wisdom must lie. That he knew his education had made him who he was is clear from how he reads this part of his own story: God had led him to read Cicero, so his education too cannot but have been part of God’s plan (*Confessions*, III.4.8).

Augustine was brought up a Catholic, he drank in Christianity with his mother’s milk, although not baptized as an infant and not receiving formal instruction in the faith until his thirties. He does not say, and we do not know, much about the details of what he believed as a boy. We know he would later reject views popular in Africa, even among Christians, for example, that God and the soul are material. These he probably believed as a boy, since he does say he could not imagine anything immaterial (*Confessions*, III.7.12, IV.15.24, but most clearly at V.10.19), although the circumstances and story of his change of mind are beyond my purpose here. He certainly had reverence and awe for his mother’s religion: he had always loved the great Easter liturgies in the dark basilicas, lit with points of light. Since the faith was lived out before him and since he was raised as a Christian at a time when Christianity was already or would soon become mainstream, it is not surprising that he should turn to the sacred books. He tells us that

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23 *Confessions*, III.4.8: “this name of my Savior, your Son, my infant heart had piously drunk in with my mother’s milk, and at a deep level I retained the memory” (translation: Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 40).

24 On their popularity in Africa, see Brown, *Biography*, 29-32.

25 As Brown points out (*Biography*, 23, 325), Augustine’s only surviving poem is on the Easter Candle. See *De civitate dei* XVII.15.
he turned away from Cicero because, in the books of the old Roman, was not to be found the name of Christ (*Confessions*, III.4.8). Of course, it is also likely, although hard to say either way, that he did not have much in the way of philosophical literature ready at hand. Philosophy in those days was hardly carried out at all in the Latin West.26 The only text he mentions specifically was a translation of Aristotle’s *Categories* that he read later when he was studying rhetoric (*Confessions*, IV.16.28).27 The schools of rhetoric, at that time, would have included some superficial tincture of philosophical knowledge, which is where Augustine seems first to have become more seriously acquainted with philosophy; the orators of the Second Sophistic had made such knowledge popular—but that was about all.28 Perhaps he knew others, but it seems likely that at the time he first read the *Hortensius*, he did not have much else in the way of philosophy available to read, even if he had wanted to—most of what he does know comes by way of Cicero, earlier, and Varro, later.29 Whatever else, we know he read the *Hortensius*, turned to the Christian scriptures, and read them as a North African man would read them in those days,

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26 For a good overview, see E. Depalma Digeser, “Philosophy in a Christian Empire: From the Great Persecution to Theodosius”, in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, edited by L. P. Gerson, two volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), I.276-297; hereafter, *CHPLA*. See also, Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 526: scholars, he says, have made the fourth century Latin west more sophisticated than it was largely on a misreading of Macrobius as historical. True or not, it seems clear that philosophy was not much practiced or studied west of Athens in Augustine’s day.

27 His narration here is relevant to the state of philosophy in the West. He describes how teachers and reputedly learned men talked about this book with great conceit; others said they had taken great pains to understand it. Augustine himself understood it without difficulty. This suggests such works were not widely available, nor was good instruction about them.

28 For how the Second Sophistic specifically relates to philosophy in this period, see R. Fowler’s, “The Second Sophistic” in *CHPLA*, I.100-114.

29 Rist, *Ancient Thought Baptized*, 8-9, and for the relevant bibliography, see especially notes 9-12.
literally. And he did not like what he read. The style was barbarous, the content unintelligible (*Confessions*, III.5.9-6.11). So, he put the books down. What is important is both that he picked them up and that he put them down. That he picked them up is important because it foreshadows the role scripture will play in every major decision of Augustine’s spiritual and intellectual life thereafter. That he put them down is important because it shows us just how inured he was in his education, which made the scriptures revolting to read—how could wisdom be *there*, among, of all things, solecisms?—and it shows just how much he accepted the religion of his mother, which drew him to pick them up in the first place. This is mildly controversial to say, but Augustine never really had a fully pagan outlook; it was always a mixture of pagan and Christian elements, both orthodox and heretical.

Although I am leaving out much, the story continues that he did not turn at this point to pagan philosophy or pagan anything else. For some reason, despite what he says, we know that he actually took the scriptures quite seriously. He did not study them, but his first major commitment as an intellectual, one which certainly influenced much else, he entered into

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30 On the way African Christians read scripture generally, see Brown, *Biography*, 31-32. The question has gone far beyond where it was when Brown first wrote, for example, with P. Bright’s detailed work on Tyconius and his predecessors. It seems to me, however, that the general point Brown made has not been undermined.

31 Indeed, this is precisely how I have organized below my account of Augustine’s life and thought. The way the story is usually told seems to miss the role scripture actually played, but, as I will show, the Bible appears right on cue at every major change. This could be a product of how he told his story in the *Confessions*, but, even if true, that only means that Augustine understood the Bible to play crucial roles at every major turning point of his life. Since he wanted to understand himself and his own life most of all, it does not seem unwise to rely on his account of himself. For a very different view, see J. J. O’Donnell’s biography, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: Harper, 2006). O’Donnell sees Augustine as a conniving self-promoter, always more imperial propagandist than Christian.

32 Harrison, *Christian Truth*, 6. Here, it seems to me, she is too conservative in merely saying that it is possible that Augustine was never a pagan.
precisely in order to preserve what was good in those Christian scriptures, namely, the name
of Christ.\textsuperscript{33} The radical sect of the Manicheans always had Christ’s name on their lips, and what
is more they had a neat way of accounting both for why the scriptures looked the way they did
and for how to go about reading them aright.\textsuperscript{34} The details of his affair with Manichaeism need
not concern us here, except to say that they appealed also to one of the habits he had inculcated
in himself through his education, the habit of seeking to win arguments.\textsuperscript{35} He and the young men
with him who became Manicheans in the 370s in North Africa loved, he tells us, to go about
knocking down, intellectually, those Christians with whom they picked intellectual fights.\textsuperscript{36}
Since Manicheans were Christian heretics, and Augustine says he joined them in part because the
name of Christ was always on their lips, it is fair to say that Augustine became a committed
Christian when studying rhetoric in Carthage and remained one nearly all his life, with the
possible exception of a period of skepticism, during some of which he went to church.\textsuperscript{37} (To
what degree he remained a Manichean all his life is another matter.\textsuperscript{38}) His first version of
Christianity made sense for him of what he knew of scripture, something he clearly valued a
great deal; it also allowed him, he tells us, to indulge his passions, something he also loved a

\textsuperscript{33} Cicero did not have the “name of Christ”, so Augustine turned away from him; see
Confessions, III.4.8.
\textsuperscript{34} Brown (35-49) rightly makes much of how the Manicheans appealed to Augustine’s desire to
know “the reasons of things” (36).
\textsuperscript{35} Brown (37) cites Augustine’s De duabus animabus contra Manichaeos, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{36} Contra epistulam Manichaei qui vocant fundamenti, 13.17: The Manichaeans, he says, bitterly
and with glee taunt those who believe things without consideration.
\textsuperscript{37} He started attending church in Milan in order to hear Ambrose’s sermons. For an account of
this, see Confessions, V.10.19-14.25.
\textsuperscript{38} For a recent and ongoing discussion of this question, see J. BeDuhn’s Augustine’s Manichean
Dilemma, Volume 1, Conversion and Apostasy 373-388 CE (Philadelphia, PA: University of
great deal; and it promoted in him habits that young disputatious intellectuals often revel in, those habits that help one win arguments.\textsuperscript{39} It was a convenient religion for him.

Augustine was set on fire for wisdom, and then turned to the scriptures, found them wanting, and then found an intellectually respectable way to preserve them.\textsuperscript{40} It is a little unclear what he thought he was preserving or why he would already have such reverence for the scriptures that he continued to know so little about; it seems reasonable to think that plenty of ordinary, middle-class Christians at the time, raised as he was, did not have quite the same degree of reverence for the Bible as he had. This is particularly brought home by reflecting that the Manicheans actually rejected a good part of what usually constituted the scriptures, so, in a way, Augustine was not really preserving them. But the parts that the Manicheans rejected were, for the young Augustine, the right parts, the Old barbarous Testament with its strong God and his conniving patriarchs.\textsuperscript{41} A possible answer to the question of why he had so much reverence for the scriptures in the first place may be in his own unique and passionate combination of the learning of the grammarians, with its fixation on texts, and the habits and beliefs of a North African Catholic upbringing in the fourth century. In the North African church, the scriptures held pride of place, were read frequently in the churches, and very often memorized by the

\textsuperscript{39} On how Manichaeism gave him free reign to indulge his passions, see Brown, \textit{Biography}, 39-40.

\textsuperscript{40} Harrison (\textit{Christian Truth}, 8) thinks it strange that Augustine would turn to scripture and thence to Manichaeism, but when we consider the scriptures to be at the center of his change, such a turn becomes understandable. Brown too thinks Augustine is simply unpredictable: if he could read the \textit{Hortensius} and then become a Manichean, it is impossible to tell what he would do when he finally read the \textit{Libri platoniciorum} (\textit{Biography}, 96).

\textsuperscript{41} One of the main objectives of most of his anti-Manichean writings seems to have been to respond in detail to the charges they made against scripture, for example, \textit{De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeis}, \textit{De Genesi contra Manichaeos}, inter alia.
people who heard them. In the schools of the grammarians, texts were everything: the study of texts was the mainstay of what the grammatici did from day to day with their students; it provided the basic rationale for the existence of such teachers, since these texts in these styles by these authors had to be learned by the sons of aristocrats and others preparing for the administration; and it was what the grammatici themselves had done in their own arduous education. These proud pedants were responsible for constructing and maintaining the whole of the classical world as a textual community, within which those other textual communities like Christianity would exist. Still, neither one of these fully accounts for his love of the scriptures from such a young age. Doubtless, the real reason lies in the particularities of his upbringing and temperament, as well as his acknowledged burgeoning literary genius. Having studied Vergil and Terence all his life, and possibly being without much in the way of real philosophical works near to hand or serious philosophical culture in which to participate, Augustine turned to the

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42 In a letter (71.3.5) to Jerome in 403, Augustine remarks that the new translations could not be read to some of the African congregations because, if they differed, the congregation, who knew the text by heart, would clamor with disapproval and possibly riot.

43 Kaster, Guardians of Language, 15-31.

44 Kaster, Guardians of Language, 15-31 (in general), 70-95 (on Christianity, community, and grammar)--note though that Kaster does not use the term “textual community”, which had only recently been coined by Brian Stock in The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Catherine Chin, Grammar and Christianity in the Late Roman World (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 96-102. Here, Chin specifically shows how Jerome’s Hebrew philological work positions itself both within and without the classical paideia. Her main goal, though, is to indicate how Jerome uses this work in an effort to create more meaning for Christians. See also, Kim Haines-Eitzen, “Textual Communities in Late Antique Christianity”, A Companion to Late Antiquity, edited by Philip Rousseau (New York: Blackwell, 2009), 247-257.
scriptures for wisdom. In situations like his, of which we have scant knowledge but can surmise from what we do know, men of his day almost always turned to texts.⁴⁵

By the time his fascination with the Manicheans was wearing off, Augustine had begun to go places in his career: first to Rome, then to Milan.⁴⁶ He was an ambitious young man with a powerful mother, both driven to succeed. The day-to-day life of a young man seeking influence, fame, and fortune by means of his pen should never be far from our thoughts about him during these years, since they were never far from his thoughts about himself. Perhaps too that very ambition had helped him to put some distance between himself and the Manicheans, who were an officially proscribed sect.⁴⁷ More likely, however, it was his very connection with the Manicheans that ended up recommending him to the Prefect of Rome Symmachus as a non-Catholic ally at court. Symmachus may well have helped him get an excellent imperial posting as court rhetor. Augustine was brought to Symmachus’s attention because, after winning a poetry contest in Carthage, he had befriended Vindicianus, one of the African proconsuls and friend of the son and son-in-law of Ausonius, who as tutor to the emperor Gratian was a very well placed lover of all things literary.⁴⁸ Whatever is the right account of his relationship to Manichaeism and its role in his success at this time, what matters for me here is this: Augustine tells us that he began to have more and more questions about Manichaeism, especially after hearing the lectures

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⁴⁵ On the transition from philosophy as a way of life pursued in a school to philosophy as a textual activity, see Gabor Betegh, “The Transmission of Ancient Wisdom: Texts, Doxographies, Libraries”, Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity, I.25-38. The implication here is that the changes in the way philosophy is taught have significant effects on how its students approach philosophy and what they understand themselves to be doing.

⁴⁶ Brown, Biography, 58-61.

⁴⁷ Possibly, he would have found his religion inconvenient as he rose higher in the society of the western empire, whether he converted to orthodox Christianity or not.

⁴⁸ Brown, Biography, 56, 59-61.
of Elpidius at Carthage, attacking the Manichean views of scripture on their own terms (Confessions, V.11.21). Those questions only grew in importance as time passed, as he heard the answers given and found them wanting--that the text of the New Testament had been corrupted by Jews--and as he himself continued to mature as a thinker. Increasingly, he found Manichaeism unacceptable, its doctrines silly, its rites empty, its clergy corrupt, its intellectuals uneducated.

At this point, Augustine seems to step back from religion and he becomes, for a time, a skeptic (Confessions, V.10.19).\textsuperscript{49} He had joined the Manicheans to be part of an intellectually respectable brand of Christianity, which he thought the Catholic Christianity of his home was not, and when that sect failed to satisfy, he did not see much else in the way of options. Cicero had been something a skeptic, so that way had at least a literary pedigree. His reading of some of Cicero’s works made him aware of the power and force of skepticism philosophically.\textsuperscript{50} The trouble with that choice, which Augustine does not mention, but seems clear now, is that any refined set of skeptical ideas and positions taken from respectable old Roman books would, in times like those of Augustine, have to remain merely ideas taken from respectable old Romans. As I mentioned above, there were hardly any philosophers in the West in those days, so Augustine would have had to remain largely alone--but he was about to move to one of the few places where this was not entirely true, Milan. Philosophy in antiquity was always seen as a way of life, so the thought of remaining content with a collection of ideas from a different time and

\textsuperscript{49} Brown does not seem to put enough emphasis on this period of Augustine’s life. He treats it briefly, almost casually (79).

\textsuperscript{50} He was struck, nine years earlier, by Cicero’s exhortation in the Hortensius to avoid sticking to the teachings of one school but to pursue wisdom wherever found. He quotes from Cicero at Confessions, III.4.8.
thinking that in so doing he was pursuing wisdom probably never occurred to Augustine, and if it had, it would surely have been unacceptable. Standing at a crossroads, with Manichaeism behind him, he did not see a clear path ahead, and so he lingered on in doubt.

Then, Augustine discovered something he had not expected: a great Christian exegete. He discovered, through the sermons of Ambrose, that the scriptures which he had become a Manichean to preserve did not really need preserving, that they could be interpreted allegorically (Confessions, V.13.23-14.25). At that time to interpret “allegorically” meant something like to interpret ethically, philosophically, and theologically, since the allegorical methods used were those developed by the ancient philosophical schools and picked up by men like Philo of Alexandria and Origen, as well as being put to some use by the literary specialists themselves, the grammatici. In short, those very things that Augustine had originally balked at in the sacred text became, in the hands of a skilled interpreter like Ambrose, the very strengths of the texts. Augustine himself would never use allegorical interpretations quite as liberally as Ambrose did, so we should not suppose that Ambrose’s sermons ended Augustine’s scruples over the scriptures. Far from it. What they did do, though, was show Augustine that the narrow literal way he had been taught to understand the scriptures as a boy and through which he had

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52 In general, see Peter Struck, The Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Margins of Their Texts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). For Christian uses of these methods, see Kannengiesser, Handbook of Patristic Exegesis; since he organized the work by author, rather than theme or method, a quick review of the whole volume is necessary.
approached them, both when turning to look for wisdom at first and while remaining a
Manichean, was not the only way to read these Christian texts.

For the time being, he remains a mild skeptic and, leaning toward another position of
Cicero’s, that authority plays an important role in the philosophical life, Augustine follows the
example and authority of his mother and becomes a catechumen in Milan. 54 Clearly, something
else besides the mere ability to interpret the scriptures in a reasonable way was holding
Augustine back. It does not seem to have been the case that Augustine was only held back from
full communion with the Catholic Church because of doubts about the Bible. But he did have
issues with the way people in Africa and he himself interpreted the scriptures. The Manicheans
helped him resolve those doubts for a while and retain his reverence for the texts that spoke of
Christ. Now that he had seen that he could retain that reverence on a firmer ground through the
kinds of interpretations that Ambrose made, he was intrigued, but he was not yet convinced. He
tried to ask the old bishop about how to respond to the skeptical arguments he had spent the last
while familiarizing himself with, but Ambrose, ever practical, had no time for such things
(Confessions, VI.11.18). Ambrose’s attitude to the allegorical methods he used helps us see why
he would not have cared to deal with Augustine’s theoretical troubles. Ambrose used this kind of

54 Brown (Biography, 69-71) wisely points to Cicero’s example. He was a skeptic, true enough,
but like Augustine after him, he remained committed to the religion and political life of the
Roman people. In De oratore (I.195), Cicero argues that the Roman political regime, embodied
in the Twelve Tables and what grew out of them, is better and more profitable than all the books
of the philosophers. Brown also mentions that there was incredible political pressure to conform
to Catholic orthodoxy, especially for those easily under Ambrose’s influence, but Brown was not
keen to make this the dominant note of his account of Augustine’s decision to become a
catechumen and neither am I.
exegesis mainly for pastoral ends. He was not known as a man who developed new ways to read scripture, but more as a man who used the means others had developed. He seems to have had little concern to justify that method or draw out a theoretical foundation for it, both of which Augustine was increasingly keen on doing. And so, Augustine remained as he was, a mild skeptic, often frequenter of Ambrose’s basilica, but that mostly for the show of rhetorical skill and the interest of the bishop’s allegories. Augustine was a Catholic churchgoer and a catechumen for three years in Milan.

Augustine had never been a very good skeptic. His latent beliefs in God and his providence rose to the surface in Milan in those years.

“Since we are too weak to discover the truth by pure reasoning and therefore needed the authority of the sacred writings, I now began to believe that you would never have conferred such preeminent authority on the scriptures, now diffused through all lands, unless you had willed that it would be a means of coming to faith in you and a means of seeking to know you” (Confessions, VI.5.8).

He continues. Here is a book that, unlike that of the philosophers, is open to all to read, in a humble and accessible style, but with matter for the deepest reflection, just as one might expect for a book aimed to bring salvation to all. Before he was to read the books of the Platonists, Augustine had already begun to see a way out of his skeptical trap: the Christian Bible, a means of seeking God. He never changes his mind about this, and he builds, in the De doctrina christiana, an account of how the Bible is the means of seeking God.

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55 His main contribution seems to have been to use these methods for concrete pastoral aims and to build up the faith. He saw, through the varieties of scripture, places, times, allegories, the same vision of God’s work presented under different guises. See L. F. Pizzolato, La dottrina esegetica di Sant’Ambrogio, Studia Patristica Mediolanensia 9 (Milan: Vita e Penserio, 1978), 223-262.
57 Chadwick translation, 96.
But despite being at the pinnacle of his career and in the capital of the western empire, Augustine lived an anxious life. He was ambitious but afraid of failure. Of this, he longed to be free: he once had his friends consider a drunken beggar, how much more of life he enjoyed than did the fashionable young men in their long tunics (Confessions, VI.6.9). He also had a concubine and was ashamed by his desires for her and lived like a guilty man (Confessions, VI.13.20). These two stresses were combined in a match Monica made for him, a young heiress with whom marriage would ensure his fortunes. Augustine began to be sick, a pain in the chest, he would later say; maybe it was his lungs, maybe his heart (Confessions, IX.2.4).

And, then, in this life already dominated by texts, Augustine encountered in the span of a few months the kinds of texts that changed the lives of late ancient men: books of some Platonic philosophers, which helped him overcome several key philosophical problems (Confessions, VII.9.13), and a book about the first Christian monk, Anthony of the Desert, which showed him how to live a life devoted to that which is true wisdom, God (Confessions, VIII.6.14). Two or so months after reading the books of the Platonists, which thrilled him with philosophical confirmation of what he was beginning to believe on the authority of scripture but did not end his anxieties, and on the very day that he read the Life of Anthony, Augustine resolved to resign his

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58 Confessions, VI.6.9. That late ancient men wore long tunics Augustine mentions in De doctrina III.
59 On the complications and importance of such a marriage, see Brown, Biography, 51-52.
60 These two events are far apart in the Confessions, but must have occurred within a few months of each other. R. Markus’s succinct account of Augustine’s life seems preferable here than those of others. The key moment Markus locates in the vision of a Christian way of life: “His decision was finally inspired by a discovery of the appeal of the ascetic life” (Markus, “Life, Culture, and Controversies of Augustine”, Augustine through the Ages, 498.
61 At Confessions, VII.9.13-21.27, he details what truths in scripture he found in the books of the Platonists and what truths he did not find in them. Everything he found in them, he wants us to
imperial post, break his engagement, and live a celibate life, ending his battles with ambition and lust by giving up hope of ever engaging in any such sin again.\textsuperscript{62} The decisive moment in this conversion experience, as Augustine tells it, was actually neither of these texts, but a third: a passage from Paul’s \textit{Letter to the Romans}, which Augustine, racked with anxiety, had picked up on hearing a child singing “Take and read” (\textit{Confessions}, VIII.12.29). Scripture told him to put off lust, and so he did, and ambition too. He makes the chain of events clear in his \textit{Confessions}:

Ambrose shows him that the scriptures can lead to wisdom and can be reverenced as they are; he begins to think such authorities are necessary; the books of the Platonists overcome the last vestiges of his skeptics, thus freeing his mind to understand things rightly; the story of Anthony sets his will in motion with its desires to leave off sinful habits and become pure; and the letter of Paul tells him in the right moment to do that very thing.\textsuperscript{63}

Which of these is the key event? Which of these has the most influence on him? I do not need to answer these questions here.\textsuperscript{64} What is important for my purposes is to show that this moment in Augustine’s life is one in which a man’s search for wisdom in philosophy, his search see, he also found in scripture, but much that he found in scripture he did not find in the \textit{libri platoniciorum}. This precise point he had already made in his \textit{De doctrina}, II.151.

\textsuperscript{62} Pierre Hadot, in “Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse”, \textit{Philosophy as a Way of Life}, translated by Michael Chase, edited with an introduction by Arnold Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), follows Courcelle in maintaining that much, if not all, of the conversion story Augustine tells in the \textit{Confessions} is due to the conventions of the late ancient genre of theological treatise. Many have done likewise. The best modern biographers (particularly, Brown) have taken the \textit{Confessions} as largely intended as an accurate narrative of Augustine’s life. I have followed them in doing the same here. Also, F. Van Fleteren gives a convincing case for the book’s historicity in “\textit{Confessiones}”, \textit{Augustine through the Ages}, 228-229.

\textsuperscript{63} The most comprehensive source on this episode is J. J. O’Donnell’s commentary, \textit{Augustine: Confessions, Text and Commentary} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

\textsuperscript{64} There is a large literature on this point. Van Fleteren’s “\textit{Confessiones}” and Markus’s “Life, Culture, and Controversies of Augustine” in \textit{Augustine through the Ages} provide the most handy summary and all of the important bibliographic notices.
for God in the scriptures, and his search for the right kind of life for himself all come together in one Italian summer. Scripture, love of wisdom, and a pure life: these are the themes of the *De doctrina christiana*, specifically how to direct the second toward the first so as to grow in the third; many if not most of Augustine’s books could be categorized under such a heading, but none so clearly or directly as the four books on Christian learning. The *De doctrina christiana* is, then, the full fruit of Augustine’s conversion. For a man who could not simply accept from others the right way to read the books that speak of Christ, a man who had seen his life punctuated by turns toward and the influence of those very texts, something like the *De doctrina christiana* was very likely to come.

But it took ten years. The first period of Augustine’s new life was short but productive. He spent the winter at a lake house in Cassiciacum, far enough away from Milan. He took with him a few friends and a few students and one mother, who, despite her earlier efforts on his behalf, approved of this new direction (*Confessions*, VIII.11.30). Since he was a well-known intellectual in Milan, his conversion and renunciation of a worldly life would certainly have created a buzz. If nothing else, people were interested in what he would do now, and he left them in no doubt: his Cassiciacum dialogues all pick up discussions he had had as part of his life in Milan. He wrote dialogues first against the skeptics, *Contra Academicos* in two books, continuing his discussions with Romanianus (*Contra Academicos*, II.2.3 and II.3.8); then he wrote on the happy life, *De beata vita*, which might have resumed a conversation had in the

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65 Brown, *Biography*, 108-120. This is still the best account, especially if supplemented with J. McWilliam’s “Cassiciacum Dialogues”, *Augustine through the Ages*, 135-143, which focuses more on Augustine’s thought at this crucial period than on the man himself.
67 Brown, *Biography*, 110, enumerates the sources and implications of each.
house of Manlius Theodorus (*De beata vita*, 7.16); he then wrote on order, *De ordine* in two books, which took up again a discussion he had had many times with Zenobius (*De ordine I*.7.20), and, probably not meant yet for public eyes, he wrote a dialogue with himself (*Soliloquies*). What emerges from these is a changed man, but still an anxious one. Augustine tells us that he still cried and still felt the pangs of fear and doubt—to be expected, since rarely do complete changes of life go off without a hitch.  

He had begun to seek wisdom without public ambition and he had turned his able pen to her service. The wisdom that he sought too, most scholars agree, was probably somewhat at odds with the Christianity that he was adopting; this means that at least in some ways Augustine did not fully understand Catholic Christianity when he first began to write in its defense.

The question that often arises immediately after great changes and is usually not thought of in the heat of the moment is this: What now? Augustine dashed off his dialogues, sending them on to Milan to interested audiences—the educated Christian circle there thought very highly of itself—but he does not himself seem to have had a clear answer to the larger question that winter. The dialogues read at least a little like a justification for his new life but they do not provide a clear picture of what that new life would actually be like. Whether he had a clear idea or not, we know what he did in the coming months: he was baptized by Ambrose at Easter, he

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68 Brown, *Biography*, 110, references half a dozen remarks in these dialogues that indicate he was far from at peace: he cried at night, he thought alone in the dark, he had to speak slowly to keep from getting excited.


70 Brown, *Biography*, 110, again, references several notices of their attitudes about themselves.

71 Augustine seems in those to be speaking from an already secure social and intellectual position. He is confident and bold. This was, of course, the necessary attitude to have toward his students, but it belied the reality of his position at the time.
wrote more books, he stayed in Rome with another vague Christian intellectual circle for a short time, and then he returned to his native Africa, to a small town up in the pinewood highlands and a retreat, something like a monastery for intellectuals. The order of events in his life in the next few years, from 386-391, is not important here, and, anyway, we do not know very much about the details of this period; what is important is the order of the books he wrote and what they meant to him and those who read him.

But before I begin considering his works in addition to his life, a few remarks are in order. My goal is to discuss in as brief and comprehensive a fashion as possible those portions of his thought that are relevant to the understanding of the *De doctrina*, as a whole. Doing this, nearly work by work (but note that I do not need to discuss them all), will actually make my treatment of the *De doctrina* itself much shorter because so many of the important points Augustine has already made in his earlier works. I can, then, do two things at once: show the *De doctrina*’s dependencies on other works and make clear what many of the important points in the book are. Both of these will, in addition, draw the outlines of the progress of Augustine’s thought on these issues from his first books as a Christian writer to his first as a bishop and so intimate, in the evolution of his thought, the moral inquiry that Augustine himself carried out in his life, which is surely relevant to any theory of moral inquiry he may have developed--at least relevant enough to keep in the back of the mind.

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73 This is not exactly coextensive with Augustine’s interest in biblical exegesis. The best summary of how all of Augustine’s works relate to exegesis is that of Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis,* 1149-1218 (with bibliography). What is important here is why such a survey is not coextensive with the one I make below. Briefly put, the reason is that my focus, and I believe the real purpose behind the *De doctrina,* is right at the intersection between the scriptures and the moral life, where the scriptures become an object of the kind of reflection that is aimed at moral inquiry.
Cassiciacum and Thagaste

What had always been of interest to Augustine, and what emerged now as the main edifice he began to build up, is the role the liberal arts play in a man’s quest for wisdom. What he will present in the works he wrote in North Italy, and soon after, is an account of how human beings can learn to take their minds through the contemplation of corporeal things, chiefly the objects of the arts, and raise them up to the contemplation of incorporeal things, namely God and the soul. This is also a major concern, albeit in a different way, of the *De doctrina*. There, he will say (*De doctrina*, IV.19, written in the 420s, forty years after his retreat in North Italy) that a man’s learning in the scriptures is precisely equivalent to his wisdom, which sounds a lot like his view articulated at Cassiciacum, but for one thing: the Bible has replaced the liberal arts, and, equally important for him, the scriptures are, as we have already seen him realize, open to all to read in widely available books or listen to proclaimed in the church; they are written in a simple style and convey the core of their meaning plainly. To understand how he made this transition is to see how Augustine grew from being a Christian learned layman of philosophical bent to one of the great Christian bishops of his time.

This does not do justice to the story, but suffice it to say here that, after his baptism the following spring (387) in Milan, Augustine became, or at least wanted to become, a Christian

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74 For a more succinct account, less keyed to Augustine’s life, see F. Van Fleteren, “St. Augustine and the Possibility of the Vision of God in This Life”, *Studies in Medieval Culture* 11, 9-17.
public intellectual, like Jerome possibly, but more philosophical. What those who read him read was the work of a man who claimed to have the outlines of, and to be building in successive books, a program of study that would draw one out of oneself and one’s desires and up toward wisdom and one’s eternal homeland, a bold claim outside the confines of the classroom or the philosophical retreat. What the rest of his life makes abundantly clear is that Augustine himself gradually begins to think and then knows for sure that he was wrong in those years, and that his first program of learning aimed at drawing the mind up to wisdom through the liberal arts was, not only tinged with pride, but fundamentally flawed. No one knew that at the time, of course, so his admirers probably thought that this program was “a truly good vision for a life’s work” (De ordine, II.5.28). All seven liberal arts were needed, he argued at the time, as prefatory stages for the ascent to wisdom, but even the uneducated, for example his mother, could be taught, as it were, the soul of this knowledge, not needing to bother learning the body (De ordine, II.17.45).

Writing against the skeptics, Augustine extolled philosophy as a sure way of life: “This philosophy it is which promises that it shall demonstrate with limpid clarity the most true and hidden God and deign, step by step, to show him forth, as if through clouds suffused with light” (Contra Academicos, I.1.3). While in Milan, waiting for baptism, he started working on those books on each of the arts, “manuals of the sciences” he calls them in the Retractationes (I.6), that would draw the soul up through them, as through a structure, to the truth beyond (Soliloquies, II.20.35). Many of these books Augustine writes as much to train himself as for the benefit of

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75 Brown, Biography, 125-130, ties this to the wider movement of men who gave themselves the title “servus dei”.
76 Brown, Biography, 113-115, almost makes it seem as if people in Milan were interested in Augustine’s work, but in the way non-philosophers are always interested in a philosopher’s work: they do not follow it but they nod and smile anyway.
others, although he is clear that some of the books are meant for beginners (Soliloquies, II.20.34).

Such are the broad strokes of his program. But a closer look reveals many veins that run all the way down to the De doctrina. Beginning with the question in De ordine (I.1-I.11) of how the evil in the world is compatible with God’s goodness and order, Augustine turns very quickly from this deep philosophical question to questions about how God’s order can be perceived in the world, on which he spends the rest of the work; he later says he shifted emphasis in the book because his students were unable to follow him (Retractationes, I.3.1). One of his chief conclusions here is that those who have not mastered the arts should not try to understand the true ordered plan of the world, which comes through philosophy. Although philosophy is explicitly condemned in scripture, he says, the philosophy that is condemned is the philosophy of this world (De ordine, I.11.32). The philosophy of the other world, the divine intelligible world, only a few men actually understand--a point which he later retracts (Retractationes, I.3.2). This branch of learning imposes a twofold method on its students, that of life and that of study. Let them be good men, have friends, and grow to be mature in virtue as well as be learned in philosophy (De ordine, II.8.25). One always grows in his learning by reason and authority, but those who only have authority can never truly be happy--which point, again, he retracts later (Retractationes, I.3.2). Human beings are reasonable in actions and in discourses. The right way of life covers the first and learning the second. He then gives an extended discussion of both how the various learned arts arose and how the student can himself move through them to philosophy and wisdom (De ordine, II.11.32-17.45). What emerges most clearly from this account of the arts

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77 For an overview of the literature on this subject, see Virgilio Pacioni, “Liberal Arts”, Augustine through the Ages, 492-494.
is the place of the concept of number for the young Augustine. The one who grasps simple
and intelligible numbers will understand the whole range of the progression of the arts. Number,
he will suggest soon but in another book, is almost equivalent to wisdom. Importantly, he sees
that it may be unreasonable to expect people to progress through such a program, even for so
worthwhile a goal. He says he hopes his program of learning is not too extensive, but the one
who thinks it is should study at least logic and number, or only just what unity is (II.17.46). His
final thought in the work is this: “It is not by faith alone but by trustworthy reason that the soul
leads itself little by little to the most virtuous habits and to the perfect life” (II.19.50).

Philosophy itself has two main questions, he had said in De ordine (II.18.47), on the soul,
the subject for the less advanced, and on God, the subject for the more advanced. The
Soliloquies, his notes for them on the soul, which he later calls De immortalitate animae, and his
De beata vita show that for now he sees himself, and his readers too, as only capable then of
striving toward understanding these less advanced subjects. In De immortalitate animae, to take
one example, he tries to follow through on what he hints at in De ordine and relate the soul to
bodies and to higher things, but his thoughts end in a quagmire. He begins this well enough,
albeit somewhat densely: “If science exists anywhere, and if it can exist only in the realm of that
which lives and always is, nor can something in which something always is itself fail to be
always, then that must live forever in which science always exists” (1.1)--but, as he later says in
the Retractationes, the book ended up being incomprehensible to him (Retractationes I.5.1).

About this time, but perhaps after he had already left Cassiciacum, he also began work on
several manuals of the liberal arts designed to carry through this program of education for his
readers, for his students and readers--and, if he is right in the Retractationes (Prol. 3) that he
thinks as he writes, then at least implicitly for himself.\footnote{78} Consider his six books on music, *De musica*, completed a little later. His account of meter, rhythm, and number in Books I-V are intended for youths or those with the capacity and desire to learn; these books are meant to draw such readers up, here again, to the incorporeal, and, he continues, “we too have preferred to walk this way, not very strong ourselves” (*De musica*, VI.1). (Interestingly, Augustine does not quote scripture at all until Book VI, when he turns from corporeal to incorporeal things.) In general, Augustine says, striking for the first time a profound note running all the way down to the heart of the *De doctrina*, a man will be cleansed and drawn up to God if he refers “all motions and numbers of human action” to the double-love of God and neighbor (VI.14.43). To strike a note similar to this but closer to how he usually expressed himself as a young man, he says a man should use the bodily numbers for the sake of his bodily health (things like proportions of amounts and kinds of food, proportions needed for controlling desires, etc), the numbers operating on those people related to him for the sake of the utility of their souls, and both numbers for directing the moderation of the senses, ordered to the love of neighbor (VI.14.44). These little points he has realized through such long meditations on numbers in verse and in body as best he could, he says, but it is better for a man to gain them or their like by the reading of scripture, and so to grow in the knowledge of God; he wrote about this subject in this way to reach those snared in secular learning and to teach heretics (VI.17.59). *De musica* already reveals his insight that scripture can (he will soon say “must”) be at the heart of Christian’s quest for wisdom.

\footnote{78} See also, Letter 143.2-3 and Dolbeau Sermon 10, section 13.300.61.
His short, incomplete work *De dialectica*, one of his first not to be written as a
dialogue, gives the flavor of other aspects of this program. It proceeds through a treatment of
words, signs, and arguments, all of which he will later return to in the *De doctrina*. Here, he even
begins to discuss the duties and aims of the orator: if he wishes to please, he needs “the color of
rhetoric”; if he wishes to persuade, he requires dialectic (*De dialectica*, 7). Focusing on words
from the perspective of the speaker, rather than as he will in the *De doctrina* from the perspective
of the listener (or reader), he says that the listener is hindered from seeing the truth by obscurity
and ambiguity (*De dialectica*, 8), which neatly parallel his later discussion of difficulties in
reading, although he carries each out differently. There are three kinds of obscurity, he says:
first, those open to the senses, but closed to mind, for example, “if someone sees a picture of a
pomegranate who has not seen one before and has not heard what one is, it is not the eye but the
mind which does not know what the picture is of”, second, those open to the mind but closed to
the senses, e.g. “a picture of a man in darkness” since when one sees the picture one does not
doubt it is of a man, and third, those “both hidden from the senses and not at all clearer to the
mind” (8). The rest of his little treatise discusses in great detail the types of ambiguity, which he
begins by dividing into those that occur in speech and those that occur in writing (9-10). He will,
of course, return at great length to this topic in Book III of the *De doctrina*, although there he
ends up making fewer distinctions outright because his goal is less to make a handbook of verbal
art and more to help readers. Also, his change in approach may be because he found the earlier

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79 It used to be thought that *De dialectica* was spurious, but now the consensus is that the work is
genuine. See Michele Malatesta, “*De dialectica*,” *Augustine through the Ages*, 271-272. I have
used the edition and translation of the text by Malatesta (which is based on Pinborg) available at
[www.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/texts/dialectiatrans.html](http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/texts/dialectiatrans.html), accessed February 7th 2013. The best
available print edition of the text, on which Malatesta has based hers, is that of J. Pinborg, “Das
one lacking; he indicates the difficulty of it and his own uncertainty that his account is best
with his remark that, in equivocal words, “ambiguitatu perplexio prope infinita silvescit”; you be
the judge of whether I have done well here, he says (10). I will argue below that this difficulty in
resolving ambiguities, especially in figurative language, is something Augustine will struggle
with a great deal, never ultimately being able to come up with the kind of account he hoped for.

By this time, Augustine had left Italy for good. His mother was dead, and he lived in
Thagaste now in something like a monastery for African ecclesiastical intellectuals, where he
would stay in prayer and study and writing until ordained in Hippo four years later. As much as
he may have been for a while interested in writing these technical manuals of the arts, he never
lost interest in ethics. One of his first works to address an ethical topic directly is his De moribus
ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus manichaeis. He turns here very early to the Manichean
challenges to scripture. It is the precept of the love of God that shows the harmony of the Old
and New Testaments (De moribus, I.9), since that ensures that a man lives rightly. He is at great
pains to relate all four of the classical virtues to love (I.15.25) and talks of the difference between
using and loving things (I.21.39), the latter of which he deploys powerfully in the De doctrina.
Throughout, he makes every point he can, it seems, to reply to the Manicheans’ attacks on
scripture and to offer his own defenses of the sacred text. It is, he reiterates, the two
commandments of the love of God and neighbor that are to guide the Catholic life (I.29.59-62).
What man needs most of all is disciplina, divina doctrina, divina scientia: this is “the perfection
of moral conduct by which we come to the knowledge of truth we aim at so earnestly” (I.28.56).
Even his accounts of ethics build toward the same goal as his incomplete program of the arts. His
turn to the defense of the faith shows that he became engaged with the intellectual life of Africa, where Manicheans and Donatists dominated.

Other works written at this time illustrate how his thought progressed on the same issues he will return to in the *De doctrina*. For example, his *De quantitate animae* gives an account of the seven stages of the soul, which parallels, especially at the end of this book, the seven stages of wisdom articulated in the *De doctrina*. Also, his first book of *De libero arbitrio* contains an extended discussion of what wrongdoing is, which he picks up again in Book III of the *De doctrina*, although again with different emphases.

Returning to his defense of the faith against the Manicheans, in his next work, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, he takes up themes and material directly related to the interpretation of scripture. He wrote this, he said, in a simple style for simple men to convince them of the errors of the Manicheans on precisely that ground on which their views were so convincing: the interpretation of the Old Testament (*De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, I.1.1), particularly the cosmology and narrative anthropology in Genesis. He argues forcefully (I.8.14) that “nothing can be said worthily of God”—a point he also makes near the beginning of the *De doctrina*—and, he continues, that “some things are said that we can grasp so that we may be nourished and come to those things which cannot be said by any human language.” He also here begins to articulate his own method of approaching the scriptures: “the more we approach the scriptures and become familiar with them, the better we know their modes of expression” (I.9.15), and “divine scripture habitually transfers words from human to divine realities” (I.14.20). Here, he uses a kind of distinction he will make much of in the *De doctrina*, dividing up human subjects of study along these lines: “all living things are either useful, harmful, or superfluous” (I.17.26). Further,
“narrative unfolds in figures to exercise the mind” (II.1.1); the value of this exercise he had already noticed before his conversion, as noted above, and would continue to make a point of throughout his life. At the end of his account of Genesis he returns to the beginning of it and so to the beginning of what will become a productive insight in the *De doctrina*: a man arrives back at the tree of life by fullness of the knowledge of God which is charity, by loving God with his whole heart, soul, and mind, and by loving his neighbor as himself (II.27.41).

But, in his monastery in Thagaste, the liberal arts and philosophy were also never far from his mind. His influential book *De magistro* was written to prove by way a discussion of how one learns, particularly through signs and the realities they signify, that there is only one true teacher, Jesus Christ. On a note similar to how speech in figures exercises the mind, which he made mention of above, he says that the work of thinking through signs, things, words, and teaching is done to exercise the intellect and make it capable of perceiving God; he says he may seem ridiculous for having set off after truth and a happy life by considering signs instead of things (*De magistro*, 8.21), which point is related to and preparatory for what he would later do in the *De doctrina*, turning the reader’s attention to divinely inspired signs.  

He says too, at the end of the dialogue (14.46), that he will return some other time to the usefulness of words, which he does not seem to have done until Book IV in his late additions to the *De doctrina*.

The two goals that have emerged from his earlier work, refuting the Manicheans and studying wisdom, he combines in the *De vera religione*, written near the end of his period as a layman in order to convince his old patron Romanianus to abandon the Manichean sect for the Catholic Church. Revealing the tenor of this work, he says that there is not one thing called

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80 I pass over his account of the details of sign theory here because I do not see it as important for the broader understanding of what he aims to do or what he accomplishes in the *De doctrina*. 
philosophy and another called religion; both are the same, and what Plato did is the same as what the Catholic church does now (*De vera religione*, 5.8). We should become spiritual men, he urges, echoing the words of Christ and what will be the central peg on which all the *De doctrina* is hung, by keeping to the love of God and the love of neighbor, on which depend the law and the prophets (12.23). What the Church teaches, she teaches partly in straightforward language, partly in comparisons of words, deeds, and sacraments; such teaching conforms to the rational rules governing every kind of learning process; “the explanation of the mysteries too is directed to things that are said openly” (17.33), and he makes the point that the mysteries teach in symbol what is otherwise taught openly. This principle, that the obscure things in scripture are to be explained through and for building up what is clearly taught, he makes central to his later account of resolving the ambiguities of scripture. He concludes this passage importantly: “if there were only things easy to understand, there would be no eagerness in seeking the truth or delight in finding it”, which will play an important role at the intersection of scripture study and moral inquiry. Near the end of the work, he takes up scripture’s role in salvation: let us use the steps God gave us to the truth, the study of the divinely revealed signs, the sacred books, the study of which he gives a brief and basic outline (50.98-99)\(^8\); let us forget fictional literature and turn to the study of the word of God (51.100).

Priest of Hippo Regius, then Bishop

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\(^8\) His treatment of scripture here is different enough from what he will develop later that I have left out the details of it. What is important is that he was aiming to be systematic and that he came at many of the central problems several times from different angles.
This period of writing does not really end until Augustine becomes a bishop, since he keeps working on philosophical works like *De libero arbitrio* even after being ordained a priest of Hippo in 391. That he was forcibly ordained by the people and bishop of Hippo Regius is a sign that reveals much about the role Augustine will soon play.\textsuperscript{82} The Catholic congregation at Hippo felt hemmed in. Bishop Valerius spoke at length of his need for able men to serve the church. The congregation present then forced Augustine, who stood in the nave of the church, to come forward for ordination. Valerius, who was not a native Latin speaker, did actually need a voice. He would soon appoint Augustine, though still a priest, to preach for him. This was uncommon in Africa then. The Catholic people of Hippo were a minority, harassed by the Donatist church, which the local magnates supported, and which had the tacit approval of the town’s officials. The Catholic Church in Africa was in crisis. It would be men like Augustine and those who had been with him or known him at his monastery that would change the Church’s fortunes.

It shows his deepening interest in and concern for the scriptures that he wrote, as a new priest in Hippo, a book *De utilitate credendi* to another friend of his who was a Manichean. He had recently written his bishop (*Letter 21.3*) that he needed more time to study scripture, about which he felt he knew woefully little, time which he presumably got; he said that he and his community had been preparing, right before he was forcibly ordained, to undertake such study of the scriptures and had been planning out how to carve out the leisure time. This book to an old friend makes clear that scripture was then near the forefront of his mind, as even little details indicate. The Old Testament, which the Manicheans lambasted at every opportunity, even the

\textsuperscript{82} Brown, *Biography*, 131-134, gives a very readable account.
example of Christ and the Apostles shows can and should be read in a fourfold manner (De utilitate credendi, 3.5)--and this Augustine says he received from his own teachers in the faith: according to history, when the teaching the text communicates concerns what has been written or done or written as if done; according to aetiologia (Augustine apologizes for using Greek words), when the reason is given why something is said or done; according to analogy, when it is shown that the two testaments are harmonious on some point; and according to allegory, when one is taught that certain writings are to be taken figuratively (in 3.6-9, he gives examples of each of the four and discuss them in turn). There are, he continues on the same topic, three kinds of errors in reading (4.10): when what is false is thought to be true, though the writer thought otherwise; when what is false is thought true when the writer thought it true; and when some kind of truth is perceived in a writing that the writer himself did not intend. This last point he changes his mind on by the time he wrote De doctrina, as I will show. His own way of discussing and carrying out scriptural interpretation is emerging in places like this, and taking note of them we can see that his account grows and changes over the next five years.\(^83\)

But, again, that deepening interest in scripture does not entirely replace his more philosophical reflections, at least not yet--it never actually will, but later in life his philosophical reflections will be made in a way more clearly subsumed in late fourth and early fifth century Christian debates.\(^84\) Part of the reason for this is that his views are undergoing substantial change at this point. Based on his deep reading of scripture, particularly Paul, as well perhaps as his own

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\(^83\) The specific sources of some of these views would be interesting to discover, for example, who taught him this fourfold manner of reading the Old Testament and where did that person learn it from. I have not been able to discover much in the way of work on these questions, and since they are not actually important for the argument here, I leave them to one side.

\(^84\) Harrison, Christian Truth, 24-25, makes this point.
experience on the heavenly staircase of the liberal arts, he begins to think that the human will is far from what he once thought it was, that human nature is fractured in a deep way and more in need of healing through divine remedies than of learning through human books.\textsuperscript{85} As a priest, he tells us in the Retractationes (I.9.1), he turned to finishing his De libero arbitrio and ended up adding two more books. Returning to his old way of expressing himself, he asks whether wisdom comes from number or number from wisdom, and then explains why number is so undervalued and wisdom so highly valued, but he only concludes here that both wisdom and number are unchangeable (II.11.30-32), which is why, he later says, we should always look beyond anything containing number and proportion to God almighty as its author (II.20.54). And, on wisdom, he goes on, “while we are engaged [in our effort to be wise] and until we have finished it, we are wayfarers” (II.16.41); we are, he says, on a journey to wisdom, and we are led on it by wisdom (II.16.45). This will emerge as his new way of saying what for him has been an old realization--but he will not leave off the old just yet, as he speaks again in a way similar to how he spoke in his early manuals: “all practical instruction in [restraining the evil impulses] has this for its aim, that, in renouncing and restricting this kind of movement, we turn our will from the instability of temporal things to the enjoyment of everlasting good” (III.1.2). Even this, though, shows how his

\textsuperscript{85} I have obviously summarized a lot. My goal in making this point is to contribute what is essential for understanding the turn that obviously occurs in Augustine’s thought in these years. Brown’s account of this change, Biography, 139-150, is superb in how it treats of Augustine the man, but less so on the details of his thought. Paula Fredriksen puts together an admirably succinct account in her article “Paul”, particularly the section entitled “Divine Justice and Human Freedom: Grace and Will”, Augustine through the Ages, 623-624. One reason I have been content to rely on such an article rather than on the foundational literature itself is because my needs here are quite limited. The signposts and acknowledge turns in Augustine’s thought will do me well enough without entering into extraneous debates.
thought has changed. No longer does he emphasize the discipline of liberal arts; instead, he speaks more practically of moral instruction.

As a well-known African orator, then intellectual, now priest, Augustine was asked by his bishop in 393 to present to a meeting of bishops a discussion of certain parts of the old Roman creed, which he does admirably, presenting a fine summary of the doctrine of the Trinity (*De fide et symbolo*, 9.16-19). In his discussion of Jesus Christ as the Word of God, he meditates on the nature of human words and how those words, even in the most ordinary circumstances, fall short. As he will say later in the *De doctrina*, our words proceed from our mouths, reverberate in the air, and remain only as long as they are heard, but the Word of God remains beyond change (*De fide et symbolo*, 3.3): “It is our intention when we use words to speak the truth to reveal what is in our mind to the one who is listening to us and to disclose to that other person through signs of this type the secrets we carry within”; the same is true of the Word by which the hidden God discloses himself to us. A vast gulf, he goes on (3.4), exists between our words and our minds: we manufacture signs out of the motions of our bodies, far from our minds; we try to beget in others, through signs, what we have in our minds; we do this in word, facial expression, gesture, but we cannot succeed; our intentions lie beyond our words’ expressive power and we cannot know another’s mind; but God, in his love, begot his own Word to reveal himself to us. He has occasion here, more than once, to speak on specific points of scriptural interpretation, for example, when he discusses how one can read the anthropomorphic language about God (7.14), and when he argues that some passages of scripture were written obscurely to send evil men into error, those who, through pride, “wish to teach more than to know” (9.18).
From this, Augustine turns, for the first time, to a proper commentary on scripture, one whose aim was not primarily polemical or apologetic. His *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus* is an unfinished attempt to understand Genesis in a philosophically and scientifically respectable way (especially e.g. in 8.29). We can see his interests shifting more toward those of a Christian ecclesiast, as he approaches the scriptures at this period from different angles. Just as we treat the hidden things of the natural order, not by assertion, but by inquiry, so too he will undertake, through faith, to investigate this book, and whatever doubt one has should never exceed one’s faith (1.1). “In accord with this faith, we must consider whatever can be discussed and investigated in this book” (2.5). As in his *De utilitate credendi*, he says that scripture is to be read in four ways, but he mentions them in a different order here: history, allegory, analogy, and *aetiology* (2.5). The details of his interpretation need not detain us here, but more than one passage bears on any study of the *De doctrina*. For example, sin, he tells us, lies in the illegitimate use of things (1.3). His last remark in this draft is fitting for the last remark in an abandoned draft, and it shows us Augustine’s lack of confidence about his knowledge of and ability to interpret the scriptures:

“We need not scrupulously search out all these matters; let each choose what he can, only let him not say something rashly and assert something as known when it is not. Let him recall that he is human and investigate the works of God to the extent that we are permitted” (9.30).

His next commentary, *De sermone Domini in monte*, steps even closer to much that is central to the *De doctrina*. He writes now, as he will later, on the ascent to God, and his subject here is how this ascent parallels the beatitudes (I.5.10) and the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer (II.11.38) and is thus the whole purpose of the Sermon on the Mount. The first stage of the soul’s ascent is that of humility, since they are blessed who are not puffed up but submit to the divine
authority, fearful that they may be on the road to punishment. At the second stage, the soul
studies scripture and see what it is that holds it in sin. The soul then understands itself and its
predicament and mourns for its sins. The fourth stage brings labor and the courage to extricate
oneself from one’s sins. At the fifth stage, a means of escape is offered to those who persevere.
At the sixth stage, “by a blessed consciousness of good deeds, the pure heart is able to
contemplate the supreme good, which cannot be discerned except by a pure and serene intellect”
(I.5.10). He then compares this account with that of Isaiah’s gifts of the spirit (I.5.11-12). This is
nearly the exact list of the stages of wisdom that he will later use (De doctrina, II.16-23) as a
way of situating the study of scripture at a key stage in man’s movement to his eternal homeland.
Connecting this up clearly with moral inquiry, he continues by asking who is he who is in
agreement with scripture? And he answers that he is the man reading or hearing piously,
ascripting its words to the highest authority, so that, seeing how the Word contradicts the way he
is living, he does not hate it but is happy to be rebuked; scripture’s obscurities do not make him
wrangle but make him pray for understanding and remember to show reverence for such great
authority (De sermone Domini, I.11.38). In this great progress of the soul toward God, it is the
intention that counts, not the act (II.13.45-46), which he will again make an important point of
(De doctrina, III.45). The just man, he says on a related point, cannot serve God unless he uses
everything else for the sake of God’s kingdom (De sermone Domini, II.17.56). And, at the end of
the second book, in a rare comment on how he came to a realization, Augustine says this:

“The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried by the fire, purified from the
earth, refined seven times.’ It was from this number that I was reminded to compare those
precepts with the seven maxims on which the Lord based this entire sermon when he
discoursed on blessedness and also on the seven operations of the Holy Spirit which the
prophet Isaiah enumerates” (II.25.87).
What moral inquiry is and how it relates to scripture are coming more clearly into focus. Augustine’s focus had begun to center more squarely on scripture, but he did not cease to be a controversialist, writing against the two major heretics of the Africa of his day, the Donatists, by far the largest but somewhat backward, and the Manicheans, persecuted and small but intellectually more respectable; indeed, it was through his controversies with these two groups of heretics that his interest in scripture deepened even further. He began by writing a song against the Donatists, in an effort to make his message clearly and readily understandable and available even to the uneducated, and he followed this up with a short (now lost) treatise on similar points, *Contra epistulam Donati heretici*. In another short work, he addressed Adimantus, a Manichean, *Contra Adimantum Manichaei discipulum*, and presents arguments on various points of the Manichean understanding of scripture; he has spoken of this before, but here he argues simply and forcefully, with an increasing knowledge of scripture and how to read it. In three other short works from this period, he continues his study of the letters of Paul, particularly Romans: *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula Apostoli ad Romanos*, *Expositio epistolae ad Galatos*, and *Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*. As witnessed in these hard to read little treatises, Augustine’s changing attitude to both grace and the will slowly changed his view of the whole human person. He had moved away from his earlier manuals of the liberal arts, with their goal at lifting the soul up by abstraction through prosody and geometry to

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86 James J. O’Donnell’s article “Bible” in the *Augustine through the Ages* has a particularly useful summary (101-103) of how scholars think Augustine’s acquaintance with and understanding of scripture developed from his first encounters to his mature exegesis. 87 The best discussion of this is Rist’s in *Ancient Thought Baptized*, 148-202, especially 186-188, but to consider the same questions from a theological perspective---so less about Epictetus, etc.—see Harrison, *Christian Truth*, 85-97. See also Marianne Djuth “Will”, *Augustine through the Ages*, 881-885, for a broad but brief discussion, beginning with Augustine’s terms.
God, but now, after his study of Romans and Galatians, it is clear that he cannot go back. With a sentiment that will reappear in the De doctrina, he asks, in a letter (27.4), what do we have at all that we have not received as gifts from God above. He can no longer view man as able to achieve happiness merely by the efforts of the educated man. It is clear something changed by this point and that something was related to human weakness; humanity appears, in works like these and probably even earlier, as more fundamentally fractured and, increasingly, as altogether helpless.

Something like his last work as a priest, De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus contains his responses on miscellaneous questions, covers many topics from many directions. There is, for example, much on the interpretation of various passages in scripture and much on the philosophical implications of Christian beliefs. On at least one important matter, it anticipates the De doctrina: his key distinction between use and enjoyment, which he had already deployed earlier but which he now delved into zealously. The good and the useful are to be distinguished, he says, as what is to be used and what is to be enjoyed. “We are said to enjoy a thing from which we derive pleasure while we use a thing which we refer to that from which pleasure is to be derived” (De diversis quaestionibus, 30). Vice comes from wishing to enjoy what should be used and to use what should be enjoyed. Only God is to be enjoyed, all else is to be used (30, 73). Picking up in another place the thread of interpreting scripture, Augustine says that “in certain places in scripture, a clearer explanation is given of something that a careful and devout reader might understand as well in other places where it is less clear” (53)--one of the points he will late make in trying to help readers decide what should be taken figuratively (De doctrina,

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88 Brown is good here on the personal reasons Augustine had and how his thought change him, Biography, 145-149.
III.68). God aims to nourish us with what is obvious and exercise us with what is obscure.

And on how he carried out this kind of exegesis practically, he gives a frank and detailed narrative to Alypius in a letter (29) describing successive days in which he preached and argued with his congregation and townsmen, in the end winning over the majority and silencing the rest—a fine example of how an interpreter can change his listeners’ moral and spiritual lives.

Having been elevated to the see of Hippo Regius, Augustine received and answered a series of questions from Simplicianus of Milan, who was his friend from ten years before. These two books, *Ad Simplicianum*, treat in depth of detailed scriptural questions, particularly on two areas, what Augustine had recently spent so much time of late studying, Paul’s Letter to the Romans, and on the Book of Kings. Here he asks, as he often has before and will again, whether anything can worthily be spoken of God (*Ad Simplicianum*, II.2.1).

Probably around the same time, he wrote his *Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*, taking on headfirst a work central to Manichaeism. As befitting to the tenor of Manichean thought, Augustine turns philosophical and engages across the board in arguments on everything from the nature of shadow to, unsurprisingly, how best to interpret certain passages and books in scripture. At one key moment in a discussion of nature he opposes *doctrina* to *imperitia*, here being one of the few places where his meaning is not vague or ambiguous showing how, by this point, he was using the word (*Contra epistulam Manichaei*, 19.21). At this time too, and throughout his early years as bishop, he engaged with the Donatist leaders, less in protracted treatises and more through letters (for example 33-35), attempting to arrange a debate between a Catholic ecclesiast and one of the prominent Donatists. At one point in all this, there

89 Brown, *Biography*, 207-221.
was even a proposal to nominate ten Catholics and ten Donatists who would sit down together with a copy of the scriptures and argue the disputed points, but that, as might be expected never went beyond paper (Letter 34.5). In trying to arrange a debate with the Donatist bishop of Hippo in the same letter to Eusebius, one of the bishop’s associates (34), Augustine tries to overcome the man’s reluctance: if he is concerned about Augustine’s secular learning, he need not be, for that has nothing to do with the scriptures, of which Proculeianus, as the older bishop by far, certainly has the greater mastery; Augustine is also willing, for the sake of starting a dialogue, to have a less learned man take his place.

In what was probably his third work as a bishop, De agone Christiano, a talk on good morals and the true faith given to less educated monks, Augustine admonishes his audience to seek after truth, and he does it in a way very similar to a passage in the De doctrina (II.148), drawing on the same scriptural texts:

“We ought then to long more eagerly for the clear and distinct knowledge of truth, according as we see ourselves advancing in charity, having hearts made pure by its simplicity, for it is by the eye of the soul that truth is perceived. … So that, ‘rooted and grounded in love’, we may be able ‘to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height, to know also the surpassing knowledge of the love of Christ in order that we may be filled with all the fullness of God’” (De agone christiano, 33.35).

As we grow in love, we long more eagerly for the truth that is the love of Christ, and thus we are filled with God. This strikes the same note, in almost the same words, as the De doctrina itself.

_De doctrina christiana opus imperfectum_: Motive for Writing and Audience
The date of Augustine’s composition of the first draft of the *De doctrina* seems relatively secure, between 395 and 397.\(^9^0\) He was anointed as bishop in 396 by Valerian, now an aged man, and it is likely that he worked on the book soon after this. He had finished enough of the work to send out a long excerpt, Books I-II, in 397 to Simplicianus then bishop of Milan. He probably took the work down to his stopping point in Book III around that time, possibly before he sent it out to Simplicianus, possibly after, but it would be hard to say precisely which. What his motivation was for writing it seems relatively clear in a general way, both from the circumstances of his own situation in Hippo Regius and from the account of the development of the broad pattern of his thought. What his audience was emerges from the same set of circumstances. And these two, motivation and audience, are closely related.

Augustine says an odd thing in his letter to Valerian (21.3), right after his ordination as priest: he says he needs more time to study the scriptures. This is odd because he has already shown more familiarity with the scriptures, in his works leading up to ordination, than most ordinary, even educated, Christians will ever have. Valerian gave him the time, and Augustine used it well, as his works as a priest show, everything from accounts of Christ’s message as the way toward wisdom to attempts to understand what may be the Bible’s two hardest books, *Genesis* and the *Letter to the Romans*. The works he wrote before his ordination to the priesthood as well as those after it show very clearly what he felt he needed this knowledge of the scriptures for. He needed this knowledge to refute heretics and encourage those who are in his charge. The second he mentions in his letter to his bishop, but the first is clear from the works what he actually wrote at that time: his flock probably had little need for treatises refuting

\(^9^0\) The little known is well put by James. J. O’Donnell in “*De doctrina christiana*”, *Augustine through the Ages*, 278.
Manicheans. As we have seen, Augustine deployed his knowledge of scripture in work after
work against the Manicheans and the Donatists, the two chief foes of the Catholic Church in
Africa.

But this knowledge is not merely one of proof texts to undermine his enemies. Augustine
wants genuinely to understand how best to read the scriptures. Many of his interpretations,
therefore, are extended arguments from the plain sense of scripture or, his favorite kind, from the
confused and self-contradictory things the heretics themselves say about the sacred books. He
also has more direct need of this knowledge than others priests do because his bishop, Valerian,
broke with the old custom of only allowing bishops to preach and gave this responsibility to
Augustine. This was doubtless partly because Valerian was old and his first language had been
Greek, so preaching in Latin had never been easy or effective, but it seems likely too that
Valerian was taking advantage of the great man in his midst, a man once a court rhetor and
official propagandist for the western Roman emperor.91

Augustine did not disappoint. Indeed, from Augustine’s receipt of permission to preach
down to the rolling back of the Donatist schism from its popular majority in North Africa in the
410s, a line can be drawn. The chain of events can be summarized thus: Augustine was
authorized to preach, the great former rhetor turned Christian philosopher and public intellectual,
and he began to turn out works on scripture, at least some of which were more like notes for
himself and for his close associates than anything else. Then Augustine was made bishop, and he
increased his output on scripture, particularly with questions on key books for the bishop of
Milan, with a summary for his monks, and with his own beginning work on a theory of

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91 Brown, Biography, 132-134, on Valerian’s decision and what it meant. He credits Valerius
with “the perceptiveness of the foreigner” in choosing Augustine.
interpretation and its purpose. Not long after, the Primate of Carthage too allowed his priests to preach to the people--Augustine congratulates him on how successful this has been and asks for copies of these sermons (Letter 41).\(^\text{92}\) And from there on the pressure mounts on the Donatists, who themselves, as appears from Augustine’s early letters, are afraid of public debate and probably did not allow their own priests the ability to preach in the churches. It did not help their case that many of their senior bishops had thrown their support behind an imperial usurper, Gildo, whose revolt was crushed in 398. Ramping up the pressure on the schismatics in the coming decade, Augustine changes his mind about the use of the civil authorities in settling ecclesiastical disputes and he begins to press for the civil laws against Donatism to be applied.\(^\text{93}\)

Augustine did this, he says (Letter 93.17), because he saw the results that imposing fines and legal restrictions can have: they can bring men back to the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, Augustine pens the first draft of the *De doctrina*, a work aimed at helping readers interpret the scriptures, and even though he was not to add the treatment of rhetoric for twenty-five years, nevertheless, the first two books on Christian learning, which he sent out to Simplicianus and

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\(^{92}\) These general points, that Augustine needed to produce something like the De doctrina in the context of the current ecclesiastical struggles in Africa, have been made many times by most commentators. The one who presents them most succinctly, point by point with their accompanying evidence, is Charles Kannengiesser, “Interrupted De doctrina christiana”, *Classic of Western Culture*, 3-13. I have taken a slightly different, more roundabout tack than his.

\(^{93}\) Augustine’s first view was that the civil laws should not be so used, so he says in 392 (Letter 23.6-7). By 405, he had changed his mind (Letter 88.8), but he is also clear that torture is unacceptable in such cases (Letter 91.9); fines and legal restrictions are enough. I have not used the standard sources on this point because I think they do not accurately capture what Augustine’s attitude to coercion was. Augustine neither swore off coercion nor applied it happily with the rack. His was a measured approach. For a good overview of such work, see R. A. Markus, “Christianity and Dissent in Roman North Africa: Changing Perspectives in Recent Work”, VII, *From Augustine to Gregory the Great* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1983). For a much needed legal perspective on one incident in particular, see E. Hermanowicz, “Catholic Bishops and Appeals to the Imperial Court: A legal Study of the Calama Riots in 408”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 12.4 (2004), 485-520.
certainly made available to his priests in Hippo Regius and maybe sent out to other bishops in Africa too, or at least to his old friends like Alypius, could only have raised the level of scriptural understanding for those men who would otherwise not have had access to the kinds of thoughtfulness and erudition that it evidences. Having raised the level of understanding, this work on Christian learning, incomplete as it was, would still have made them better preachers and, given its emphasis on personal moral inquiry, better servants of God.94

The best the Donatists had was Tyconius, whose little books were themselves somewhat anti-Donatist.95 No wonder Augustine was so interested in him and so eagerly waited to hear what Aurelius thought of the Liber regularum (also Letter 41). Some have supposed this was because Augustine was afraid of Donatist exegesis, that he did not finish the De doctrina on the first draft because he feared what people familiar with Tyconius might think of it and that he was able to finish it later because, by then, he was a well-regarded figure of authority, perhaps more so than Tyconius.96 It seems at least as likely, though, that he was eager to use material from it, but was wary of putting to use a book from a heretic, even one that seemed good and useful in many respects. Given the structure of the first draft of the De doctrina, it is hard to see quite

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94 This narrative and much of what follows is based on Robert Markus’s “Donatus and Donatism”, Augustine through the Ages, 284-287, together with P. Bright’s “Donatist Bishops”, Augustine through the Ages, 281-284. In the epilogue to his Biography (443-444), Brown describes how the discovery of new sermons, the Dolbeau Sermons, sheds light on the period in the early 400s when Augustine traveled about the towns of North Africa and in Carthage, preaching against the Donatists. The tide was beginning to turn against the old schismatics.

95 The best treatment of Tyconius is now K. Pollmann’s in her book Doctrina Christiana, 32-65. P. Bright argued at length, in The Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), that Tyconius’s rules were primarily to be taken in a mystical sense, one which Augustine had misunderstood. P. Frederiksen, in her article “Tyconius”, Augustine through the Ages, 853-855, is careful both to use some of Bright’s work on the mystical aspects of the rules without necessarily embracing all of her claims. This seems the best approach.

where Augustine intended to use the material from Tyconius’s *Book of Rules*. Since he does use them in the late additions, it seems likely that he would have all along, and it is certainly clear that they would have found a place broadly similar to the one they did find in the book. Tyconius’s rules relate most to finding separate, even contrary meanings and interpreting them correctly, something Augustine needed to get to at some point, particularly if African exegesis had been, as some have suggested, concerned with contrary meanings for a century and a half.97 But this is to anticipate a later discussion. The point right now is that Augustine need not have been afraid of Donatist exegesis; he may have been eager to use it, or even openly engage with it, against the actual men he argued with in letters and debates. If nothing else, one does not get the sense that the Donatist bishops acted as if they had from Tyconius a sophisticated and well-developed, defensible account of exegesis. They act, instead, as men who are completely sure of their own interpretations, many of which Tyconius himself would fault, but at the same time men who are afraid to enter into dialectical battle with the other side: they seem, in a word, like fundamentalists. It seems doubtful, therefore, that Augustine was afraid of being embarrassed in writing because he had not understood Tyconius’s very short and difficult work.98

The line from Augustine’s permission to preach down to the relative victory of the Catholic Church over the Donatists is clear: Augustine was not certainly not the *only* cause of such a change in the North African church, but he must have played in an important part. Augustine and Aurelius, the Primate of Carthage, together with the movement they began among Catholic ecclesiasts, changed the face of North African Christianity and brought largely to an

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98 Some, like P. Bright, have argued that Augustine misunderstood the *Liber regularum*. If he did, that just shows how difficult it was to understand.
end the longest schism of the Church up to that point--of course, Donatism did not end in Augustine’s day or later, probably until years after the coming of Islam, but Augustine and his friends had reduced it from the dominant form of African Christianity to a band of backward men and marginal bishoprics.\(^9\)

And in this, the *De doctrina christiana opus imperfectum*, Augustine’s first draft, seems likely to have played a role, however small. But even this wide-angle view of the history of the African Church is, in at least one way, too narrow. Augustine’s interest in scripture and the years of labor he devoted to understanding it are themselves part of a wider trend, little connected with the Donatists, throughout all of the Latin Christian world. It is enough to mention the three great Latin Fathers of the Church to see at once what that trend was: Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine.

Where this started is hard to say, and beyond my scope here, but commenting on scripture, understanding it, interpreting it, arguing about it, and defending it is the hallmark of the literary output of these three men.\(^1\) Perhaps the very need to have the sacred books translated, a need that did not exist in the Greek world, since both testaments were in Greek, made it likely that the first great generation of Latin Christian writers would devote their time to the sacred books. Or maybe it was because the Latin world could not draw on a deep, native philosophical tradition to help it answer its own questions. Many of the most well-known and

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\(^9\) Neither the Edict of Unity in 405 nor the Conference of Carthage in 411 were able to end the schism (Markus, “Donatism”, *Augustine through the Ages*, 285), but by then power, prestige, and momentum had shifted to the Catholics.

\(^1\) I have picked up here on the key points Simonetti makes, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 86-108. It is unwise to rely heavily on any one source for the analysis of such a broad trend. My goal here is simply to point out that there was one. Its character is beyond my scope. Charles Kannengiesser’s introduction to fourth and fifth century Latin exegesis, in *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 991-993, points out the Ambrose prepared the way for the prodigious work of Augustine, but the same could be said of Jerome, since he was well under way as a scholar before Ambrose was elected bishop.
influential Greek Fathers tend toward philosophy, at least in a broad way, just as the Latins tend toward scripture. Anyway, what matters here is not such speculation, but the plain facts: Jerome began early to be interested in scripture and became the (second, after Origen) most important scholar on the Bible in antiquity; Ambrose brought with him a developed understanding of Greek exegesis and deployed it in many works and sermons; and Augustine wrote philosophical works based on scripture, commentaries, doctrinal treatments drawing on scripture, and a handbook for the interpretation of the Bible, only the second one ever to be written. They were anticipated by men like Marius Victorinus in his commentaries on Paul, but for the most part these three constitute the bulk of Latin thought on the Bible down to the death of Augustine. The great Christian men of letters from Latin late antiquity were, therefore, deeply interested in all aspects of the sacred books. This was, whatever its cause, doubtless a movement of minds in that period, one where men seem interested in the same things for both the same and different reasons. To permit an oversimplification--the scriptures were a literary problem for Jerome, they were not a problem at all for Ambrose but he deployed the learning of the Greeks to treat them prominently as he saw fit, and they were a philosophical and intellectual problem for Augustine. In short, the educated Christian world in the Latin West began to deal with the scriptures in a serious and detailed way, as it never had before. Augustine was only one part of that interest among men of his time.

In this way, then, against this broad African picture and even broader snapshot of Latin Christian writing in his day, Augustine’s choice to write a book like the *De doctrina christiana* makes perfect sense. It makes sense as a work that followed from his own interest in philosophy, in texts, in scripture, in the role all of these play in the individual Christian’s life, and how such a
life can impact the life of its community, all of which are clearly evident in the broad strokes and in the details of his life and works up to this point. Even the trends in Augustine’s theological thought and in the particular details of his exegesis point toward writing a book like the *De doctrina*.\(^{101}\) When, at the beginning of the *De doctrina* (I.1), Augustine says that he has had many insights into the interpretation of scripture, he is not merely playing at rhetoric; much important of what he will come to say in the first draft has more or less direct parallels in earlier work--as I have shown above.\(^{102}\) More importantly, though, if what Augustine says in the *De doctrina* and in earlier works about moral inquiry is right, or if he at least thought it was right, then the scriptures for him must have always been far more than mere books, far more than mere sources for the knowledge which he needs in order to refute heretics or understand theological debates. From his early days as a public Christian intellectual he thought the study of those books was crucial to his own growth in wisdom, his own journey toward God. His central insight of the early program of education was right, that man can engage in a learned activity for the salvation of his soul and that of others. He was just wrong, he saw now, about the objects, goals, and methods of that study. The *De doctrina* was, then, something like the fruit of Augustine’s conversion. He revisits or reuses in the *De doctrina* many of the ideas and distinctions that he had developed in his earlier works, and this for the obvious reason that they were part of the same movement of thought on the same issues over nearly a decade. But, later, as he matures as

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\(^{101}\) Cameron makes this point cogently in his *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 215-250, especially 218-219.

\(^{102}\) Interestingly, most of the parallels I have noticed do not appear in standard editions or translations of the *De doctrina*, but articles will often make mention of one or two that serve the writer’s purposes, for example, J. Patout Burns, “Practice of Figurative Interpretation”, *Classic of Western Culture*, 189, n 21, notes a parallel between the seven stages of the journey to wisdom in Book II of *De doctrina* and that of the seven stages of the soul in *De quantitate animae*, 33.71-76. There must be many more to find.
a thinker, Augustine does not use much of what he built up in the *De doctrina*--for example, his distinction between use and enjoyment, which has provoked so much debate, never really gets used again after 397. This might mean that he later found these distinctions faulty, or at least infelicitous, for some reason. It is also worth noting that he does not substantially return after 397 to these themes, so prominent in his early work.\(^{103}\) Whatever it was that got him to write around and about education, the liberal arts, and wisdom for a decade seems largely to have subsided after his first draft of the *De doctrina*. One guess here might be that he finally arrived at something like what he wanted to arrive at, in a general way, a program of study with the right objects aimed at the right goals, and according to that program would he work for the rest of his life.\(^{104}\) Whatever difficulties we can surmise that he had with the *De doctrina*, it does seem clear that as a whole he was satisfied with what he produced; it met the need he had felt since nineteen for a clear road to follow.

And those are just the internal motivations for writing this book. The external motivations, those based in his social circumstances, are more ordinary but just as clear. As an educated layman, he had founded a monastery in Thagaste, and now as bishop he built around himself another monastery.\(^{105}\) His monks were not all learned men, however. He says in his *Retractationes* (II.3) that he wrote his *De agone christiano* for the benefit of those less learned monks, and he wrote it in a simpler style. When he says in *De doctrina* (Pref. 1) that he writes for those zealous of learning these things and with the capacities to do so, he is not again merely

\(^{103}\) The most recent editor of the *De doctrina* makes this point, Green, xiii, as does Oliver Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 26.

\(^{104}\) O'Donnell makes this point, “*De doctrina christiana*, *Augustine through the Ages*, 280.

\(^{105}\) Possidius, *Life*, 5.
deploying rhetorical artifice at the beginning of a book. He doubtless has individual men in
mind who were not able to undertake such a work, and also he likely had others in mind that he
thought would be suited to it, or at least he could remember what such men were like. So, there
probably was an audience for such a work as this, even among his own episcopal retinue. But the
*De agone christiano* was one of the three works that he sent for review to Simplicianus of Milan
in 397. So, even a book that had a clear audience in his own house, like the *De agone christiano*,
was still held to be something for a far wider audience--for simple men everywhere, Augustine
might have said. It is likely too that he had meant it all along for that far wider audience. In the
case of a simple work, so much is easy to see.

But the same is certainly true of the *De doctrina*. He wrote it at a unique time and place:
in Africa, right as the Catholic Church was opening up the preaching office to priests, partly in
an effort to combat the greatest schism of those provinces. He meant it no doubt for those priests,
as well as for those bishops involved in the same great movement--to the educated Christian
ecclesiasts of Africa, he might have said. That it was meant only for those educated in the way
late Roman men and women were is clear from the style and content. For one thing, he treats
subjects like number, logic, and eloquence (*De doctrina*, II.104-136), not as matters to be
learned, but rather as matters to be organized in his discussion of them, put in their place in the
larger scheme. He does treat of some things, for example false statements (II.118), in a way that
suggests the reader need not be familiar with the details of logic, but this might be because few
less well-educated people knew logic in those days. Generally, though, Augustine, whoever he
may have intended to read his book, was writing it in such a way that his book would be useful,
or at least be thought to be useful, to those who had an education but whose education had not
gone to the advanced stage. And this was written at a time when local debates were being set with heretics, and most often the questions involved the scriptural text in important ways. Whatever may be Augustine’s opinion of Tyconius’s *Book of Rules*, it is also clear that, in the events of Augustine’s early episcopate, he faced a group of heretics who did themselves possess, even if it did not completely support their views, the first fundamental treatise on biblical hermeneutics. That Augustine would write one to oppose it is, again, not at all surprising.

But that was in his own present need, like the *De agone christiano*, and like that work, there was another audience Augustine doubtless had in mind for the *De doctrina christiana*. He sent an excerpt for review, Books I-II, to Milan, to Simplicianus, in 397. There is no reason to think he meant the *De doctrina* chiefly for Simplicianus; the *De agone christiano* was clearly not meant for the old bishop primarily, but Augustine still included it. One scholar has suggested that Augustine wrote the *De doctrina* in response to a request made by the Primate of Carthage for a book to guide the priests of his diocese in the exercise of their new office of interpreting scripture.¹⁰⁶ This is an appealing suggestion. In one letter, Augustine tells the bishop of Carthage, Aurelius, that he is happy the bishop has begun allowing priests to preach and that they have been so successful; he asks for copies of the sermons and says that he himself does not neglect what Aurelius has asked him to do and he is still waiting to hear from Aurelius about the rules of Tyconius, about which he has asked him many times. The context, however, seems to focus more on the asking, the bidding, the ordering, and less on what exactly has been asked. Here is the Latin: “obsecramus . . . ut iubeas singulos quos volueris sermones eorum conscriptos et

emendatos mitti nobis. Nam et ego quod iussisti non negligo et de Tyocnii septem regulis vel clavibus, sicut saepe iam scripsi, cognoscere quid tibi videatur expecto” (41.2). 107 The “nam” is crucial, it seems, since that shows that Augustine asks Aurelius to send those sermons because he, Augustine, himself is not neglecting what he has been asked by Aurelius and because he, Augustine, is still waiting to hear on a matter which he has already often written to Aurelius about. Augustine seems to be reminding the bishop that he, Augustine, is not remiss in doing what he is asked and the bishop should not be either. The matter of Tyconius and his rules does not seem to be the main point, and so it seems unclear whether Augustine’s previous claim that he is not neglecting what he has been asked to do is a clear link to another book relating to the rules, namely the De doctrina christiana. So, Augustine was possibly asked by Aurelius to write something like the De doctrina but also possibly not.

Whatever else, it is clear that such a book follows from much of what Augustine was writing on about that time. This does not mean he could not have been asked, but it just suggests that, whether he was asked or not, he was likely to write such a book anyway. An additional piece of evidence on whether he wrote the book at the Primate’s bidding comes from absence: in the excerpt copy for review sent to Milan, Augustine says nothing at all about being asked by the Primate of Carthage for this work; such a request would have likely given the book that much more weight and interest, and, even if not, would have been a moment for Augustine, an internationally known Latin scholar by this point, to make connections from and for Aurelius.

Late antique letter writing was always as much about who was named in the letter, and who on

107 The “conscriptos” seems to mean simply “written down” or “written out”. Lewis and Short gives “write down, compose” as the secondary meaning of “conscribere”, after “enroll”, as in “patres conscripti”, but also “draw up” or “delineate, sketch”, so it might perhaps mean something like “jotted down” or “as they were noted down”.

the other end knew whom, as it was about the content of the letter; for the actual business, they sent brief cover notes.\footnote{Elizabeth Clark makes much of this in her \textit{The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).} It seems improbable that Augustine would have left off mentioning the Primate of Africa, if that Primate had requested that the book be written. This is also true of how Augustine composed other works: he never seems to have been reticent about whom he was writing a work for; the fact that he says nothing at all about anyone in the \textit{De doctrina} itself suggests he did not have a particular commission, as it were, to write the book. The probability of these two points, both his lack of mention of it to Simplicianus and his lack of mention of anyone in the \textit{De doctrina} itself, combined with the evidence of Augustine’s life and development up to that point suggest Aurelius probably had not asked Augustine to write the \textit{De doctrina}. It is less neat to suppose that Augustine wrote the book on his own initiative, but, finally, more compelling as something he would do; Augustine’s works are rarely tidy. But, even if he had been asked to compose it, the point I wish to make here is that this would serve to confirm that his audience for this book was partly an audience of learned ecclesiasts. This point is more essential than whether the young bishop took the initiative in beginning to write a book that can only have been regarded for a long time as forthcoming.

And that he had such an audience of learned men is confirmed elsewhere. In several of his letters, Augustine carries on a warm correspondence with another ecclesiastical great of his day, Paulinus of Nola (Letters 24, 25, 27, 30, 31, and 42). The two began writing to each other before Augustine was bishop. Paulinus sent the first letter, encouraged on by Alypius, who, Paulinus says, had given him copies of all of Augustine’s works up to that point, sometime in 394. Augustine also carried on a sometimes-frustrating correspondence with Jerome, from 394
on. This shows what hardly needed showing, that Augustine was a well-connected and famous man, whose works others wished to read and did read.

Augustine would certainly have known this. His works, whatever their original occasion may have been, were usually written for a large and sophisticated audience, first in time in Milan, later in Africa too, and at length in all the places where Latin was read—Augustine would not have presumed to say this; regardless, it is true. As I will detail shortly and have mentioned many times already, Augustine even sent a review excerpt from his work on Christian learning to Simplicianus of Milan and asked him to make any corrections and provide any feedback that he felt was necessary. Augustine does not do this often. Augustine, therefore, wrote for an audience beyond Africa, certainly in a major treatise like this. It was major since Augustine had come to think of scriptural interpretation as at the heart of the Christian life and certainly among the core duties of Christ’s ordained ministers; the account of his thought above has shown this. This audience abroad was, as at other times, an educated audience, even if the book was meant, in its own way, to help organize and improve the reader’s education, to solidify it in Christian form. Its chief audience, then, after those for whom Augustine may have meant it in Africa, was the learned ecclesiastics of his own status and education, abroad, men like Jerome, Paulinus of Nola, Simplicianus of Milan, all of whom he corresponded with about this time, as well as others like Jerome’s former friend Rufinus and his circle, the Popes and their retinues, and the great western bishops.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Clark’s work *The Origenist Controversy* gives the best sense for what such a learned audience was like, how such people communicated among themselves, and what kinds of difficulties they involved themselves in. Robert Kaster’s *The Guardians of Language* contains a detailed prosopography of late ancient grammarians and rhetoricians, many of whom were Christian. Specifically related to the city of Rome, Jörg Rupke’s *Fasti Sacerdotum: A*
Another point that confirms the book’s audience was not only the young less well-educated clergy, but also the great learned men of his time is the systematic structure of the first draft. For a textbook aimed at young, less well-educated monks, such a nested structure built on analogies of love is unnecessary, indeed might even be confusing. It is the learned who will appreciate this, and not just that, but it is the learned who will expect this kind of thing in a work by an important Latin thinker at the height of his powers in defense of the Church. In fact, Augustine has given the learned precisely what they were trained to want: a balanced systematic structure, one that squares as well with rhetorical principles as any of the great Latin treatises, but also one that communicates the central teaching of scripture and that organizes all learning, subtly, under that single teaching, a superb example of content translated into form. This structure would likely have been lost on the ordinary monk in Augustine’s monastery or in Carthage, partially educated, even if such a man could learn well from Augustine’s book how to go about interpreting the Bible. Appreciating the balanced structure of the work is not essential to being able to learn from it about biblical interpretation. If such structure was lost on the more ordinary men, it would not have been lost on Jerome.

His defensive preface to the work too can give some hint about the audience Augustine had in mind for the first draft.\(^{110}\) Mainly, in the preface he does two things. First, he discusses

\(^{110}\) The preface was part of the first draft and was not added later, since it is found in the Saltykov-Ščedrin Codex. There, interestingly, it seems to be treated as part of Book I and not on
potential objections to his work. Second, in the course of carrying out the first, he makes important observations about the role human beings play in teaching one another. Of his detractors, he lists three potential kinds: those who do not understand the rules he gives, those who understand them but cannot employ them for a good result, and those who already interpret the scriptures well or at least think they do (Pref. 2). I have already suggested that his audience consisted of these main parts: the less well educated members of the African clergy, learned ecclesiasts abroad, and, implicitly, those heretics with whom he wished his clergy and others to struggle. The first two kinds of detractors are clearly from among his own people, particularly from among those less educated readers who could not follow his arguments and style very well; some cannot follow him at all, others cannot follow him very well. Anticipating such detractors implies, of course, that the book will be explaining things that are hard to understand, which makes sense given that Augustine himself is soon to call the work of this book “an arduous task” (I.1). But it may seem odd to us that less well-educated men might respond in such a way to the book of a learned bishop. It is worth noting that late ancient, half-educated Christians are known for being a sometimes very narrow and vindictive lot, who take cudgels into the streets when some doctrine or teaching does not conform to what they have always heard. Augustine himself

its own, although this is not unheard of, as, for example, what might best be called the preface of De Trinitate is not separate but part of the text at I.1. There has been a minor debate about whether the preface was part of Augustine’s first draft of the De doctrina, but its existence as part of the Saltykov-Ščedrin Codex seems to settle the matter. Duckrow, for example, contended that Augustine wrote this preface in the late 420s, in the second phase of writing On Christian Learning, only after word had come to him, through a source like Cassian (Institutione coenobiorum V.33), of the views of certain charismatics who believed one who to rely solely on the spirit for inspiration in interpreting the scriptures. (U. Duchrow, "Zum Prolog von Augustinus De doctrina christiana", Vigiliae Christianae 17 (1963), 163-72) As R. Green (De doctrina christiana, xiv) points out, though, the views Augustine characterizes do not closely resemble the views of those Cassian refers to, which one would have expected if that were indeed their source.
cites an example of this to Jerome in 403 (Letter 71.5). A bishop had recently adopted Jerome’s translation of the Book of Jonah and, when he came upon a certain word that Jerome’s version had translated very differently from the Greek, his congregation, who knew most of the old translation by heart, began to shout and clamor over the difference, “denouncing the translation as false”, and the bishop was forced to emend the book so as, Augustine says, “not to be left without a congregation—a calamity he very narrowly escaped”. These were, presumably, not primarily educated people. Beyond the tradition-locked mindset of most late antique men and women, North Africans were alleged to be particularly proud and stubborn. One has the sense, at this time as at others, that the less educated a person was the more likely he or she was to be certain of how things should be, although the learned themselves showed little lack of certainty. Augustine was proposing what amounted to a new, systematic way of reading the scriptures aimed at growing in wisdom (which always means, as he makes clear, questioning and correcting oneself), and he was proposing such a system, not only to the well educated of great cities, but for the benefit of men with relatively poor education, men set in their traditions and in what they perceived to be their knowledge of the scriptures and the truth faith, men who were themselves known for being some of the most passionate and stubborn men in a passionate and stubborn time. Lest one think that those in clerical orders would be more willing to accept the lead and direction of their bishop, Augustine recounts in a letter (35) to the Donatist Eusebius from 396 about a certain subdeacon who, deprived of “immoral access” to the nuns by rules of conduct, treated the ecclesiastical regulations with contempt, possibly even violating them again,

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111 Brown discusses this, Biography, 7-15, 30-32, among other places. For a detailed look at the African church, W. C. Frend’s The Donatist Church (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958) is still valuable.
and was the deprived of his orders. At which point, he became a Donatist, was rebaptized, and, with some nuns he had taken with him, joined the band of Circumcellions and homeless women. These Circumcellions were Donatist extremists who went about the highways committing robbery, murder, and sacrilege, all for the name of Christianity and in, they said, the hope of a martyr’s death at the hands of the Catholic authorities. Joining this former member of the Catholic clergy to live in the highways and byways, some of the nuns themselves declined marriage, it was said, so that they could live among the Circumcellions without restraint (35.2). A dramatic instance, of course, but it illustrates the point. These were the kind of men Augustine was writing the De doctrina christiana for, so he had reason to suppose they might object.

And the three kinds of detractors Augustine anticipates actually could come from any class of his readers: the uneducated were no less certain than the educated elite that their own views were the right ones. That the educated themselves needed to be handled with caution, Augustine noted later in his De catechizandis rudibus (8.12). The instructor should assume that such have done a great deal of reading and are familiar with most doctrinal matters already. The instructor should mention things briefly to see whether the learned man already knows about it, and if the man does not know of something, the instructor should go over it only with a measure of authority comparable to the learned man’s measure of humility in coming to be baptized. The situation is even more difficult to handle in the case of grammarians and orators who come for baptism (9.13). These will appear to themselves to be superior to other men, and the instructor must make clear that they are to submit humbly to the Christian faith, not disdaining those who

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prefer to commit a solecism rather than a sin, nor despising holy scripture because it expresses itself in a manner that is not puffed up as they are used to--all of which Augustine knew too well.

Among those who already know or think they know how to interpret the scriptures, Augustine considers, not those who learned such a skill themselves, but those who received or think they have received some kind of divine gift that allows them to understand these books without studying (Pref. 4). He mentions the case of Anthony of the Desert who learned the scriptures by heart as they were read in church and of a certain slave who recently prayed for and received the gift of being able to read without ever having studied. These, doubtful they may be, are the kinds of gifts at least that he has in mind. And these are also precisely the gifts that the prophet Mani claimed for himself and that his followers implicitly claimed for themselves. In his treatise *Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*, which he completed right before he began work on the *De doctrina*, Augustine asks where Mani learned the absurd things he claims to know about the foundation of the world.

“If he replies that they were revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, and that his mind was divinely enlightened that he might know them to be certain and evident, he himself points to the distinction between knowing and believing. The knowledge is his to whom these things are made fully known as proved; but in the case of those who only hear his account of these things, there is no knowledge imparted, but only a believing acquiescence required” (14.18).

The distinction Augustine makes here exactly parallels that which he makes a little later in the preface to the *De doctrina*, between learning to interpret and learning someone else’s interpretation (Pref. 7). He does not say it this way in the *De doctrina*, but the one who learns to interpret acquires knowledge of the text when he interprets it, whereas the one who merely learns someone else’s interpretation only comes to believe what he is told.
It would not be quite right to say that Augustine wrote his preface chiefly against the Manicheans and their claims. That would leave aside the evidence of the other kinds of readers he expected and the objections he anticipated from them. It would also leave aside the evidence from his works of other similar prefaces, in *De Trinitate*, for example. There is, in fact, no separate section called a preface to that work, but in his first chapter of Book I of *De Trinitate*, Augustine outlines three different types of detractors to that work, those who imagine God to be corporeal, those who imagine God to be like the human soul, and those who make neither mistake but cling to what are false views about the divine nature (I.1). As in *De doctrina*, Augustine proceeds to discuss each type of error in turn; his emphasis in *De Trinitate* is less on the kinds of objections each would make to his current work and more on the kinds of mistakes each would make in reading the scriptures or undertaking such a work. But he does remark on the kinds of objections all might raise: they might think that the things in this book that they do not understand are actually meant to be derogatory to them; or that they do not get the explanation of some point of theology that they were looking for and so they believe that Augustine is acting either cunningly to conceal his ignorance or maliciously because he is jealous of their knowledge (I.1.3). What this shows is that Augustine does not necessarily have some particular class of readers in his mind when he makes observations like this about his potential detractors. The best that such evidence can do is confirm for us what we might otherwise have inferred about what audiences he actually did have in mind.

One final point emerges from the effect such a preface would have likely had on most readers. The majority of his readers, he surely knew, would have been Catholics, most likely clergy, or at least highly educated laymen. His purpose in making the book was to equip these
readers to undertake the study of scripture for the sake of their own progress toward wisdom. As such, one purpose he surely had in the preface was to give those readers answers to the objections that others might raise against his project and against what his readers were to learn from his book. An interlocutor might object to a man who claims to have learned principles for the interpretation of scripture on one or the other of the grounds Augustine discusses here. The reader will be better prepared to answer any such concerns because Augustine has dealt with them himself in the preface—a point which Augustine himself makes at the outset (Pref. 1).

Readers would read the *De doctrina christiana* for different reasons. Simplicianus might read it less for what it says about individual components of the knowledge the exegete needs and more because of the vision it gives of such knowledge and the place it assigns that knowledge on the sevenfold path to wisdom; and such a learned man could also keep the book in mind as something to recommend to other men, ones who either had the right beginning of an education and could profit from such a treatment, or who were very well-educated and were the sort interested in projects like this or, possibly, the sort who could stand to read the book for what it might teach about topics like the proper place of erudition in a Christian life, as a remedy for pride, for example. Another man, less well-placed and less well-educated, might read it for help in deepening his education in a Christian style oriented toward Christian goals, or because it was given to him by someone he trusted or at least someone he had to listen to. It is often said in praise of modern books that they can benefit both the beginner and the advanced; the *De doctrina christiana* is such a book, even only in its first draft.

Such then was broadly the audience Augustine had in mind in 396-397 for his work on Christian learning, which ended up being only his first draft. Briefly, his intended audience was
this: first, the less well-educated clergy and young men in training for orders of three broad areas: those in Hippo Regius, those in the Catholic sees of North Africa, specifically those who would soon be preaching from the pulpits, and those in sees and monasteries throughout the west; second, the great Christian men of learning throughout the Latin world, of whom there were many in the last decade of the fourth century. These, in this order, are those for whom Augustine wrote the first draft: his intended audience.

DE DOCTRINA XPIANA EPISCOPI AUGUSTINI

But what was his actual audience? Who actually read the work? For one part of the first draft, the preface and Books I-II, there is direct physical evidence. In 1959, William Green discovered, in the library in St. Petersburg, the oldest known manuscript of a work of Augustine, the Saltykov-Śchedrin Codex. He studied this manuscript in preparation for his edition of the De doctrina itself. Green reasoned that this MS must have been produced before 426, since it is the only incomplete text of the De doctrina known and it would make no sense for someone with the complete edition, available after 426, to put together an incomplete one. Green supposed that the codex had been produced in Hippo Regius, which he asserted because the book contained the first four works Augustine wrote as bishop in their chronological order and it seemed reasonable to him that such an accurate list would only be available at Hippo.

113 He published his findings in “A Fourth Century Manuscript of St. Augustine?”, Revue Bénédictine, 69 (1959), 191-197.
114 For a brief summary of the current consensus on this MS, see Kenneth Steinhauser, “Manuscripts”, Augustine through the Ages, 527.
115 Augustinus, De doctrina christiana, edited by W. Green, CSEL 89, 80.
codex was studied in detail by Almut Mutzenbecher, who made two related suggestions: first, the work was too deficient textually to have been produced in Hippo; and, second, it may have been copied at Carthage, since there is known to have been a scriptorium in Carthage used by men like Paulinus of Nola as he mentions in a letter to Augustine (Letter 24.3).\textsuperscript{116} Thirty years after Mutzenbecher, Kenneth Steinhauser, building on her work, put together a plausible explanation for who ordered the codex and for what purpose.\textsuperscript{117}

Briefly put, Augustine himself ordered the codex made as a gift for his old friend Simplicianus on the occasion of his own ordination as bishop. To show this, I construct a timeline and then describe relevant details of the manuscript itself.\textsuperscript{118} While Augustine was still a priest, Simplicianus had sent him a series of questions on Paul’s Letter to the Romans and on the books of Kings. This work is now lost, but Augustine was clearly happy to respond to it, as he says in the letter (37) to Simplicianus in which he encloses his own answers, the treatise \textit{De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum}. This work of Augustine’s, we know from the \textit{Retractationes} (II.1), was the first he wrote as a newly ordained bishop. Before he could finish and send \textit{De diversis quaestionibus} to Simplicianus, the old bishop sent Augustine another letter in which he congratulates the young man on being raised to the episcopate. Augustine says in his letter (37) that he received Simplicianus’s letter of congratulations with great joy. Steinhauser supposes that Augustine wrote \textit{Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti, De agone christiano}, and the first draft of \textit{De doctrina christiana} in the winter of 397, after having finished

\textsuperscript{117} Kenneth Steinhauser, “Codex Leningradensis Q.v.I.3: Some Unresolved Problems”, \textit{Classis of Western Culture}, 33-43.
\textsuperscript{118} For the most part, unless otherwise noted, I follow Steinhauser. He does not correct Martin, Green, or Mutzenbecher so much as add to what they have established.
or while still working on *De diversis quaestionibus*. Augustine, he says, would presumably have sent the *De diversis quaestionibus* along to Simplicianus as soon as it was finished, but if he did not manage to finish it until September 397 or thereafter, it would not have been able to reach Simplicianus before the following April.\(^{119}\) This would have allowed him time to write and, therefore, to include his other works as a bishop up to the time when he sent the actual book of his answers off to Simplicianus. Once spring came, Augustine wrote his letter (37) to Simplicianus and ordered it to be written in first in the manuscript.

Which brings us to the relevant details of the manuscript. It is a large edition with a title page with red border decorations.\(^{120}\) The title page has only these words in large *capitalis rustica*:

\[
\text{AVRELI\textsc{<I>}} \quad \text{AVGVSTINI} \\
\text{AD INTERROGATA - SIMPLICIANI}
\]

That this is the title of the codex itself can be seen by reference to the titles of the works within it, all of which are only written out in one column. Next comes Augustine’s letter (37) to Simplicianus, without a greeting at its beginning; the greeting is most likely implied in the title of the codex.\(^{121}\) Following this are the first four works that Augustine wrote as a bishop, given in the order in which he says he wrote them. The picture that emerges from the order of events and from the description of the codex is that of a gift edition of Augustine’s first works as bishop ordered up for Simplicianus, possibly on the occasion of Augustine’s ordination.\(^{122}\) The codex

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\(^{119}\) Steinhauser, “Codex Leningradensis”, 38.

\(^{120}\) See the description and relevant details at Mutzenbecher, “Codex Leningrad”, 410-426.

\(^{121}\) Steinhauser spends a paragraph arguing for this at “Codex Leningradensis”, 41.

\(^{122}\) This is Steinhauser’s main suggestion, and it is an appealing one, but I do not need to commit myself to anything more than that Simplicianus had asked Augustine for answers to some
was likely produced at Carthage, and some evidence indicates the existence of a lost archetype. Also, the venerable paleographer B. Bischoff argued on the ground of paleographical evidence alone that there was a substantial Christian book trade centered at Carthage, so this seems the most likely origin for the codex.

Steinhauser’s account, then, incorporates all the distinctive features of the manuscript, as well as of the correspondence between Augustine and Simplicianus. It was intended as a gift for the aged bishop, containing both Augustine’s answers to his questions and the treatise he had written that winter. Since scholars have suggested that the MS’s first layer of corrections and marginalia originate in northern Italy, the *Aurelii Augustini interrogata Simpliciani* clearly reached its intended audience. What Simplicianus may have done with the *De doctrina christiana* is not known to us. Given how much he valued Augustine’s friendship and the new bishop’s considerable intellectual and literary skills, it is likely that he read it and either had it copied for those he thought might be interested or at least made it available to those who might wish to have it copied.

We have seen that Augustine wrote for a large and diverse audience, and we have seen that he may well have written the first draft of the *De doctrina* in the first winter of his episcopate. We can be fairly certain that he sent the excerpt for review to Simplicianus in Milan, and so we know who at least part of his audience was. The Saltykov-Ščedrin Codex confirms questions and Augustine responded with his answers and decided to include all the works he had written as bishop up to that point.

123 Steinhauser (“Codex Leningradensis”, 40) points out that this might account for the deficiency of the text. Presumably, a copy was made from Hippo, the lost archetype, and copied in Carthage before being sent on to Milan.


125 Steinhauser, “Codex Leningradensis”, 41.
part of the picture of that audience I have drawn, that Augustine at least intended his work to be read by some learned ecclesiasts of his day—which was, of course, nearly certain before. But knowing this also helps confirm the broader picture I have drawn of those audiences.

Which *De doctrina christiana*?

I return to the question of who actually read the *De doctrina*’s first draft. Doubtless, Augustine’s own monks read or at least could read the whole of the first draft in his library. Maybe too that version of the text leaked out and was copied in other parts of Africa, as happened with *De trinitate* (*Retractationes*, II.15.1), and also with *De immortalitate animae* (*Retractationes*, I.5.1). That is possible, but there is not much in the way of evidence for it, though: he says nothing about it getting out in the *Retractationes*. It is also unlikely that he would have actively circulated a work which ended abruptly, in mid-thought, as others have observed.\(^\text{126}\) So, maybe a few monks or friends read the first draft in its entirety, but the first full draft was not widely read.

But, of course, the first full draft was not the only text of the *De doctrina* in the late 390s. Another text had been sent out to a scriptorium in Carthage and then on to Milan. So, our next question must be: who read the excerpt for review, the text represented by the Saltykov-Ščedrin *Codex*?\(^\text{127}\)

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\(^\text{127}\) I say “represented” because there was almost certainly an archetype and very likely there were copies made.
Stepping back, one clue is found in precisely what Augustine does say in the *Retractationes*. He seems actually surprised to find the *De doctrina* incomplete: “The books on Christian learning, when I discovered them incomplete, I preferred to complete them rather than to pass on to the revision of other works” (II.4.1)--as if he had not quite remembered that they were as yet unfinished. This comment seems to imply that the work had not got around in an obviously incomplete form, that is, as the full first draft; if it had, he would presumably have been annoyed, as he was in the other cases when this happened, and would have mentioned this. His first sentence begins simply “the books on Christian learning”, and this makes it sound as if the books are well known, or at least well known by name to him and to his readers. He says nothing about them in the way of context, as he does with so many other works, which also might imply that they were more familiar, needing less of an introduction. Also, unlike other works, he says he preferred to finish these rather than to move on and leave them incomplete. The broad implication here seems to be that these were not just another set of old drafts that he found incomplete, but that they were known in some form. Of course, it is clear that they *were* known in some places in some form, at least in Milan, and probably in Africa. It also seems clear that Augustine had not looked at his first draft in a while. If another edition of his work was published, the fact that he had not looked at the first draft in a while might tell us that he was, in the meantime, more or less satisfied with the published edition. He was satisfied enough with one published version of the work that we know of, namely the one he sent to Simplicianus. Perhaps, then, that very excerpt for review, Books I-II, was itself the *De doctrina christiana* for the thirty years between the first draft and the later additions. Augustine himself sent out that excerpt for review, this became a published version--whether he wanted it to be or not I will
discuss momentarily--and that version made it easier for him to leave the full first draft incomplete, since he had now written a good work on Christian learning that covered many important topics and was certainly a help to those looking for guidance.

And what was covered in his excerpt for review, his “first edition”, was also material Augustine had written about before, in *De ordine* and in many other works, namely the kind of education a man seeking wisdom needs, and so this was what contemporary readers would have expected to hear from Augustine, of late a *magister* and *rhetor*, now elected bishop of Hippo; this is especially true of the Christian intellectual circles of Milan where he had published so much of his earlier, now surpassed work. This first edition would likely have been perceived as a treatment of education primarily, like his earlier work. Augustine says in a letter in 412 (143.2-3) that he had considered for a while making a book of reconsiderations of much of his earlier work. Perhaps the *De doctrina*, sent to Milan, was a part of that same movement of his mind: it certainly would have set right any errors readers had seen or been tripped up by in Augustine’s more immature work. In 397, it would perhaps have also been more politic for him to publish the book in this form, as only Books I-II, because he was doubtless seen as an expert on education, on building up through the philosophy of the ancients to the religion of Christ. It is likely he would not yet have been perceived as a master exegete, the kind of exegete one would expect to write a book giving guidance on interpretation, which does not seem to be properly a young man’s book--Jerome asks him, in 402, not to criticize the work of a senior biblical scholar

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128 This is confirmed too by the state of scholarship up to this point. One of the standard views of the *De doctrina* is that it is a treatise on Christian education. These first two books of the text do have enough of an inner consistency that some scholars seem to have read them as normative for the whole of the work. This supports the view that these two books make a decent, standalone first edition of the *De doctrina*. 

as a young man often criticizes his elders (among Augustine’s letters as Letter 68.2). What all this means is that most likely his first readers read the excerpt for review (Books I-II), which itself became the first edition of the work; it was, then, this first edition that was read during most of his lifetime, from 397-427.\textsuperscript{129}

So, we have seen that few would have read the first draft, but we have also seen that there was a first published edition of the work. We can then ask what can be said about the actual readership of that first edition. To this question, there are only general answers, given the state of our evidence. Possidius (\textit{Life}, 7) tells us that Augustine’s works circulated widely around Africa, so this one probably did too. Based on the above account of his motives for writing and his intended audience, it makes sense that Augustine would have done something to use his so carefully written text to meet the needs he clearly had in Africa.

Beyond that, the best that can be said here is that he probably was read by the sorts of people he intended himself to be read by. But it is generally true that those of a lower education or status would have had considerably more incentive to read and engage with this text. Jerome, for example, had little need for it, at least he would certainly have thought so, and Simplicianus would have probably found it more useful for how he could employ it given his position than for anything that it directly taught him, or at least he would have had long practice doing what the book teaches and so would have had less need of a detailed study of it than others had. Paulinus

\textsuperscript{129} This text was most likely made from Augustine’s manuscript of the \textit{De doctrina} up to III.78, but he only had the scribe copy out the first two books to be sent to Simplicianus. It is also possible that at the time of the copying of the Saltykov-Ščedrin Codex Augustine had only written up to the end of Book II. One way to go further in the investigation of these two possibilities would be to make an extended examination of the manuscript itself. That would enable one to make a judgment on questions relating to the deficiency of the text and thus to its relationship to Augustine’s original. This might lend even small bits of evidence relevant to timeline of its composition.
too would certainly have found it useful for educating others, although perhaps he would have found a good deal of substance in it for himself too. It is doubtless that these other men would have learned something from the *De doctrina*, but it is also true that their juniors would have been able to learn more and would have found the book more helpful, particularly those African priests who were now being asked to interpret the scriptures and preach regularly. This fact will turn out to be one that Augustine probably recognized and may have played a role in his change of approach in his late additions to the work. What the first draft of the *De doctrina* appears to be, finally, is a treatise explaining fundamental and important matters in a masterful way, a way that must have met with the approval of the great, who read it less in order to learn and more in order to see how Augustine thought others should learn. To those in his monastery, see, and province who had need of such a work Augustine wrote something to supply their needs, but he did so in a way that might not have been the most ideal for teaching the kind of men who read it in order to learn from it. Shortly, I will argue that evidence for this can be found in how Augustine himself changed his approach in his late additions: no more did he build a balanced structure on subtle moral points; instead, he gave handy rules and made distinctions simply and clearly, and, above all, he would make it a point to be particularly useful to the least of his readers.

Why the Interruption?

Even if the excerpt for review became the first edition of the *De doctrina*, still at least two questions arise. First, is that what Augustine intended, or was it simply that circumstances
conspired to make it so? Second, and more fundamentally, why did Augustine stop writing on the *De doctrina* to begin with? Why leave the first draft incomplete? The first question can best be asked after the second has been answered, so I will start with the second. Several explanations have been offered of why he stopped work on the *De doctrina*. It has been suggested that he got too interested in the *Confessions*, or that he was too busy with other matters and forgot about it.\(^{130}\) Still others have said, citing a letter (38, the very next letter after that to Simplicianus), that around this time he became very ill, was confined to his bed, and this stopped his work for the moment, and then, when he returned to good health, the press of business moved his mind along to other projects.\(^{131}\) Still others have said that he felt he could not publish the book because it would be too vulnerable to attack from Donatists, who themselves possessed a well-developed account of exegesis, and that, thus, Tyconius’s prestige was such that Augustine could not risk coming out against him while still a young bishop.\(^{132}\)

The first two explanations are matter of fact and straightforward, but for all that they seem relatively weak. Augustine worked on *De trinitate* and *De civitate dei* over many years, so there is no reason to think he would have simply forgotten about his work on scriptural exegesis under nearly any circumstances, whether they be too much interest in other projects or too much other business generally. It is certainly true that such circumstances have a role to play, but it does not seem that Augustine would thus have been kept from finishing a book that he wanted to

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\(^{130}\) Kannengiesser ("Interrupted *De doctrina christiana*", 5) mentions these and other critics in a general way.

\(^{131}\) This is Steinhauser’s view, “Codex Leningradensis”, 38.

\(^{132}\) This is the suggestion of Kannengeisser, “Interrupted *De doctrina christiana*”, 6-9. It is also implied in Robert Kugler’s “Tyconius’s Mystic Rules and the Rules of Augustinian”, *Augustine and the Bible*, edited and translated by Pamela Bright (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 129-148.
finish. The question is not whether circumstances affected him, since clearly they did. The question is rather what explanation the circumstances fit into best. The third explanation is just a variant of these two, except that it draws on the fact of his illness about that time. Illness need not have any more power to distract him from writing than anything else; indeed, one wonders whether he might not actually have got more writing done when he was ill; it did not stop him from writing letters, for example, his letter 38, in which he says that he can neither walk nor stand nor sit from the pain of a boil; he could only lie in his bed and write, at least a little.

The fourth explanation I have made mention of above but now return to. Tyconius does not seem to have been a large opposing figure for him to contend with, and, even if he had been, that would not likely have stopped Augustine from writing against him; in fact, given his temperament, it probably would have made Augustine more likely to write against him quickly and thoroughly and have it published, since such an effort would have played directly into the large scale effort of the Catholic Church in Africa at the time, in which Augustine played a key role. As it was, though, Tyconius seems not to have been of interest to the major Donatist figures that Augustine was arguing with at this time. The person who actually seems most interested in Tyconius was Augustine himself. Tyconius has been posited as both the reason why Augustine would stop writing the *De doctrina* and also the reason why he would start writing it in the first place. My suggestion is that Tyconius was less important both as a reason for writing and as a reason for breaking off work than was Augustine’s own social, ecclesiastical, and intellectual circumstances. Furthermore, it seems somewhat hard to flesh out exactly what it would entail for Augustine to break off work on the *De doctrina* because of a concern for a work that he had not yet understood well. We know that he sent out part of the *De doctrina* at this time, so he cannot
have been too concerned about what the Donatists armed with Tyconius might think. Also, the chain of events would have to be somewhat odd, it seems: Augustine knows about Tyconius’s rules, but begins writing the De doctrina anyway; he sends out Books I-II for review and publication; then he reached a place where he was no longer satisfied with what he was writing for some reason, presumably because he had not understood how best to integrate or respond to Tyconius. One assumption that might possibly underlie the suggestion that Augustine stopped working because of troubles with Tyconius is that Augustine intended all along to introduce Tyconius’s rules in the very place where he does introduce them. This would make those rules practically the next thing to write on in Augustine’s projected table of contents of the De doctrina. So, naturally, since he had not yet understood and integrated them into his own hermeneutics, he stopped work until he could. But my outline of the De doctrina in Chapter 2 seems to indicate that Augustine may originally have intended to do something more systematic in the last third of Book III, or at any rate I have given good evidence to suppose that what Augustine wrote in the 420s was written with a different approach than the one he had in the 390s. If one no longer assumes that Augustine would have treated Tyconius in the 390s in the same place and in the same way he did treat him in the 420s, which does not seem entirely unreasonable, then the chief piece of evidence that Augustine stopped work on the De doctrina because of worries about Tyconius recedes into the background. I am frankly somewhat hesitant to disagree with Kannengiesser, but it does seem to me that my analysis of the text itself, its structure, and its historical circumstances lead me away from thinking that Augustine broke off work because of concerns about Tyconius.
What needs to be explained is simply this: Why did Augustine stop writing his books on Christian learning at III.78? Most of the accounts mentioned above end up giving a reason for why he stopped work at all, but they rarely give a reason for why he stopped working where he did. And maybe it is not just that he stopped but *where he stopped*, at III.78, that need explaining. Other interpreters seem to have assumed that *where* he stopped had little to do with *why* he stopped. This is not necessarily so. The clearest clue that it is not so is the details of Augustine’s system and his change of approach, as I laid both out in Chapter 2. The fact that Augustine changes, quite dramatically, his method and attitude to the subjects of the book, as well as the audience for whom he intends it, which I will argue for in detail later, suggests that he found something wanting in the original approach and method. Of course, it may be that he only found the book wanting from the perspective of thirty years later. By that point, he clearly saw what he took to be reasons to change his method in the late additions to the text, but he did not at that time see good reasons to rewrite the earlier portions of the text. The most plausible explanation for this is that whatever he may have found wanting in the *De doctrina* as an old man was something he did not consider by then to be a very important matter. The possibility that emerges here, then, is that Augustine changed his mind about something, between 397 and 427, such that, as a young man, he thought it was so important that he needed to stop work on the *De doctrina* for the time being, and that, as an old man, he no longer considered it worth bothering about.

One thing we can surmise he changed his mind on is, again, the structure and method of the *De doctrina christiana* itself, and more generally on how important systematic structures are. Briefly put, as a young man, he seems to have favored system, although by no means
exclusively, and, as an old man, he seems to have been uninterested in it. This implies that if there were a difficulty with the system and structure of the *De doctrina* itself, as he was building it up in 396 and 397, he might well have cared enough about it at the time to stop work in order to rethink and possibly rewrite, but he probably would not have cared about it much thirty years later when he set himself to finish the text. If there were a problem with his system, that would also matter considerably more to one of the kinds of men Augustine thought himself writing for in the mid-390s, learned ecclesiasts like Jerome and Paulinus, arguably the audience then uppermost in Augustine’s mind. It would matter considerably less to the kind of man he took himself to be writing for at the end of his life, less learned men like Possidius. His later emphasis on primarily being helpful to his readers, which I suggested above in Chapter 2, would not necessitate a well-balanced, subtle system.

And, through his account of his works in the *Retractationes*, Augustine has shown that he is willing to leave off writing a book because he was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with it and then, ultimately, decide that something is wrong either with what he has done so far or with his ability to carry the work forward. Unfortunately, there is not much evidence about why he usually stops work on individual books or projects. Some things can be inferred from the general pattern of his thought. For example, he lost interest in completing the books on each of the liberal arts because he began to see that his original project was misconceived. He does mention one work whose subject matter he changed as he wrote it, and that was the *De ordine*. He changed the treatment as he was writing, or he changed the topic of discussion, if this is anything like a record of one, because his students could not understand the material (I.3.1). This does not seem to have been anything like his concerns about the *De doctrina*. Beyond that, researches on
these points are best to confine themselves to statements of fact. He did not finish his
*Soliloquies*, nor his accounts of the various arts, nor his first commentary on the literal sense of
Genesis, nor his treatise on Christian learning, nor his early attempt at an exposition of Paul’s
Letter to the Romans. He provides no details at all about why he stopped writing the *Soliloquies*
or the books on the liberal arts or the *De doctrina*. Only on his first attempt at a literal
commentary on Genesis and on his first attempt at a commentary on Romans does he have
anything at all to say about why he stopped. In both cases the reason is the same: the difficulty of
the task (*Retractationes* I.18 and I.25)—and also in both cases, he returns to the task and pens
longer, more satisfactory treatments. The two books that he leaves off writing and ends up
leaving incomplete, even after his effort of revising his works, are both then ones whose topics
he returned to in important other work, for example, his twelve book *De Genesi ad litteram*.
When he was rereading his works in the library at Hippo and came upon the *De doctrina*
unfinished, it would have at first been classed in his mind with all his other unfinished works, but
once he decided to finish it, in a way, it would have been classified in his mind with those
unfinished works that he returned to in another form. This is particularly true since, as I have
shown, he does in fact return to the *De doctrina* with a method and audience in mind different
from when he left it. Unlike the others, though, he thought this one was good enough as it was to
complete it, or at least he thought that it needed completing and it would be better to finish it off
rather than to leave it incomplete, presumably for the sake of the same people for whom he was
writing his *Retractationes*. ¹³³

¹³³ Steinhauser, “Manuscripts”, *Augustine through the Ages*, 525, makes the point that the *De
doctrina* is very unusual precisely because Augustine completed it.
If he did think that there was some problem with the system he was building up in *De doctrina*, and some have suggested this independent of my considerations here, then it is reasonable to see if we can figure out what that problem was. Before that, though, I suggest that more important than *what* that problem was might be the question of *where* that problem was. Since we have good reason to think he published a kind of first edition of the *De doctrina*, consisting of Books I-II, in or around 397, there is good reason to suppose that the problem was not in Books I or II. It is improbable that Augustine would send out a work if he knew that it had or even thought that it had some kind of structural, philosophical, or doctrinal problem. The manuscript he sent to Simplicianus was a beautifully made *formata* edition, so, even if he had been prone to sending out works he had problems with, say, for review and correction from a wiser man, it still seems unlikely that he would order such a fine manuscript made for it. That seems reason enough to suppose, following through on this suggestion, that whatever problem Augustine had with the *De doctrina* he had with Book III.1-78 primarily. Again, and this makes something like the same point, Augustine specifically leaves out all the material from Book III in his first published edition. This might be simply because that part was not done yet, or that, given its unfinished state, the neat line for division was that between Books II and III. Both points are true enough, but it is not irrelevant that the portion that he left out, Book III.1-78, is also the

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134 Michael Cameron gives a good summary of some of the theological and hermeneutical problems with the first draft of the *De doctrina* in *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 239-240. Curiously, though, Cameron points out that the work was left unfinished at the time but then proceeds to find fault with that first draft as if it were a finished work.  
135 Cameron suggests that Augustine stopped working on the book because of certain theological and hermeneutical problems that occur throughout the whole of the first draft (citation in previous note). But the fact that Augustine as a new bishop did send Books I-II out indicates at least that he did not see the problems Cameron discusses and so it seems unlikely that he stopped work because of them.
portion that he would never really finish, since, as I have shown earlier, he is building up a certain system in that book, a system which he simply leaves unfinished when he completes the book. Instead of completing it, he passes on to make a few related remarks and then add in Tyconius’s rules and his own commentary on them and stops.

The next question is this: If Augustine did have a problem with his Book III of the *De doctrina*, what can be said about what that problem might have been? Before I go on, however, it is worth taking stock of where my reasoning has brought me and what suggestions I am actually making and, to anticipate a little, what I will suggest about the context and motivations for his late additions to the text. The *De doctrina*, I suggest, was a product of Augustine’s specific need, at the time of its writing, for a way to help less educated African clergy, as well as others abroad, to become better interpreters of scripture for the purposes of responding to Donatist critiques and catechizing Catholic congregations more fully. The work was a part of a broad movement of interest among Latin Christian thinkers at this time and followed from many of Augustine’s own realizations and insights into scripture, as well as from the movement of his thought away from classical learning toward the Christian scriptures; he seems to have felt the need of interpreting those scriptures more urgently every year. The system of the text that he develops builds on the foundation of scriptural precepts and adds, to an organization of learning according to the principle of love, the liberal arts as exercises meant as much for moral purposes as for intellectual ones. He ends up stopping work on the book in 397 or 398 mainly because of some problem or problems he had with how he was building up his structure for interpreting ambiguous signs in Book III. Around this time, he sent a copy of Books I-II to Simplicianus in Milan, specifically leaving out the problematic Book III. Those two books became the first
edition of the work, which Augustine was more or less satisfied with, as evidenced by the fact that he seems to seem later surprised to find it incomplete. The *De doctrina* that was known throughout most of his life and was used and referred to by others was his first edition, Books I-II. When reviewing his own copies of his works for the *Retractationes*, he discovers and so remembers that, in fact, the *De doctrina* is not complete. Despite the trouble he may have had with Book III when he was a young bishop, he sees now, as an old man, that it would be worth it to finish the work off: maybe he saw, as he did in the case of his early *De mendacio* and *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, that there was much good material in the book and such was worth saving (*Retractationes* I.18 and I.27). He adds the rules of Tyconius and then his treatment on rhetoric, largely ignoring the earlier structure of Book III that he had so painstakingly made. The men who would have reveled in that sort of rhetorical and philosophical structure are mostly gone, the learned men of the Theodosian Age, and he finishes now, at a more anxious time, a book to help his monks, priests, and brother bishops in their task of interpreting the sacred books for themselves and their congregations.

A careful look at precisely the place in his structure that Augustine left off the work might give us a clue to what theoretical problem he saw with it and thus why he left it unfinished for three decades. At the central movement of Book III, Augustine says that whatever cannot be literally related to good morals, which is love of God and neighbor, or the true faith, which is an understanding of God and neighbor, must be taken metaphorically, so that it can be so related to one or the other (III.34). He then proceeds to discuss in detail, by examples, how we can know whether an ambiguous passage is to be taken figuratively or literally (III.35-75). We do this primarily by seeing whether the passage teaches good morals literally. If it does, then we should
take it literally. If it does not, then we should take it figuratively, and we determine what that
figurative meaning is by trying to relate the passage to our understanding of things, outlined in
Book I: “facile est eam versare omnibus modis donec perveniamus ad sententiam veritatis”
(III.76). Now, he continues, the words that contain those figurative meanings can be drawn from
similar things or from things more or less closely related to each other (III.77). But we should
not think that a word always must have the same meaning in different contexts--and this is where
he stopped (III.78).

He has plainly said that one determines what these figurative meanings actually are by
reference to the account he laid out of things in Book I. And then, precisely when he gets to the
point where he would begin using that account to set up distinctions among words and things so
as to build up a framework of how to find true meanings for figurative expressions, a framework
based on his account of the double love of God and neighbor, something on which he has based
his distinctions at every turn in Books I-III, he stops. Augustine’s theory was, then, that the
double love of God and neighbor could give principles whereby one might actually figure out
what a figurative passage in scripture means.

It is an intriguing idea for a theory--but it is a theory that Augustine never manages to
construct; he only makes the few preparatory remarks. Almost as soon as he has said what the
theory is, he stops writing. When he returns to the text thirty years later, he sidesteps this
completely, observes that meanings can either be contrary or simply diverse and that some words

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136 One suggestion I might make based on Cameron’s meditation on the shape of Augustine’s
exegesis in 399 and 400 (Christ Meets Me Everywhere, 246-248) is that perhaps De
catechizandis rudibus can give us some hint about what might have been in Book III if
Augustine had completed it in the 390s. It is clearly a turn toward the same kind of topic for a
broadly similar reason. A study that looked to see how the ideas in this little work might fit in the
system of Books I-III.78 would be worthwhile.
can have many meanings, and then finishes the discussion by saying that it is acceptable to interpret a passage in any way that is consonant with the general teaching of scripture, although it is preferable to find a meaning that the author intended. He then moves on to discuss figures of speech in scripture and then he gives Tyconius’s rules.

How exactly is one to use the account of things in Book I to figure out what the figurative meaning of a passage is? Augustine never says. On his failure to complete his first commentary on the literal sense of Genesis written while he was still a priest, he remarked in his *Retractationes* that “in scripturis exponendis tirocinium meum sub tanta sarcinae mole succubuit et nondum perfecto uno libro ab eo quem sustinere non poteram labore conquievi” (I.18) and, on his first attempt to interpret Paul’s Letter to the Romans, close to his ordination as bishop, he says that “cessavi alia volumnia adiungere exponendo epistolam totam, ipsius operis magnitudine ac labore deterritus, et in alia faciliora deflexus sum” (I.25). Whatever the difficulty of interpreting these two books of the Bible, Augustine would return to both and interpret them in a way satisfactory enough to publish. And as difficult as they were for him to interpret, the difficulty of that task must have paled in comparison with the difficulty of providing a means whereby a reader could use the double-love of God and neighbor to find out how to interpret the ambiguous figurative passages throughout the whole of the sacred books. As a young man, Augustine probably thought of this theory, unrealized as it was, as something that must in fact be possible to make and that, if made, it would be the cornerstone in his Christian program of

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137 E. Hill notes how disconnected Augustine’s points in this section are (Hill, *Teaching Christianity*, 184 n. 53). He thinks this is because the work was not well edited. My suggestion is that this is because Augustine was making these points because he thought they would be useful to his readers, which they doubtless would be to what he knew now was his audience, the less well-educated men; he also seems to use these points to move away from the system he had set himself up to articulate and toward a narrative place where he can deploy Tyconius’s rules.
scripture study and education aimed at moral inquiry. Love, the heart of existence, reveals itself in human speech (Book I), love structures the human journey toward itself (Book II), love guides the reader to find in its self-revelation only those meanings that are true (Book III), and love teaches its followers how to speak best to one another so as to build up others in love (Book IV). He did produce this system, but he seems never to have been able to fabricate its cornerstone, rules based on love for finding the true meaning of figurative signs. This, rather than any mere illness or press of business, is why he stopped work on the *De doctrina christiana*.

Nor should it go without saying here that at this very time Augustine is in the middle of a major shift in his thought, one that would profoundly affect his views of God’s grace and well-ordered love. So, this problem of how to construct an interpretive system for all figurative signs based on love itself emerges as connected with and probably subordinate to the central changes of his thought at this period. Reevaluating the nature of grace, love, and the will would have meant the reevaluation of those theories and systems based on his older notions.

To return, briefly, to the first question above, whether Augustine intended for Books I-II to constitute a first edition of the *De doctrina* or whether that is simply how matters turned out, two things are worth noting here. First, if Carthage was a major book making center in the late 390s, it would be sensible for Augustine to send whatever books he wished to have published there, and once there, these works would become part of what was available in Carthage. If the Saltykov-Ščedrin Codex was made at Carthage, as seems likely, then it is also likely that Augustine would have sent it there in a form that he wished to make available to others for order or purchase. It has been suggested that there is a lost archetype of the Saltykov-Ščedrin Codex.

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138 A good recent summary of this is Lenka Karfikova’s *Grace and the Will according to Augustine*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 115 (Lieden: Brill, 2012).
This text, kept at Carthage, would likely have been the text that others copied as Augustine’s works were distributed. Second, Augustine later proved to be willing to release his books in installments, for example, the *De civitate dei*, so it is not unreasonable to suppose that he meant the same for his first two books on Christian learning. These two probabilities indicate that Augustine most likely did intend the *De doctrina christiana libri duo* that he sent to Simplicianus to be something like his first edition of the text.

Maybe Augustine intended to finish the work soon, but maybe he found, in the time he spent thinking about it then—which would not be more than a few years, since by the 420s he seems to have forgotten that the work was incomplete—that he could not discern a satisfactory way ahead and so he was happy to have the work published, possibly take comments on it, and, in the meantime, try to discover how best to build the structure he needed. Looking forward to what came next in his life and work---perhaps he thought that applying to his own life the very principles of exegesis and learning that he had just articulated would help him find the right way forward. Or maybe he was simply stopped for the time by the problem but was, at the same time, impelled by his own desire to use what he had developed for the sake of his own journey toward wisdom, his own inquiry into himself, and so turned to writing about himself and the scriptures. Wherever his mind was after he had set aside the *De doctrina*, we know that very nearly the first text he took to writing next was his *Confessions*, an inquiry into self, a prayer, and, at the end, an exploration of the meanings of scripture.

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139 At *De civitate dei*, V.26, Augustine plainly states that he had sent out books I-III as a first installment, for feedback and discussion, as he will do with the others.

140 The first to argue that there is a connection between *De doctrina*, an abstract account of scriptural interpretation, and the *Conféssions*, a concrete account of how Augustine himself
It remains now to treat of Augustine’s late additions to the *De doctrina*, the end of Book III and all of Book IV. I have had occasion to refer to these, and to my outline of them, many times already in this study of the context of three of the *De doctrina*’s four texts. Constant reminders of the contexts and contents of the three texts that represent something like his stages of composition have been necessary to keep this discussion firmly rooted in the historical reality of Augustine’s life and times. It is such rootedness that has enabled me to answer many of the important questions surrounding the work. But I have reached a point now where the historical threads become very thin indeed. Essentially, the clues we can put together on the context of these late additions come from three places: first, the circumstances attendant upon his project to reread his works and comment on them in the form of *Retractationes*, of which his work on the *De doctrina* in 426 forms a part; second, his decision to finish the work rather than leave it incomplete; and, third, the content of the additions that he actually made.

Augustine turned in 426 or 427 to reread and comment on all of his works up to that time. He had been bishop of Hippo for almost exactly thirty years, had been involved in many controversies, had written many works, some of them long, delivered close to four hundred sermons--and those are only the ones we possess--and led North African Christians largely to end the great Donatist schism, a hundred years after it had begun. Augustine too had witnessed

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141 See Alan Fitzgerald, “*Retractationes*”, *Augustine through the Ages*, 423-424.
many changes in the world around him. Much is still controversial, but it is enough to say that the confident world of the Theodosian Age, with its poems about the Moselle River and its closing of the pagan temples, had changed. Despite the sack of Rome, the western empire was still very much alive. Barbarians were at the gates and in the suburbs, and the emperors had suffered many losses and would soon suffer many more, but the fundamental structure of the empire had not been broken, and the western empire as a political entity would probably remain politically viable until 467 and the defeat by the Vandals of the combined eastern and western fleets.¹⁴² But that was forty years away. It is often remarked that Augustine saw the future coming and saw that it was something very different than the past; he is supposed to have seen the Middle Ages. But this sounds wrong, for it must be asked: which Middle Ages? For educated Romans in the fifth century, there were two futures lying ahead for their empire that had endured so long: the future of Byzantium, strong but narrow, and the future of the Roman west, its constituent parts separating out, some slowly, some quickly, like sediment from water.¹⁴³

A brief glance at the Retractationes will not go amiss here. Augustine did not first have the idea or the desire to make something like this during the 420s. In fact, as he shows in a letter to Marcellinus (143), he had the idea nearly a decade before, sometime before 412. He wanted to write a book of corrections to his earlier works, to show his critics what kind of judge he was of himself, and to show them that he knew well enough many of the mistakes he had made (143.2-3). Now, consider what Augustine made in making the Retractationes. He made a review of most

¹⁴² This is Peter Heather’s contention in his The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
¹⁴³ Marrou thought Augustine was expecting the future to be something like a Latin Byzantium. This seems right.
of his treatises; he intended to do his letters and sermons too but did not get to them. He organized them chronologically (generally) and commented on them, taking pains to correct any errors that he found. He did this for two main reasons: first, as a way of continuing the moral inquiry into his own life and thought that he had carried out for the past decades; second, as a way of helping those who would read his works by correcting what in them needed correcting and by showing how they developed over time. So, mainly, the old bishop undertook this labor for the good of his own soul and to show others what kind of judge he was with himself (Prol. 1). Moreover, his original hope was to correct the versions of the works that he possessed, but, since he could not recall those versions of his works that had already been published, he decided to write the two books of *Retractationes* (Prol. 3). He continues: “Let those, therefore, who are going to read this book not imitate me when I err, but rather when I progress toward the better. For, perhaps, one who reads my works in the order in which they were written will find out how I progressed while writing.”

Augustine does not seem to have undertaken the *Retractationes* in order, somehow, to set his thought in some final, systematic order before death. His main goals seem to have been ones related to what he took his responsibility as a bishop and a Christian writer to be and ones related to how best his readers might come to understand his works and in what ways he thought those works were defective. Augustine was a unique man in many ways, a literary innovator. No other thinker from antiquity, and few from medieval or modern times, was able or willing to return to his works in the way that Augustine first wanted to in the 410s and then finally did in the latter half of the 420s. The scholarship on Augustine’s *Retractationes* leaves a little to be desired, so I

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144 Alan Fitzgerald, “Retractationes”, *Augustine through the Ages*, 423.
145 See Also, Letter 143.2.
will not attempt to reach any firm, broad conclusions. Suffice it to say, the text is one that Augustine of Hippo probably would have written whenever he lived; the fact that he lived near what appears in hindsight to be the end of an age would have made little difference to him, at least on this project. His work was always a moral work, for himself and for others—in that way, like the *De doctrina* itself.

Augustine says (*Retractationes*, II.4) that he preferred to complete the *De doctrina christiana* rather than to leave it incomplete and pass on to other works. I have mentioned above that this is an implicit recognition that many things already in the book were worth preserving. It also implies that some things in the book itself would be better completed. Augustine does not complete the system, based on love, for resolving ambiguous figurative signs, so in that sense he always leaves Book III unfinished. What he does do is add his treatment of rhetoric in Book IV, the second part of discovery and expression, which was his original plan. He must have thought, then, that this original plan was worth completing.

And, for a man in the midst of rereading and correcting his works, it is not surprising that in Book IV Augustine focuses most on reading. The key to speaking well is practice and reading (IV.6-14). The key to knowing when to say what and how to deploy the three styles is, again, reading (IV.133). The key even for those who cannot speak well themselves is the right reading, namely some approved ecclesiastical author’s treatment of whatever the subject might be (IV.160). His rhetorical theory had become about practice and example and ultimately about grace. The former *rhetor* now long time bishop has dismissed the rhetorical training and the

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146 Alan Fitzgerald, “*Retractationes***, *Augustine through the Ages*, relies heavily on the study of G. Madec, *Introduction aux ‘Révisions’ et à la Lecture des Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1996), but I have found this too to be relatively unhelpful.
learning of the schools with a wave of his hand. In rhetorical theory, he innovates boldly, almost without caring that he is innovating. He is confident now and dispenses with the theoretical system of his early days. As a young man Augustine was concerned with immutable *regulae*, enshrined in the heavens almost, and he had looked for those on which to base his account of Christian learning. He certainly seems to have built that account by means of analogies with the double-love of God and neighbor. He might well have tried to do the same thing with his account of rhetoric, but he did not. As an example, at the beginning of Book IV (6-14), his account of how one becomes eloquent, mainly by example and not by rules, has a clear parallel in the moral life, but the old Augustine does not bother to make it; the Augustine of 397 would likely not have passed up such a chance. Perhaps he would have made such connections in the text if he had been able to make what was his cornerstone, a system for finding the true meaning of ambiguous figurative signs. But he never did make that system, for whatever reason.

And, in Book IV, he did not even try to build systematically, except that he used the materials that were already laying about, the earlier distinctions. He had said above in his treatment of the knowledge of things (II.134) that rhetoric might often be better learned through reading and practice than through the efforts of teachers, just as an intelligent man might see, without training, that an argument is bad, although he may not be able to identify the fault. Such rules are not to be learned for their own sake, he was clear, and those who do learn them should not be puffed up (II.148). But the sense one has is that he valued this kind of knowledge more as a young man than as an old. He does value it as an old man too; he is clear that such rules are useful (IV.3). Nevertheless, his emphasis has shifted from the insight that *often* rhetoric is learned better through example to the knowledge, as he seems to take it, that it is *always* best
learned through example, through reading and practice, with little in the way of rules. His attitude toward the rules of rhetoric, *regulae*, has clearly shifted, even if it is true that, as I indicated above in my look at his education and his attitude toward it, he was never as enamored of the rules or the way they were taught. The views he adopts on these matters are not those of the Roman writers popular in his time, those of the Silver Age. His views are primarily Ciceronian, at least on the relative utility of rules and textbooks for teaching rhetoric. To make his point, he will actually quote Cicero several times in Book IV (6, 67)--Quintilian too (IV.6). He never does this, and arguably would never have done this, in Books I-III.78 with their conscious focus on founding Christian learning on distinctions drawn, not from pagan learning, but from the scriptures and the order of the world. For efforts to found learning on distinctions analogous with the double love of God and neighbor, any talk of Cicero would simply be out of place--another indication of Augustine’s change of mind by the 420s.

Changed Conceptions after Thirty Years: Audience and Author

What emerges from a cursory look at Book IV in the context of Augustine’s long life is that, by the time he wrote it, he had a different conception of himself as an author and a different, more realistic understanding of his audience. This does not take much to show. For his audience, he abandoned the systematic progression of the earlier books, but he kept what he had already made. He added in the handy rules of Tyconius most likely because they were actually helpful in carrying out the interpreter’s task. Since his own theory of how to find the meanings of ambiguous figurative signs had not worked out, he supplied one that worked well enough. Some
scholars have suggested that Augustine did not understand Tyconius’s rules. This may well be true, but it might also be that he understood them well enough but thought those rules were much more useful if one understood them more straightforwardly, without need of a mysticism tinged with heresy. Anyway, he does use them, just as he used, throughout much of Book IV, example after example of the various styles and genres. In his book on rhetorical theory he maintained that theory was not as important as reading good examples, and so, in that very book, he gave many examples--Book IV is the longest of all the books, chiefly because it contains lengthy excerpts. The Christian exegete could do worse than study those excerpts.

Handy rules and lots of examples: these would really only be good for one of his earlier audiences, that of less well-educated clergy and monks. There is basically nothing in Book IV that could be aimed at the late fourth century Christian literary circles of Milan, Rome, or elsewhere. This may be because those circles were all gone now, although that seems a too dramatic way to put it; suffice it to say that the literary life of the Latin world had changed. What is certainly true is that Augustine recognizes that he is not a part of any such circle as he once was; he recognizes that he has become to the younger men something like what Ambrose was to him. He wrote, then, more clearly for those who would use this book to train themselves to be preachers. He strived to be useful to them rather to construct fascinating distinctions or build methods based on analogies.

To put the matter straightforwardly, Augustine seems to have realized that the kind of reader who would actually be reading his books on Christian learning was no longer the great learned men of the church, but was now the less well-educated priests and monks. He is no longer writing for anyone like Jerome. Now, he writes for men like Vincent of Lérins and
Prosper of Aquitaine. It is in fact likely that both men read Augustine’s first edition of the *De doctrina* or his final draft or both. We know both men read extensively in his corpus, and Prosper even wrote to the old bishop for direction (among Augustine’s correspondence, Letters 225 and 226). But neither man was concerned with learning and the liberal arts so much as with doctrine and dogma, both of which are far from the pages of the *De doctrina* from its first to its final draft. In a way, Augustine had always known that his audience would be primarily those clergy that wishing to deepen their understanding of the scriptures; that was certainly part of his intended audience back in the days of the Catholic resurgence against Donatism in the 390s. Now, in the late 420s, he focuses his energies most directly, not on building a system, but on helping the kinds of men he knows actually need his help and are actually reading his work on Christian learning. This audience and its needs had come more clearly into focus.

This was his better conception of his audience. Of what must have been his better conception of himself I can say little. He seems to have understood better the kind of thinker he actually was, one bound by time and place as all are, one whose errors needed correcting, one who could pray and then write without much in the way of forethought or planning, to say nothing of system, and one who could believe that the Holy Spirit would guide him as he wrote to say whatever needed saying. A balanced structure built on analogies was a beautiful thing, but it may not be what was needed. His biographer, Possidius, tells (*Life*, 15) of a long sermon Augustine gave one Sunday in church; he tells how the saint spent half of his energy developing one point, piece by piece building up his account, and then, suddenly, took a tangent that occurred to him and spent the rest of his sermon following it down. Augustine said that it had

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147 See the little summaries by Mark Vessey, “Vincent of Lérins”, *Augustine through the Ages*, 870, and Michael McHugh, “Prosper of Aquitaine”, *Augustine through the Ages*, 685-686.
seemed to him in the moment that he should follow it, so he did. Not long after, Possidius reports, a merchant named Firmus came to see the bishop. The man had been a Manichean for many years until one day, listening to a sermon of Augustine’s, the saint went off on a long tangent to run down a certain point. The man had left the church with that point in his mind, and it had stayed with him until he realized that the Manicheans must be wrong. He had come to see the bishop to ask for baptism. As Augustine himself would say in the *De doctrina* (IV.88): “As in regard to every matter of faith and love, there are many things that may be said, and many ways of saying them, who knows what is expedient at a given moment for us to say, or be heard saying, except God who knows the hearts of all?”

Maybe when he found the *De doctrina* incomplete, the old bishop said a prayer for the right words, and then wrote as seemed right to him, following his earlier structure as seemed best, deploying Tyconius’s rules, quoting extended excerpts from scripture or the fathers. He wrote now clearly for the kind of men who he knew would read his book, not for learned ecclesiasts abroad, and he wrote now his treatise on writing as a man who knew, better than he knew anything else, how to write. Augustine had wished when he was young to be a famous man of letters, and so he was to become. God had answered even a sinful prayer and transformed it at the same time. But, now turning his pen to write about writing, the learned bishop advises asking for grace, he advises reading more than the study of rules, and he advises following, not always a prearranged plan, but sometimes where the Spirit might lead.

The best way to characterize both his changed conception of his audience and his changed conception of himself is to say that Augustine had originally intended his work on Christian learning to fulfill two broad cultural functions, which are, according to Gracia, the
chief factors in determining a text’s meaning: first, he intended it as a work of learning for other learned men, as a work essentially for the leisure of great men like Simplicianus and Jerome and others after them, like but very different from Macrobius’s *Saturnalia*; and, second, he intended it as a treatise for the instruction of the less well-educated of the African clergy and of Latin clergy and laymen throughout the Roman world. Cultural functions are deeply related to the author and the audience of a text and their relations to each other, which is why the preceding discussions of the various audiences have been so in-depth. What changed in the thirty years between the first draft and his late additions, what combines both his change in his view of himself and his audiences, is Augustine’s understanding of the cultural functions of his *De doctrina christiana libri quattuor*. What his late additions, Books III.79-IV, added to the first draft was material clearly not meant to fulfill the first function, but material that did contribute to and complete the second. Augustine saw by the 420s that the cultural functions of his first edition of the *De doctrina* had already shifted, one taking prominence over the other, such that the learned audience he had hoped for did not materialize or, if it did, did not sustain its interest in the work, but the audience of less well-educated men turned to the first edition with interest and probably with zeal, as a Christian program of education made by one of the great Christian thinkers of their day. Possidius makes sure we know that Augustine was a famous man (*Life*, 9). When Augustine returns to complete the work in 426, he has no need to alter the cultural function of the text in some active way, by, say rewriting part of the first edition, because that function had already been changed by the book’s actual readers who found in it what they wanted or needed to find. What he added in his late additions he added for the sake of those readers, not the learned ecclesiasts of former years. So, the cultural function of the text had
shifted, moving away from one of his intended audiences toward another of them, and with that it would have been apparent that his role as an author was different now too. He was no longer writing for anything like a grand literary or leisured intellectual circle. Now, he was writing for men like Possidius, his biographer, and to those men, he himself was a figure of solemn authority, like Ambrose had been for him, long ago. That is chiefly why he wrote differently when he returned to finish up the *De doctrina* after thirty years.

Conclusion

The context of three of Augustine’s four texts of the *De doctrina christiana* is now largely clear. I have proposed answers to several long-standing questions, answers that, it seems to me, fit better with what we know about the man and his time than any others. The answers to those questions have helped to bring further into light how these texts are to be understood. In some cases, my close study of the structure of the text has thrown light onto some of Augustine’s motivations and perceptions of himself and his audience. That study has, by revealing the four texts of the *De doctrina*, allowed me to organize research on his life and though around three key moments, one of which is a material remnant, a manuscript from Augustine’s own day. It is a rare thing to derive insights into Augustine’s life and thought from material remains.

The *De doctrina* was a book whose themes he had thought about for a long time before writing it, as my look at his earlier work shows. It was a book he wrote carefully, drawing on much of the good he had seen before, and building up from those bones a well-balanced system of principles based on love. But he faltered somewhere in the winter of 397-398. He came to the
heart of his structure and found that he could not piece together what he wished to say. So, he published the first two books of what he had done and waited. When he returned to the work after three decades, he seemed surprised to find it incomplete, and so he completed it in a way that seemed best to him then, a way that aimed to be useful above all to the men he had come to know would be his readers. Once he had made his late additions, he had his final draft. This is the final historical text, which is the basis for our contemporary text as presented in modern editions, and it is what I must turn to now. What unites that text is not the liberal arts or his views on rhetoric. What unites that text is its conception of Christian learning as the study of the Bible aimed at moral inquiry.
Chapter 4

Christian Learning as Moral Inquiry: The Fourth Text

The first chapter of this dissertation, a review of the literature on *De doctrina* as a whole, was written about what I consider to be the fourth text of the *De doctrina*. Most interpreters who have tried to say what the book is about have tried to say what the modern contemporary text is about. By “modern contemporary text” I mean, as before (following Gracia), the Latin text of the *De doctrina* as it is presented to us in modern critical editions.¹ I have argued above that modern interpreters sometimes seem to have focused too much on either the first draft, with its emphasis on system (theology in Book I, education in Book II, or hermeneutics in Book III), or on the late additions, with their emphasis on rhetoric, and so have interpreted one part of the *De doctrina* as governing the whole work.² Some argue that the book is about education, others rhetoric, others hermeneutics, and others all three. It will be helpful to reiterate my view here: the *De doctrina* is about how to study the scriptures so as to grow closer to Wisdom; this means learning God’s will, judging oneself and one’s values and actions, struggling to find truth, rejoicing in it when

¹ Since there is more than one standard edition, this locution actually refers to a family of texts, more or less generically related. My text follows Green’s from the Oxford Early Christian Texts series, so that, precisely, is what I mean by the “contemporary text”, although my phrase “modern contemporary text” is meant to include all those texts my readers might be familiar with.

² Those not very interested in studying the work as a whole have gone various directions, as I pointed out above in Chapter 1. Most seem to have been interested in topics that can easily be traced backward or forwards in time, Quintilian’s rhetoric, for example, or Stoic logic, and that can easily be related to the broad disciplines or subdisciplines of the modern university. Pollmann’s work, for example, might have more appeal for a theologian than a historian.
found, and expressing oneself on all these points to others in order to help them do the same.

The best modern term for this is moral inquiry. Unlike pagan or secular moral inquiry, carried out at best as part of a tradition of action and discussion with other human beings only, Augustine’s Christian moral inquiry is carried out as a dialogue with the words of God as revealed to humanity in a human institution, the Church.

To show this, I will retrace my steps through the whole of the *De doctrina*, highlighting the structure, distinctions, analogies, rules, and digressions that relate directly to moral inquiry, and showing how all fit together to form an account of Christian learning which is ordered to moral inquiry. The previous discussions of the literature, of the broad strokes of the text, and of the historical context of the three texts have provided the occasion and footing for this description. In many ways, the central points, structures, and motivations have already become clear. Now, I aim only to show how each of these plays out through the pages of the *De doctrina* and how Augustine’s first audiences may have reacted to what they read. I will repeat some of the points I have made before, but hopefully, my movement of focus from narrow (on the

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3 I have not been able to find a systematic philological account of the origins of this term. On my own investigations I have found it dating back to 1765, in roughly the same sense as I use it now. An anonymous pamphlet of memoirs written about the poet Charles Churchill, *Memoirs of the Mr. Charles Churchill* (Dublin: Henry Saunders of Castle Gate, 1765), says that Churchill’s satire of Samuel Johnson loses all its bite when one realizes that Johnson is the author of *The Rambler*, “a work which has enlarged the circle of moral enquiry, and fixed more precise landmarks to guide philosophy in her investigation of the truth” (45). Hume’s earlier use of the phrase in his *Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix IV, Section 261 (1751) seems closer to an inquiry into the grounding of morals than a personal inquiry into one’s own moral state. Johnson’s *The Rambler* is an excellent example of the latter, but not of the former. The existence of this difference in meaning between Johnson and Hume illustrates how at that time notions of what constitutes moral inquiry, indistinct as they may have been, were beginning to separate out from each other. The best recent discussion of the nature of what we might call classical moral inquiry is that of Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 62-64.
contemporary text\textsuperscript{4} to broad (on the three texts and their contexts and circumstances) and back to narrow (on the contemporary text again with an eye for the central point, moral inquiry) will keep me from too much repetition. This chapter, then, presents my reading of the *De doctrina*. What I have said or argued for previously are subordinate points related to shoring up the case for what I say here.

The whole of the *De doctrina christiana* can best be summarized as follows: the preface lays out the method of Christian moral inquiry, namely the study of texts; Book I treats of the goal of moral inquiry, namely right action in accord with the commandments of scripture; Books II and III treat of how the inquirer carries out that moral inquiry by studying the Bible; and Book IV discusses how best the interpreter can teach others how to do what he has done, while at the same time continuing to learn himself. Building on the summary I made in Chapter 2 and my account of the context of this work in Chapter 3, I will argue below that this is the best way to understand the final edition of Augustine’s work on Christian learning. I have made the point many times that his audience and conception of the work changed in the thirty years he took to complete the *De doctrina*. This is true, but I will argue below that the unifying conception of moral inquiry does not change, even if his approach to teaching it did.

The Method of Christian Moral Inquiry: Preface

\textsuperscript{4} Again, using Gracia’s terminology, this is the text of the *De doctrina* as presented in modern editions.
As the preface makes clear, Augustine intends in this work to teach his readers a skill, the application of certain rules for interpreting scripture.\(^5\) Doing so, he says, is better than merely teaching them a particular application of that skill, an interpretation of some or all of scripture. But why? He wrote it in part to reply to detractors, as we have already seen. The criticisms he anticipates are briefly these: Some people will criticize the book because they fail to understand the rules he has given; others because, having studied its rules, they fail to be able to apply them well to illuminate scripture; still others will think that, since they already understand scripture without ever having studied Augustine's rules, the laying out of rules is of no use to anyone, for “all worthwhile illumination of the difficulties of these texts can come by a special gift of God” (Pref. 4). The first two he deals with summarily. It is not his fault if some people simply do not understand his work or, having understood it, are unable to apply its principles. Both of the first two types of objectors, Augustine says, should stop blaming him and “pray to God for insight” (Pref. 5). Those who think they have already been given divine gifts for the interpretation of scripture should also not disdain Augustine's book of rules (Pref. 7-9). First, they should remember that they learned how to read with the help of human teachers. They have no reason to be humiliated by a man who learned the scriptures without learning to read, Anthony of Egypt, or by a slave who was given the ability to read as a miraculous gift from God. It would be absurd to argue, on the basis of these gifts of God to certain people, that all Christians should not teach their children to read, or even worse, to suppose that all who actually need human teachers are somehow not Christian (Pref. 10).

\(^5\) The preface is in fact part of the De doctrina at every stage, as noted above. W. Green even cites the text of the preface from the Saltykov-Ščedrin Codex as clearing up a few textual problems (“Textual Notes on Augustine’s De doctrina christiana”, Revue d’Études Augustiniennes 8 (1962), 225-231).
Despite what he says about those who claim to have received insight, Augustine clearly does value it; indeed, he thinks it is necessary for this task. He exhorts the student of the scriptures (III.134) and the Christian orator to pray before all else (IV.164)—even in the preface, he has just told those who fail to understand his rules to pray to God for insight. On the path to wisdom, which is the goal of scriptural interpretation, even the step in which the journeyer comes to knowledge, the subject of the De doctrina, requires prayer (II.20). More than this, though, Augustine himself is writing the book precisely because God has given him insight and he wishes to communicate that insight to others (I.1). Unsurprisingly, then, the divine gift of insight will come to play a crucial role in what Augustine thinks scriptural interpretation should be. Already at the beginning, we have a guiding principle, or maybe it is better called a guiding fact, that ties the interpreter's understanding to his relationship to a person, God. But, here, Augustine is in fact limiting that principle: God does give direct insight, but that is not the only way for the Christian to learn, certainly not the only way to learn ordinary and necessary skills like reading. God can grant a miraculous knowledge of how to read, but in almost every case, he does not. Learning usually comes through human beings, even learning of divine things.  

Paul himself, as well as Cornelius the centurion, did not disdain to study under human teachers even the matters of the deepest faith (Pref. 12). Nor, he later mentions, did the eunuch disdain to learn from Philip, nor even did Moses, who had spoken with angels, disdain to learn from his pagan father-in-law (Pref. 14-15). These things could have been accomplished through angels, but human beings would be in a very bad way if God chose never to use human agency to

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6 He does not point out here, as he could have, that Jesus Christ is the true teacher anyway, so anything learned is learnt from him. Augustine seems concerned here, not with divine insight in general, but with a kind of direct insight that is miraculous or at least unusual.
carry out his word. And how, he asks, could human beings be God's holy temples if God never spoke through them but only with a boom from heaven (Pref. 13)? Besides, he says, love would have no way of uniting people if human beings learned nothing from others. If the gift of interpretation is not from human beings at all but from God, then the boastful interpreter should not even write any books, but should only refer students to God from whom he has the gift (Pref. 16). Instead, though, they do write books. Augustine's task is only different from theirs in that he writes books of the rules for interpretation, not just particular interpretation. “Nobody should regard anything as his own, except perhaps a lie. ... What do we possess that we have not received from another” (Pref. 17)?

The teacher who reads to students and expounds is only expounding what he understands (Pref. 18). The teacher who teaches students how to read is enabling them not only to understand any of his expositions but also to be able to read and expound for themselves. The first teacher is like the man who interprets the text of scripture; the second is like the man who teaches students how to interpret for themselves. This second kind of teacher Augustine aims to be in this book. It is not wrong to learn someone else's interpretations of scripture, but above that Augustine values learning how to interpret the scriptures for oneself.

He does not explicitly say that it is not wrong to learn someone else's interpretation--perhaps because it is such an obvious point. Obvious it may be, but I make it here because it allows me to bring out something important. The understanding of scripture Augustine is already characterizing as more than the mere reception of knowledge about the scriptures, though what more he does not yet say. Just as learning to read is better than learning how someone else reads a particular book, so learning to understand the scriptures for oneself is better than merely
learning someone else's understanding of them. What if that person's understanding is correct? Even still, it is better to learn to interpret for oneself. Partly, this is because the one who knows how to understand the scriptures can read and solve more difficulties than the one who simply knows someone else's understanding of a certain part of it. Why is it important to be able to understand the scriptures and solve difficulties while reading them? This seems a trivial question, but for Augustine it is not. He has an answer. The goal of human life, he says throughout the text, is to reach an eternal homeland (I.16); the path to reach it is wisdom (I.23); a man's progress in wisdom is commensurate with his understanding of the scriptures (IV.19): therefore, as the Christian grows in his understanding of the scriptures he gets closer to his eternal homeland. It is not, then, just that it is better to learn to read than to learn a text someone else reads, to learn to interpret rather than to learn someone else's interpretations; instead, to reach his eternal homeland, it is necessary for the Christian to grow in understanding the scriptures as much as he can. Augustine will not specifically say in the preface that the reason he wants to teach rules for understanding scripture, rather than just what understanding God has given him, is because knowing how to interpret and understand the scripture is necessary for the ordinary Christian life. But the implication is clear, even though he does allow later for those who are already perfect in love and who, therefore, have no need of the scriptures.

Augustine has compared the interpretation of scripture to the more ordinary reading and expounding of texts, which is the activity of the grammatici of late antiquity. One of Augustine's contemporaries defined grammar as “the understanding of the poets and the ready elucidation of
writers and historians and the logic of speaking and writing correctly.” The careful observer will see in this already an outline of what Augustine's method of interpreting scripture will actually be: two parts, understanding and expression--so, in that way, his first division of the work is not without precedent. He has compared the tractatio scripturarum neither to rhetoric nor philosophy, but to grammar.

Now, the Christian learns some things from human teachers, as is obvious, and some things he receives as gifts from God. These gifts are graces, and through them human beings grow in love. God can give gifts of understanding to anyone, but he has chosen to order the world so that most people receive the basic gifts of understanding, for example, language, mediated through others. This ordering of the world helps draw humanity back to him, a principle that underlies Augustine's whole account of Christian learning. His preface makes clear that Christian learning is built already on the grace of God, on gifts that God does give, gifts that he almost has to give because of who he is, love, and what he aims to achieve for human beings, salvation. Those gifts not only mediate knowledge, allowing one to bestow instruction on another, but they mediate other of God's gifts, the chief among them being precisely what Augustine has set himself out to do in this book: the understanding of how to arrive at the knowledge crucial to progress toward God, knowledge of the scriptures.

If the man who interprets rightly has a gift from God, what of the man who teaches how to interpret rightly? The first can understand the text and resolve difficulties. The second can teach others how to do the same. The first is himself oriented toward God, his eternal homeland,

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and has the means to attain it—in so far as anyone can ever be said to have the means to attain that goal. The second is both oriented toward reaching God himself and toward teaching others how to reach him. The activity of the first is aimed at God for his own sake. The activity of the second is both aimed at God for his own sake, when he interprets the text to grow in wisdom himself, and aimed at his neighbors for God's sake, when he teaches others what truths he has learned and when he teaches others how to interpret for themselves. This, again, is the central teaching of scripture, which Augustine has seen as bearing an analogous relationship with *doctrina christiana* all along the way. He finds it here too in the very structure of the teaching of how what can best be called grammar is taught. These analogies are not merely rhetorical: they serve to illustrate how all Christian learning is pointed toward love.

A Moral Dilemma

Now, if all Christian learning is pointed toward love, toward wisdom, and toward living well—all essentially the same thing—then this seems to set up a dilemma for Augustine of the following kind: we learn how to live well by studying scripture, but in order to study scripture well, we must already in some way be living well. It seems at least plausible to think that one could not adequately understand the truth about the moral life if one were not already, in some way at least, living well. Despite the fact that Augustine himself does not explicitly address this

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8 Mayer has found in this preface what he takes to be traces of Augustine's principle of *res per signa*, developed in Books I and II. This is very likely right, but my focus here is different: whether there are traces of something else or not does not necessarily resolve the issue of what exactly Augustine is doing in the preface. See C. Mayer, "*Res per signa*: Der Grundgedanke des Prologs in Augustins Schrift *De doctrina christiana* und das Problem seiner Datierung", *Revue des Études des Augustiniennes*, 20 (1974), 100-112.
problem, he has two answers he can give to it.

First, this is a false dilemma, he might say, because it pretends the agent is alone with his or her knowledge and his or her action and makes progress toward his or her goals entirely alone, but this is never actually the case. The analogy between learning to study the scriptures properly and learning to read in the first place is forceful on this point. On one’s own, it is nearly impossible to learn to read, and, entirely on one’s own, it is certainly impossible to learn to communicate. Moral inquiry and the path to wisdom, precisely because for the Christian they are based on the study of the scriptures, are always, like communication and reading, carried out in relationship to others. But is it not the case that one simply learns to read from a teacher and then reads on one’s own? A moment’s reflection will make clear that this is not so. Even the best reader is always learning new words (or forgetting old ones), seeing new relationships among words and concepts and across languages, understanding sentences and their clauses better, and generally, increasing his or her ability to comprehend longer and more complicated passages. In the best readers, all of this takes place, not in isolation, but as part of the continuing dialogue between a reader and his authors and between a reader and his peers. So, too moral inquiry is always carried out in dialogue with the scriptures, with one’s teachers, with one’s peers, with one’s own culture and values, with those of the Christian community as a part of which one interprets the scriptures in the first place, and with one’s understanding of what God’s will for one’s life is. And being in any of these relationships itself counts as a moral good, as one part, albeit small, of the life well-lived, of the life on the road toward wisdom. So, any person who has any part in a society of human beings, particularly in one aimed as the Church is at wisdom and moral inquiry, already enjoys the moral good of being a part of that society based around those
goals. And since everyone is always a part of such a society, there is thus no dilemma.

Augustine’s second possible response to this dilemma is derived from his account, discussed a few times briefly above and at more length below, of the stages of the journey toward wisdom itself. This journey begins with the fear of God, which is, therefore, something of moral worth. But how does one first begin to fear God? Augustine does not give a general answer to this question here, but that is because he does not need to: his account of learning and his account of the seven stages of wisdom are aimed at Christians, those already participating in the moral life of the church, not to those outside it. Those Christians cannot but be participating in the moral life of the church and therefore are in dialogue with others and with their own culture about how to live well. It is these who should be moved first by the fear of God for the sake of learning what his will is, the first stage of wisdom (II.16). By even being a part of such a community they are exposed to such concern for themselves and to the possibility of desiring to know God’s will.  

This is enough already to make them participants in the journey toward wisdom, even if only because they stand beside the road. It is true that Augustine does not, in the De doctrina, outline in a philosophical way how and to what extent non-Christians can grow in truth and wisdom, although he does imply that they can, but that is simply because his book is aimed at giving Christians a Christian account of their own sacred books and the relationships those books must have, for a Christian, to the goal of the happy life.

Augustine has other resources to respond to such a dilemma, but these two, drawn as they are from the De doctrina itself, help us see right from the beginning of the work both the limits

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9 This is particularly brought home when the seven stages of wisdom are read as part of Book II (16-23), since Augustine immediately follows them with a treatment of the canon of scripture in which he situates the Christian clearly as part of the Catholic Church, itself consisting of a number of other churches, a kind of community of communities (II. 24-31).
of Christian moral inquiry and what the nature of that inquiry is. One of the things we see right off, then, is the conception of the audience that is internal to the *De doctrina*. Augustine himself in the preface and throughout is specifically writing to a certain class of readers. This audience, which in the broadest sense is that of literate Roman Christians, includes both those learned ecclesiasts and those less well-educated clergymen from Africa and throughout the Latin world. But, as I have argued above, it is true both that the reading public of literate Christian Romans changed during the thirty years from 396-427 and that Augustine’s conception of the cultural function of his books on Christian learning changed also and thus so did the work’s audience. Here, in the preface we see Augustine’s conception of his audience at its widest.

How Its Audiences Read the *De doctrina christiana*

Above I have considered at length how Augustine conceived of his audience and what the audience of the work might actually have looked like. But I said nothing about what can be known about *how* that audience did in fact read the four books on Christian learning. My goal above was to make clear what Augustine was doing and what he meant the book to be about. Here, I turn, though only briefly since our evidence is scanty, to the question of what the readers of the *De doctrina* were doing when they read it and what they might have taken away from such a work. I will first articulate here the framework into which such readers and their responses likely fit and then, after I have given my account of each successive book, I will indicate what kinds of reactions the work’s audiences, intended and actual, may have had to the contents of that book.
Let me review. Augustine conceived of the audience of Books I-III.78 (and certainly Books I-II) as consisting of two broad groups: first, the learned ecclesiasts, great men of the church like Jerome, Paulinus of Nola, Simplicianus of Milan, who get mentioned explicitly in Augustine’s work, as well as others like Jerome’s former friend Rufinus, the various Popes of those days, and other great western bishops; and, second, the less well-educated clergy of the Latin world, obviously those of his own see and province but also men far away.

Since we do not have contemporary reactions, reviews, critiques, or employments of material from the *De doctrina*, we are left with generalizing based on what we know about the book’s actual and intended audiences and how those audiences read works like this. So, the best we can do is to compare the book in a general way to the intellectual temper and movements of its day. When we do this, the *De doctrina*, like much of Augustine’s early work, seems highly peculiar and somewhat out of spirit with the time. We can gain a better sense for what that spirit was, and thus confirm this account of how the *De doctrina* (both its first edition and final draft) was read, by a brief look at what Mark Vessey has called the “forging of orthodoxy” in the late Latin West. Vessey argues that the construction of what it meant to be orthodox in the Latin world of the fourth and fifth centuries followed two broad patterns: the *tractatio scripturarum*, and the *retractatio partum.* In general, the first was carried out by the great Fathers of the Church of the fourth and early fifth centuries, and the second was carried out by those who came

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10 Mark Vessey, “The Forging of Orthodoxy in Latin Christian Literature: a Case Study”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4.4 (1996), 495-513. Vessey limits both of these to the period after the reign of Theodosius, but this seems an unnecessary limit. One can easily see nearly everything Jerome and Ambrose wrote in the light of *tractatio scripturarum*, which pushes the beginning of such “creative and explicit rewriting” (to use Vessey’s phrase, 495) of scripture back to the mid 370s. Even the work of Manlius Theodorus and Marius Victorinus fit under this broad heading, although not all of it neatly.
after them. The Fathers of the Church wrote much on the scriptures themselves in
commentaries, treatises, and sermons, each usually in his own individual way with his own
emphases, but part of the broad pattern of *tractatio scripturarum*.11 Those Latin writers who
came after them wanted to put the mass of patristic writing into at least doctrinal order—which
such writers did for reasons that made sense in their own circumstances, different as those would
have been from that of Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine. Good examples of how they carried out
this *retractatio patrum* can be found in the early *florilegia* of Augustine’s works by Vincent of
Lérins, Prosper of Aquitaine, and, rather later, Eugippius.12 Vincent’s was strictly doctrinal,
focused on understanding the Trinity and refuting certain heretics, Prosper’s was focused more
on deep theological themes like suffering, the path to wisdom, and the doctrine of grace, and
Eugippius’s was more like a collection of spiritual reading that showed “interesting solutions to
interesting problems”, particularly concerned to make clear that hard questions have answers and
those answers can be found in Augustine’s writings—as such, it was more the search for security
in believing what was right that drove Eugippius.13 All three of these *florilegia* show how at least
some of Augustine’s readers read his works, or at least what they thought worth doing with those
works—which was presumably something those works did not do without being editing down.

There are many reasons why men of the fifth century would wish either to distill down the

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11 This locution is carefully chosen on Vessey’s part. It is the term Augustine uses for scriptural
interpretation (I.1). It is also the same phrase that Press uses to describe what he thinks is the
main purpose of the *De doctrina*, to teach the reader how to engage in making treatises
(*tractationes*) on the scriptures. I have argued above that Press’s view is too limited, but that
does not mean I would take Vessey’s use of *tractatio scripturarum* in such a limited way. It is
clear that Vessey uses the term quite broadly, and that Press does not.
thought of a great man like Augustine or to draw out themes from it for the controversies and changed circumstances of their own day, so Vessey’s *retractatio patrum* is a good way of conceiving in general what they actually did.

The *tractatio scripturarum* was carried out roughly by the great learned ecclesiasts of the late fourth and early fifth century, which men were one of the audiences for whom Augustine himself wrote the first draft of the *De doctrina*. The *retractatio patrum* was carried out by men of less learning, men not as well educated as Jerome and Ambrose and Simplicianus had been, and, although Vincent of Lérins lived later than the less well educated clergy of Hippo Regius in the mid-390s, one can surmise that the attitude and approach of such men of mediocre education would have been closer to that of Vincent, thirty years later, than to Augustine himself, the former rhetorician turned philosopher-bishop. If this broad picture is even approximately right, then there is reason to think that the great men of Augustine’s own day were not especially interested in a book like the *De doctrina christiana*: they themselves never wrote anything like it and what they seem to ask for most (from Augustine) are commentaries and refutations of heretics (Paulinus asks for these in *Letter* 25, and Augustine asks for a treatise against the pagans from Paulinus in *Letter* 31), and the *De doctrina* fulfills neither of the cultural functions that commentaries and refutations fulfilled. And it also seems true, if one follows through the implications of an account like Vessey’s, that the men who came after the great learned Fathers of the Church, were themselves also interested less in philosophical accounts of scripture’s role in moral inquiry than they were in both ironing out and organizing doctrine and at the same time making books suitable for spiritual reading on important themes, both of which are eminently practical goals. They too would then likely not have found a work like the *De doctrina* to be of
the utmost importance for what they thought they needed to do—except as a mine of examples and answers to questions, of which the De doctrina certainly has many. This is hardly surprising since the De doctrina is one of the first works in the western tradition that treats systematically of hermeneutics, and one expects a truly innovative work to be misunderstood and misused at first, or at least not recognized for what it is. As I will argue later, the probable reactions of Augustine’s two intended audiences likely played a role in how he changed his approach to the project of the De doctrina in his late additions.

The Goal of Christian Moral Inquiry: Book I

In Book I, he begins broadly with things as the objects of right action, namely as the objects of love, either the love of God for his own sake or the love of neighbor for God’s sake. This is the whole of man’s actions ordered to the one commandment on which Christ had said all the others depend. Loving God for his own sake and our neighbor for God’s sake: this is how we should live. But, sadly, we cannot keep this commandment. And so, we need the scriptures to help teach us how to love, both by teaching us to discover the right principles, virtues, and goods, and by actually inculcating those virtues in us as we read about them.

That is to say it briefly. All interpretation of scripture depends on two things: discovery of truth and expression of that discovery—and I have already shown that there exists here an

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14 It is for these examples, the corresponding problems that Augustine mentions, and his own solutions that Eugippius quotes the De doctrina somewhat frequently. Not surprisingly, he drew on Augustine’s books of questions and answers considerably more. See Lienhard, “Earliest Florilegia”, 30-31.
15 My view is not that the De doctrina was misunderstood so much as that it was not recognized for what it was. But there does not seem to be much concrete evidence one way or the other.
analogy with the love of God and neighbor.\textsuperscript{16} The activity of the interpreter is aimed at God for his own sake because the interpreter reads scripture for the sake of his own salvation; the activity of the interpreter is aimed at his neighbor for God’s sake because the interpreter teaches others both the truth about God and how to find out the truth about God.

A man fired by the desire to grow in this truth and in this skill at finding it might wonder how he can be assured of having an abundance of both. Augustine is unequivocal (I.3): just as the loaves were only five and seven but they became an overflowing abundance only when they were broken up and distributed, so too the interpreter may begin with little, but when he begins to distribute what he has he will be given more by many fold. The love of neighbor shown in expressing the truth to others is done for God’s sake and it feeds that love of God which is the man’s search for truth in the scriptures.

All things are to be enjoyed or used, he goes on, and some things can both use and enjoy (I.7). What is to be enjoyed makes human beings happy (I.8).\textsuperscript{17} Everything else is to be used (I.9). We must, he says, use this world “in order to discern the invisible attributes of God which are understood through what has been made” (I.9), and God is himself wisdom. This discernment of God is what the scriptures were made for (I.84).\textsuperscript{18}

The Trinity, wisdom, is the one true object of our enjoyment (I.9). But is God even to be counted among objects, among things (I.10)? It seems that he is not, nor is he merely the cause

\textsuperscript{16} I have had occasion here to reuse some of my phrasing from my summary of the \textit{De doctrina} in Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{17} Cf. \textit{Confessions}, X.22.32.
\textsuperscript{18} One could make much out of this remark, with its implications ranging far beyond the scriptures: if God is himself wisdom, and we are to use this world to discern his hidden attributes, then we are to use this world to discover the hidden attributes of wisdom; nature might not only be a book, nature might be something akin to scripture itself. Medieval men will make much of this, but let me leave it there for now.
of all things, since he may not even be aptly described as a cause. Later, Augustine will reverse this: there is only one real thing, God, on which we are to set our joy, grounded in that one reality (Confessions, X.22.32). But for now, he is content to lead up to such a claim by arguing that no words adequately even refer to God, much less describe him (I.13-14).

Now, in order to enjoy this one true object of enjoyment, the mind needs to be purified and healed (I.21). The progress we make on being purified is like a long journey to our homeland far away (I.21-22). This progress is a progress toward wisdom and in wisdom; wisdom is both homeland and road leading to home. Augustine does not discuss it here, but being a little more specific on this is relevant for my purposes: how we grow in wisdom is by taking the plain teachings of the scriptures to heart and changing our lives in accord with them (I.88); to take one example, in obscure passages we grow in wisdom by overcoming our pride through the exercise of our understanding on them (II.10), and, to take another, in teachings of the scriptures we are led to call into question our own actions and the social customs of our societies (II.50, 60). He will return to these and other means soon.

But since we fail to follow that road, we need to be given hope (I.31-38). The best of our hopes comes from the church, the evidence it gives of God’s work in the world, the work that the church does in us through the sacraments, particularly forgiveness of sins. The perfect way is to love God with the whole heart, soul, and mind in concert with one's neighbor (I.39). When one loves something, if he relates that thing to his permanent goal, which is God, then he can be said in a metaphorical sense to enjoy that thing, but if he holds fast to a thing and makes it the goal of his joy, then he is said to enjoy that thing in the literal sense (I.79). Only God is to be loved, in the literal sense, for his own sake.
The purpose of this whole exposition, he says, has been to show that

the fulfillment and end of the law and all the divine scriptures is to love the thing which must be enjoyed and the thing which together with us can enjoy that thing. … To enlighten and enable us, the whole temporal dispensation was set up by divine providence for our salvation. (I.84)

Any interpreter who understands the scriptures should be able “to build up the double love of God and neighbor” by his understanding (I.86). The goal of exegesis is a moral one, love, or, said differently, wisdom. This is Christian moral inquiry, whose goal is not knowledge but virtue.

Sometimes, though, it happens that a man’s knowledge, or what he thinks is knowledge, which was gained through scripture, conflicts with matters of faith or other plain teachings of scripture. “If he agrees that these [matters of faith] are true and certain, his original interpretation could not possibly be true, and by cherishing his own idea he comes in some strange way to be more displeased with scripture than with himself” (I.89). This is dangerous since it can lead to the lessening of the authority of scripture for the interpreter, and if that authority is shaken, faith falters, and if faith falters, love fails, since no one loves what he does not believe to be true. “If on the other hand he believes and loves, then by good conduct and by following the rules of good behavior, he gives himself reason to hope that he will attain what he loves” (I.91). The meaning is clear: The Christian man or woman must measure where he or she is on the road to wisdom by the true faith and the scriptures; he must not measure the scriptures or the faith by where he thinks he is on the road. What governs, then, one’s understanding and moral appraisal of oneself must be the understanding that one has of the true faith and the scriptures. One judges oneself according to this standard, but one must be particularly careful never to judge this standard by thinking oneself to be better or holier than what this standard expresses. Augustine is here
concerned to make clear again what moral inquiry is and to set such inquiry on a firm
foundation with a clear standard that itself is not to be questioned. Of course, the standard of the
ture faith and the scriptures may well be questioned and be questionable if a person is at the
appropriate stage in the spiritual life, for example, if one is just becoming acquainted with
Christianity. But, _qua_ Christian trying to grow in wisdom, the standard that the faith and the
scriptures set up is not to be questioned.\(^{19}\)

As if to reinforce this point, Augustine turns at once to the purpose of _doctrina_ itself
(I.92-93):

So there are these three things which all knowledge and prophecy serve: faith, hope, and
love. But faith will be replaced by the sight of visible reality, and hope by the real
happiness which we shall attain, whereas love will actually increase when these things
pass away. Therefore, a person strengthened by faith, hope, and love, and who
steadfastly
holds on to them, has no need of the scriptures except to instruct others.

And such a person would have no need because the purpose of Christian learning is already
fulfilled in him. He has only to keep holding fast to what he has, as Augustine said at the
beginning of Book I, by giving it all away.

So, when someone has learned that the aim of the commandment is “love from a pure
heart, a good conscience, and genuine faith,” he will be ready to relate every
interpretation of the holy scriptures to these three things and may approach the task of
handling these books with confidence. (I.95)

What such an interpreter has learned is that he must inquire into the scriptures for the good of his
soul and that he may do so confidently, knowing that he has a firm handle on their central

\(^{19}\) This would require a considerably more in-depth treatment to cover all points. Suffice it to say
here that there is a clear sense in which Augustine thinks a Christian should not doubt what the
scriptures teach, but it must be equally clear, although he says nothing about it here, that one
does in fact bring the scriptures and the faith into question, at least when one is engaged in
evaluating it before one is a Christian.
teaching and their purpose, so that he can go on to read them in accord with the will of the One who wrote them.

But now, how is the interpreter to read those books in the right way? He does so by following an account of reading that is itself built up on definitions and distinctions analogous to the central teaching of scripture: the double love of God and neighbor. The *caritas gemina* reveals the means of moral inquiry just as much as it reveals the goals of it.

**Book I and Augustine’s Historical Audience**

Turning to how the two audiences would have reacted to Book I, it is difficult to say more than a little.²⁰ A few points seem likely, though. The clergy and monks of less education would probably have found it both confusing and exhilarating at the same time. It seems doubtful that they would have encountered much like Augustine’s treatment of God’s ineffability before or his sophisticated theory of signs, and they may not have known what to make of such things—nor are they the only ones, since these are still matters of debate. His account of the ordering of all things to love might have had the most power for them. There were very few other attempts in the Latin world in the late fourth century, or before, to take a Christian view of absolutely everything. The *De doctrina* is far more philosophical than anything Ambrose, with his self-assured learning, or Jerome, with his encyclopedic breadth, ever wrote. Given what we know about men like Alypius and Possidius, it does not seem that they had a particularly sustained

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²⁰ Since Book I was part of the first edition, we consider both of his intended audiences, the learned ecclesiasts, whom I have suggested may not have actually read the work much, and the less well-educated clergy of Africa and the Latin world, who probably turned out to be the people who actually read the book.
interest in philosophy, so perhaps, even if they found the view of the world in Book I powerful, they would ultimately not have known quite what to do with it. Such a philosophical underpinning might have been beyond the interests of most of the less well educated, who would have taken away the general message but little else. So, it is likely that they would have viewed it in line with the framework Vessey has suggested and used it accordingly, considering it a source for their own *retractatio patrum*.\(^{21}\) As to his more sophisticated audience, it is likely, in my view, that the learned ecclesiasts of the 390s would also not have taken much away from reading Book I either, although for different reasons. Basically, these men seem interested in rhetoric, literature, commentaries, refined literary rebuttals of heretics, and rhetorical theology more than they were in philosophical problems or the kind of systematic theology Augustine does in the *De doctrina*. I suspect such men would have enjoyed Book I for its innovative presentation and its style, but otherwise they would have largely been unaffected by it. It was not really their sort of thing. None of this means that the contents of Book I would not have influenced its readers, some even profoundly. My only point is that when we compare the *De doctrina* in a general way to the intellectual temper and movement of its day, it seems, like much of Augustine’s early work, somewhat out of spirit with the time.

The Groundwork of Christian Moral Inquiry: Book II

\(^{21}\) The *retractatio patrum* does seem like a later movement, and so I am hesitant to apply it even to the less well-educated men of the 390s who may have read Augustine’s first edition. Nevertheless, as long as one construes the term generally enough, it would apply to the earlier period as well, even though we know comparatively little about such men at that period. At any rate, what seems clear is that the less well-educated men of the 390s were probably not engaged in their own peculiar intellectual movement that would have significantly set their response to a work like the *De doctrina* at odds with the somewhat later *retractatio patrum* proper.
Just as when Augustine spoke of things (*res*) in Book I, the reader was to consider things only in so far as they exist, not in so far as they can signify other things, so now the reader should consider things as signs, that is, things that signify, only in so far as they signify (II.1). As things exist, they can be the objects of use or enjoyment, and as they signify, they signify for the sake of use or enjoyment. This is clear from consideration of the signs humans and animals give to each other. They do so in order to communicate their emotions or whatever they have felt or learnt (II.3), and all these are, implicitly, directed toward the end of enjoyment. This kind of sign, the given sign, he will treat in this account because “even the divinely given signs contained in the holy scriptures have been communicated to us by the human beings who wrote them” (II.4). Written signs, the most common, are different among different nations; this arose because of pride, when nations wished to dominate each other (II.8). Scripture, written in one language, was spread abroad and translated into many, a means of assistance for all human beings for the many disorders of the will. For Augustine, even the most basic facts about scripture are ordered to building up love and unity. All men are to be drawn together in a very real way by the study of these books of God. But for what purpose? Augustine is, once again, very clear: “The aim of [scripture's] readers is simply to find out the thoughts and wishes of those by whom it was written down and, though them, the will of God” (II.9), and by this, taking from the previous sentence (II.8), will involves all human beings finding aid for the failings of their wills.

And they do this, not just by being edified through the text’s plain meaning, but perhaps more often by encountering difficulties in the things they read. These difficulties are themselves used by God to overcome pride in the readers and invigorate them and give them pleasure, since
it is more enjoyable to learn something more difficult (II.10). It is certainly more pleasurable to learn of things through imagery than simply through direct statements. Here, Augustine considers a passage from the Song of Songs and what it means.

It is a wonderful and beneficial thing that the Holy Spirit organized the holy scriptures 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 its obscurities that cannot be found plainly expressed somewhere else. (II.15)

This last is a foundational exegetical principle for Augustine.

But why should we turn to the scriptures in the first place? This turning toward God is the first step on the road to wisdom. “It is therefore necessary above all else to be moved by the fear of God toward learning his will: what it is that he instructs us to seek or avoid” (II.16). “After that it is necessary, through holiness, to become docile, and not contradict holy scripture but rather to ponder and believe that what is written there, even if obscure, is better and truer than any insights we may gain by our own efforts” (II.17). After fear and holiness comes knowledge, which he will treat of at more length shortly. What the exegete learns from the scriptures is that he must love God with all his being and his neighbor as himself (II.18). He learns that “he is entangled in a love of this present age” and is far from loving God and neighbor as the scriptures prescribe—he measures himself and finds that he is wanting. Here, his fear of God and his incipient holiness “compel him to deplore his own condition” (II.19). “In this state, he obtains by constant prayer the encouragement of divine assistance, so that he is not crushed by despair” (II.20). He thus begins the fourth stage, that of fortitude, in which he turns from the love of earthly things to that of unchangeable things. When he begins to see God’s light shining even in remote places and realizes that he cannot bear its brilliance, he has reached the fifth stage, that of resolve in compassion. “Full of hope now and at full strength, since he has come to love even his
enemy, he rises to the sixth stage, in which he now purifies the eye by which God may
actually be seen” (II.21). “At this stage he purifies the eye of his heart so that he does not give a
higher priority than the truth, or indeed an equal one, even to his neighbor; nor does he give such
precedence to himself, since he does not give it to the one who loves as himself” (II.22). “Such a
son ascends to wisdom, which is the seventh and last stage, enjoyed by those who are calm and
peaceful. ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’: these are the stages by which we
progress from one to the other” (II.23). Augustine turns, here and for the rest of Books II-III, to
the third stage of wisdom, to the discovery of meaning in the scriptures and to the
communication of that meaning to others.

Let me review some of these points quickly, leaving out his often extended examples. On
the scriptures themselves and their texts, he has interesting things to say, but ends up accepting
the usual canon. He then articulates his general method for the study of scripture. The first rule is
to read the canonical books in such a way as either to memorize them or at least to be familiar
with them (II.30).

Then the matters which are clearly stated in them, whether ethical precepts or articles of
belief, should be examined carefully and intelligently. In clearly expressed passages one
can find all the things that concern faith and the moral life. . . Then after gaining a
familiarity with the language of the divine scriptures, one should proceed to explore and
analyze the obscure passages by taking examples from the more obvious parts to
illuminate obscure expressions and by using the evidence of indisputable passages to
remove the uncertainty of ambiguous ones. (II.31)

As in a few other cases above, it is worth stopping here to look for his analogy with the double
love of God and neighbor. I suggested in Chapter 2 that plain passages are analogous to the love
of God for his own sake and obscure passages to the love of neighbor for God’s sake. The
obscure passages teach the same things that the plain passages teach; the obscure refer to the
plain and are to be understood strictly in terms of them. The exegete, he says, comes to understand the obscure by familiarity with the plain, just as a man comes to understand how to love his neighbor by coming to know and love God.

The analogy that underlies the distinctions and *regulae* that Augustine makes throughout the book, which I pointed to in Chapter 2, provides a firm basis for the ordering Augustine does of Christian learning. These analogous relationships seem abstract, perhaps, and, in some ways, not part of the main thrust of the system of learning he builds here. Even if they are highly abstract and seem too deeply buried, neither point takes away from the position that such analogies occupy. Other systems of thought are derived from human words, human sciences, human divisions, human observations, even those that try to found themselves on scripture approach the text usually with their own cultural baggage and their own tools for study. But Augustine tries to do here what others did not think to do: he crafts an account of human learning based, not on human thought or wisdom, but on the central command of the incarnate God. Each key part of this Christian system of learning can be rethought and related by analogy to that very love, the teaching of which is also the sole purpose of all human learning. There is only one teacher, as Augustine points out in the *De magistro*, Jesus Christ, and maybe this one teacher only teaches one thing. One reason Augustine probably did not feel the need to make this point obvious in his text was that the system he built up was not clearly something original to him; it had much in the way of definitions and distinctions in common with ordinary pagan *doctrina*, as I already pointed out above. But for Augustine the fact that ordinary *doctrina* could be found to be analogous with the *caritas gemina* was likely to be a confirmation both that such learning counted as true learning and that the analogous relationship buried in them was real. Such
disciplines would be based on things that human beings had discovered in the world, not things they had invented. To take one example—in *De musica*, Augustine did not feel the need to reinvent prosody and the study of rhythm. Instead, he ordered it in such a way as to see within the ordinary human discipline the *regulae* that lead beyond that discipline to the study of eternity. Perhaps instead of seeing such rules in particular disciplines, Augustine was concerned in the first draft of the *De doctrina* to see such rules in the ways that all disciplines related to each other, to their objects, and to their real (ethical) goals.²²

Written texts, he continues, fail to be understood for two reasons: their meaning is unclear either by ambiguous or unknown signs. “Signs are either literal or metaphorical. They are called literal when used to signify the things for which they were invented. … They are metaphorical when the actual things which we signify by the particular words are used to signify something else” (II.32). “An important antidote to the ignorance of literal signs is the knowledge of languages” (II.34). And to languages and the related matters, like textual editing, Augustine now turns (II.34-56). In all these matters, let the exegete not be concerned with the pedantic matters of the *grammatici*. “Their weakness stems from a desire to appear learned, not with a knowledge of things, by which we are edified, but with a knowledge of signs, by which it is difficult not to be puffed up in some way” (II.46). He does not say it, but these men are like Pharisees: they have kept the precepts of the law, the apparent love of neighbor, but they have

²² Catherine Chin, in “Grammarian’s Spoils”, *Augustine and the Disciplines*, 170-172, makes the case that Augustine conceives of grammar in the *De doctrina* as based on a relationship of analogy with the double-love of God and neighbor, and thus as part of the divine order of the world. Grammar occupies a certain “space of dislocation” (172) between the reader and God. Mark Vessey, in his introduction to the same volume (18), calls Chin’s a “surprising—indeed, barely tolerable” reading. But, if this study has followed the structure of the *De doctrina* correctly and laid out Augustine’s own interest in *regulae* in other subjects, then such a reading follows naturally and is not surprising at all.
failed in the essential matter, the love of God—better, he might have said, to be a poorly
spoken publican who loves God than a well-spoken Pharisee whose his love of neighbor was
really the use of neighbor for the sake of his own pride.

“Ignorance of things makes figurative expressions unclear when we are ignorant of the
qualities of animals or stones or plants or other things mentioned in scripture for the sake of
some analogy” (II.59). Augustine then gives examples of how knowledge of things enables the
reader to understand scripture, e.g. of the cleansing power and strength of the roots of hyssop, of
the habits of snakes, of the properties of numbers (II.62), and of various aspects of music, for
example musical instruments (II.66). “A person who is good and a true Christian should realize
that truth belongs to his Lord, wherever it is found, gathering and acknowledging it even in
pagan literature” (II.72). Augustine follows this broad principle with a more systematic look at
which of the disciplines are acceptable and which are not. His concern is not just that they be
directly relevant to the interpretation of scripture, although that is here his primary concern, but
also that, as implied by the above principle, the Christian claim truth wherever it might be found.
He seems concerned in what follows less to limit study only to those things needed for
interpreting the scriptures, and more to eliminate those disciplines that are themselves morally
suspect for some reason. Two kinds of learning, he says, are pursued even among the pagans:
learning of things instituted by human beings, learning of things “already developed, or divinely
instituted, which have been observed” by human beings. “Of those instituted by humans, some
are superstitious, some not” (II.73). To flesh this out briefly, based on what went before--the
divine instituted things reveal God in the order of the world; the humanly instituted things are
aimed at use and enjoyment, some for good, some for evil ends; these things need to be ordered
to the divinely instituted things, and those that are superfluous to that end should be jettisoned. Those aimed at evil ends are superstitious practices, like divination and astrology (II.74-95).\(^23\) Those aimed at frivolous ends are superfluous, for example, dances in the theater, if these have no natural meaning (II.96-97), the visual arts “except when it matters why or where or when or by whose authority these are made” (II.99), and fictional literature that is based on falsehoods (II.100). Those aimed at worthy ends are useful, including things like dress, shorthand, and currency (II.101).

A digression on the arts and sciences is in order. It is important to note here why Augustine is condemning what he condemns.\(^24\) First, he says nothing about what we consider theater. He only condemns those dances, “signs made by actors while dancing”, (II.97), that clearly have no meaning outside what people have agreed they should mean. He cites the example of when many years ago in Carthage the audience needed a commentator to say what the dances were supposed to mean, since it was otherwise not at all clear. On the visual arts, he is careful to imply that such works can have value when it matters why, when, where, or by whom they were made (II.99). It is not entirely clear what he means to condemn, therefore; perhaps he only condemns art that is mere superfluous decoration, although even there one usually has a reason for doing what one does with a particular piece. The sense seems to be that he merely means we should not go to excess in such matters. For fictional literature too, he seems to limit

\(^23\) William Klingshirn (“Divination and the Disciplines of Knowledge according to Augustine”, Augustine and the Disciplines, 131-132) distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate doctrinae, branches of learning, or disciplines. This terminology is usefully neutral, but I would go further and say that for Augustine some of these disciplines are not productive of knowledge at all, and thus are not properly parts of any kind of doctrina.

\(^24\) I will not here reach out in detail to his other works and his more developed views elsewhere. My goal is to make clear what he means here.
his condemnation to those stories that are based on falsehoods (II.100). He does not specify what this means, but one might argue, for example, that even a story based on something that did not happen can teach a true moral and so is not strictly based on falsehood, since the author never claims that such a thing actually happened. Again, his concern here seems to be to limit Christians to engaging in such arts only as have a clear moral purpose or at least to engaging in such arts only in so far as doing so does not constitute lying or vanity. At the end of this book (II.139), he generalizes that students should not seek knowledge in such studies as if they could lead to the happy life and that (II.140) nothing should be to excess. Augustine seems both to leave appropriate space for Christian art and science and at the same time to express himself rhetorically in such a way that one could easily read him as condemning all arts and sciences not directly related to understanding the Bible. The trouble with such a naïve reading, though, leaving out what Augustine says in other works, is that he explicitly contradicts it here when he says that all truth belongs to Christians. Perhaps one can account for the tone by pointing out that he is primarily concerned here with teaching the student of scripture what kinds of things he should spend his time learning. So, he leaves appropriate space for the arts and sciences, carried out in the right way, but expresses himself in a way that is more that of a teacher concerned to keep his students from error and sin than of a theorist only concerned to lay out his system of the relationships among the various human activities. He is concerned to lay out such a system, but as we have seen him above, for example in his discussion of manuscripts, he seems here particularly concerned also to use his system to give his readers good practical guidance, based on love. This seems right since even the goal of such a system is chiefly moral inquiry.
Returning to his discussion of the various disciplines, of those things instituted by God, he says, and not by human beings, all are valuable to know (II.104). These include history (105), the observational sciences (110), and other arts (115); logic too has its place (117), as does mathematics (136). Among part of this divine order is to be found eloquence. Like mathematics, its rules too are part of the order of the world, but unlike definitions and classifications, eloquence is often best learned on its own through practice than by the work of teachers (II.132-134).

In all these matters it is often true that the pleasure derived from the open display of truth is greater than the assistance gained from discussing or examining it, though indeed these things can sharpen the intellect, which is a good thing provided that they do not also make people more mischievous or conceited or, in other words, more inclined to deceive others by plausible talk and questioning or to think that by learning these things they have done something marvelous which entitles them to consider themselves superior to sincere and unsophisticated people. (II.135)

In other words, Augustine is careful to warn his readers about the moral hazards that accompany this discipline. “This part of learning, when it is learned, is more to be employed so that we lay out those things which have been understood rather than so that we may merely understand” (II.134, my translation). For the knowledge of things, eloquence does not matter; for expressing what one has learned, eloquence does matter, but is often best learned through practice and reading, not by attending rhetorical schools. This last point he will make again more forcefully in Book IV. In general,

in human life, knowledge of these things is to be used sparingly and in passing, and not in order to make things--unless a particular task demands it which is not my concern now--but to assist our judgment so that we are not entirely unaware of what scripture wishes to convey when it includes figurative expressions based on these arts. (II.116)

Learning, then, broadly conceived, should only be carried out in so far as it helps us (through the scriptures) learn the will of God and the way toward wisdom. Some people delight in learning so
much that they boast among the unlearned rather than investigating why these things are the way they are; nor do they relate the things they know to the praise of God, who made things this way (II.138). Students should not pursue any of these studies as if they “were a means to attaining a happy life”, but students must be careful and discriminate (II.139), and “in all these subjects the watchword must be ‘nothing in excess’” (II.140). But even in studies not directly pointed toward scripture, he reiterates that truth can be found, particularly among the pagan philosophers (II.144-147). Let them remember, though, that the Israelites plundered the Egyptians and took their gold with them out of the land, which is a type of the Christian use of pagan literature, but they only did this after the Passover. Christ’s Passover teaches human beings to be humble and lowly of heart, “not puffed up by knowledge but built up by love” (II.148). Remember too, he says, that at the first Passover the Israelites were to mark their doorposts with blood and to sprinkle them with hyssop, which is a symbol for love.

Nothing is stronger or more penetrating than [hyssop's] roots, so that ‘rooted and grounded in love’ we may be able ‘to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.’ This refers to the Lord's cross. … In the symbol of the cross every Christian act is inscribed: to do good in Christ and to hold fast resolutely to him, to hope for heaven, and to avoid profaning the sacraments. If we are purified by such behavior, we will be able ‘to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge’--the love in which he, by whom everything was made, is equal to the Father--‘and so be filled with all the fullness of God.’ (II.150)

In comparison with this, the learning of the pagans is as nothing (II.151).

For what a person learns independently of scripture is condemned there if it is harmful, but found there if it is useful. And when one has found there all the useful knowledge that can be learned anywhere else, one will also find there, in much greater abundance, things which are learnt nowhere else at all, but solely in the remarkable sublimity and remarkable humility of the scriptures. Readers furnished with such an education will not be held back by unfamiliar signs. (II.152)
Augustine does not here condemn knowledge of, say, Cicero or Roman history, just because it is not contained in scripture. What he does say becomes clearer when seen against the backdrop of moral inquiry. For the Christian, there is nothing contained in the pagan books that will advance a man in learning, *sana doctrina*, learning related to the progress toward wisdom, that is not also contained in the scriptures. Augustine clarifies himself right away: the knowledge he means is “useful knowledge”. Useful for what? The only answer can be progress toward God, carried out by reading the scriptures for the purpose of inquiring about oneself.\(^{25}\)

Book II and the Historical Audience

Before 427, Augustine’s audiences would have only had Books I and II, so it is useful to stop here and consider how they might have responded to the contents of Book II. Briefly, the men of less education would likely have found significant value in it, particularly for its guidance on things on the canon of scripture, its condemnation of astrology, and its general ordering of the disciplines toward Christian learning and away from the pagan learning that still dominated the schools. Some may have used such an account of the disciplines to help them structure their own reading and study, but, of course, that is only one possibility among many. As part of the *retractatio patrum*, Book II would have provided many concrete examples of the solutions to

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\(^{25}\) It has been argued that Augustine presents here, in his catalogue of disciplines, a charter for a Christian culture (Verheijen, “Le *De doctrina christiana*”, 11) or a treatise on the liberal arts more broadly (Van Fleteren, “St. Augustine, Neoplatonism, and the Liberal Arts: The Background to the *De doctrina christiana*”, *Classic of Western Culture*, 14-24). Those who call this section of Book II a digression and thus in need of explanation--the most popular explanation being that it is a charter for the Christian intellectual--have largely ignored that this whole treatment is couched in ethical terms. He relates everything to what might possibly be needed to interpret the scriptures, keeping much and discarding much too.
puzzles in scripture and answers to those critical of how Christians had been using the pagan
artes. The great learned ecclesiasts of the 390s would likely have seen this part of the book as
providing interesting answers to puzzles and questions about scripture as well as giving good
advice to students about how and what to study. Those perceptive enough to see how the whole
system of the work is aimed at building up love would have found this a powerful suggestion for
how to reorient their own education from its traditional bases to the Christian pursuit of wisdom,
which they had probably begun to do each in his own way already. One can imagine Jerome, for
example, seeing the point of what Augustine is doing but at the same time not necessarily
thinking that he himself should follow Augustine’s lead and conceive of learning like this. One
has the sense, though, that Paulinus of Nola might have gone beyond what Jerome would have
and followed Augustine’s lead more. Such, then, were his audiences, actual and intended, and
how they might well have reacted to or used what was in Book II.

The Manner, Methods, and Tools of Christian Moral Inquiry: Book III

Augustine moves now to the real heart of his project, which, as I have already argued,
will ultimately end up coming short of what he had hoped for. Having dealt with unknown signs,
he turns to ambiguous signs. “Ambiguity in scripture resides either in literal or metaphorical
usage” (III.2). Ambiguities in literal usage are easy to solve, for the most part, as long as the
exegete takes account of things like correct punctuation and pronunciation, context, and others
(III.3-20). Metaphorical language can also be ambiguous. One must be particularly certain not to
interpret literally what is meant figuratively (III.20), although this is better than interpreting as
things what are merely human signs (III.25-32). Nor should what is meant literally be taken
as figurative. Here is, as I pointed out above, the crucial idea.

   Anything in the divine discourse that cannot be related either to good morals or the true
faith should be taken as figurative. Good morals have to do with our love of God and our
neighbor, the true faith with our understanding of God and our neighbor. The hope that
each person has within his own conscience is directly related to the progress he feels
himself to be making toward the love and understanding of God and his neighbor. (III.33)

   And here he turns to many of the ways in which scripture can teach us about ourselves.
People condemn only what those of their own time condemn and they praise only what the
morals of their day commend.

   And so it happens that if scripture enjoins something at variance with the practices of its
readers, or censures something that is not at variance with them, they consider the
relevant expression to be figurative (always assuming that their minds are governed by
the authority of the word). But scripture enjoins nothing but love and censures nothing
but lust and molds men's minds accordingly. Similarly, if their minds are taken over by a
particular prejudice, people consider as figurative anything that scripture asserts to the
contrary. But it asserts nothing except the catholic faith, in times past, present, and future.
It narrates the past, foretells the future, and demonstrates the present, but all these things
serve to nourish and strengthen this love and to overcome and annihilate lust. (III.35)

To put the points succinctly, if we should not assume, just because scripture seems to teach
literally something that we think is wrong, that such a passage should be taken figuratively. We
should interpret such passages in terms of what builds up love and overcomes lust. The same
goes for any words or deeds that appear harsh to us (III.39) or wicked (III.42). Appropriate
conduct varies according to times and place, and we must be aware of this (III.45). What matters
is the motive we have for doing a thing (III.46): Is it done out of a desire to enjoy God for his
own sake or our neighbor for God’s sake? We ask this question of texts that seem at odds with
how we live, just as we ask this question of ourselves, moved by the fear of God and the desire to
know his will through the scriptures.
Whatever accords with the social practices of those with whom we are to live this present life—whether this manner of life is imposed by necessity or undertaken in the course of duty—should be related by good and serious men to the aims of self-interest and kindness, either literally, as we ourselves should do, or also figuratively, as is allowed to the prophets. (III.50)

Such a moral principle illuminates first how we should act and second how our understanding of how to act will help us understand how to interpret the reported actions of the saints in scripture.

If a command enjoins good or condemns evil, take it literally, he says, and if it enjoins evil or condemns good, take it figuratively (III.55). Furthermore, the exegete must be aware that the same passage can legitimately be taken different ways by readers at different stages (III.59).

Likewise, we must take care not to regard something in the Old Testament that is not wickedness or wrongdoing by the standards of its own time—even when understood literally and not figuratively—as capable of being transferred to the present time and applied to our own lives. (III.60)

Lust is in control of this man, who seeks in the very scriptures complicity in his own sin.

Such a wretch does not realize that these things are written down for a useful purpose, to enable men of good conscience to see, for their own spiritual health, that a practice which they reject can have a good application, and that a practice which they embrace can be damnable, if the love shown by its followers (in the first case) or their greed (in the second) be taken into account. (III.60)

This is worth reflecting on a moment. Augustine tells the reader, first, not to use the scriptures to find excuses for own sins, not, in other words, to seek what is self-serving or what blinds to the truth, and, second, to learn from the scriptures that, even being confident of his own appraisal of himself, his character, and his society, a man might well be wrong about all three. Of this, unsurprisingly, Augustine gives many examples (III.61-72).

“When we have worked out that [an expression] is figurative, it is easy to study it from various angles, using the rules set out in Book I, until we reach [a] true meaning” (III.76). The words in which a figurative expression is contained “will be found to be taken from things that
are similar or from things that are in some way connected” (III.77). Since things can be similar to many things, a word will not necessarily always have the same meaning that it does in one particular place. And here is where he ended his first draft. As I pointed out, he has used his account of good morals to show how to determine whether an expression is figurative. He now intended, it seems, to use his account of the true faith to give rules for how that can be done.

But, after three decades and a long career, he changed tack.

An important thing to note in the following is that Augustine does not change the subject of his treatment or even the subject of this section of it. He ends up giving handy rules rather than a systematic treatment, but, from the perspective of moral inquiry, it does not matter. If he had possessed a system based on love for the interpretation of ambiguous figurative signs, it would fit in at this point in the text--but it would not change its direction in the least. A description such as mine would simply note its structure and show how his rules relate to the growth of character and wisdom. This is a key point for understanding why the De doctrina christiana is in fact a single work about a single subject. What layers emerge do not undermine the original plan for the work or its purpose. The layers simply show how the author, over three decades, changed his approach to the same set of topics.

When he takes up the subject again, he moves the discussion along practically. Things, from which the words of a figurative expression are drawn, can have meanings that are contrary to each other or just diverse (III.79). Some things signify more than one thing, depending on their context. The reader should use the clearer cases to illuminate the less clear (III.82).

“Sometimes not just one meaning but two or more meanings are perceived in the same words of scripture” (III.84). This is acceptable as long as both are consistent with the truth. The interpreter
must try to arrive at the meaning the author intended. He should use other scriptures to draw out that meaning. It was a great gift of God to build multiple meanings into the scriptures, even ones that can find confirmation in other passages (III.86). It is a great gift, of course, because the discovery of such meaning builds up love in the discoverer, for example, the exercise may overcome pride, as he said in Book I. The scriptures also deploy all the rhetorical figures, so an interpreter must be on alert for them (III.87-90). Augustine then treats of Tyconius’s seven rules, which, generally speaking, he takes to be guidelines for the way scripture expresses one thing by means of another (III.91-133). The fact that these rules have little connection to moral inquiry, to the soul’s road toward God, is further evidence, if any were needed, that Augustine, at this point in the text and three decades later, has changed tack.

All these rules . . . state that one thing is to be understood by another. . . . Whenever one thing is said in order that something else may be understood, we have a metaphorical expression. . . . When this takes a familiar form, understanding follows without effort; when it does not, effort is needed for understanding, and more in some cases than others, depending on the gifts of God bestowed on our human intellects or the assistance that he gives. (III.133)

Augustine has turned, from the aspect of the understanding, to that of character. In the case of metaphorical expressions,

students of our revered scriptures must be taught to recognize the various kinds of expressions in holy scripture, to notice and memorize the various ways in which it tends to say things, and especially--this is paramount and absolutely vital--to pray for understanding. (III.134)

God gives wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, provided it is accompanied by holiness; otherwise it will be the product of vainglory, for it is God himself who has given each exegete what desire for piety he has (III.135). Wisdom is built on holiness, on God’s gifts of the desire for wisdom.
Every major distinction and every important point, together with many of the minutiae of his discussion, Augustine relates directly to the progress the reader makes toward wisdom, to the reader’s own habits of moral inquiry whereby he makes such progress. The tenor of his discussions is always moral, never merely intellectual, and their texture is always that of treatments written to inspire the double-love of God and neighbor in the reader.

Book III and Its Historical Audience

Since Book III was not part of the first edition, it is likely that few if any of the learned ecclesiastics of the late fourth century read it. Its first readers would almost certainly have been those who read the final draft after 427. Such readers probably found in Book III what we would expect them to find: principles for resolving figurative ambiguities, which they would have found as useful as they had found such things problematic before. The *retractatio patrum* of Augustine’s last years and after seems to have been little interested in such things, though. Probably, the writers and readers of that movement found value in those rules and distinctions but such things were not primarily what they were interested in, since the distinctions do not, for example, mainly help one organize doctrine or respond to heretics. Of course, if Augustine had been able to provide his account of how to interpret figurative signs truly by means principles analogous to the double-love of God and neighbor, it may well have had more influence, since those rules would have been clear guides to truth in the scriptures, not just useful principles like the *regulae* of Tyconius. But Augustine did not provide such an account, and what he did provide, even when he finally published Book III in 427, was a work that eschewed the system
building of his earlier efforts and focused now on giving the reader (of less well-educated sort that Augustine now knew his readers to be) things that would be most useful to him.

Aiding Others in Christian Moral Inquiry: Book IV

Augustine now turns to the expression of Christian truth to others, analogous to the love of neighbor that points to the love of God. Teaching this was, of course, once Augustine’s occupation, but now he approaches rhetoric with an entirely different goal in mind: not exercising influence, not educating sons of the nobility for posts in the service, but rather the salvation of souls, both that of the interpreter and of those to whom he expresses his interpretation. Augustine begins with a warning that he will not give a detailed treatment of expression here, consisting of the rules of the science (IV.1-2). “This is not because the rules have no practical use, but because such practical uses as they do have must be learnt separately—assuming that a person of good character has time to learn them on top of everything else” (IV.3). Why should only falsehood be able to use the art of rhetoric to convince, he asks (IV.4)? Clearly, truth should be able to use it too, so Christians should not neglect to study rhetoric.

As for the relevant observations and rules, which, together with a skillful manner of speaking that uses an abundance of words and verbal ornament, constitute what we mean be eloquence, these should be learned independently of this work by those who can do so quickly. (IV.6)
Those who cannot learn such rules quickly cannot learn them at all. Even the masters of Roman eloquence themselves knew this. Even the most eloquent, he says, do not think laboriously of figures.

Yet we discover the rules of eloquence to be observed in the sermons and addresses of eloquent men, even though the speakers--either conversant with them or entirely untouched by them--did not consider them when preparing to speak or when actually speaking. They observe the rules because they are eloquent; they do not use them to become eloquent. (IV.11)

His account of how best to learn eloquence is certainly analogous to the way human beings learn how to love God and neighbor, which, in Augustine’s view, is less a matter of rules and more one of examples, practice, and grace. But, as I pointed out in Chapter 3, nowhere does Augustine mention such an analogy or make a point of comparison between the two. Although we cannot know what he would have done if he had written this portion of the text in 397, it seems at least possible that he might have made points similar to this. He does precisely that all throughout the first draft. But, as we saw, he has changed his approach to the text in the 420s and has no concern now for the elaborate systematizing of his earlier work. The absence here of any such notice implicitly confirms that.

But even the way he does present the best method of learning rhetoric illustrates the key point. He has said above (II.134) that rhetoric is often better learned through reading and practice than through the efforts of teachers and he reiterates that here. He was all too aware of how dangerous the kind of knowledge one acquires in the schools of rhetoric is; it inflates the learner and makes him think he is above other men (De catechizandis rudibus, 9.13). This shows

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26 See Cicero, De oratore III.31, and Quintilian, Instituta Oratoria I.1.2.
27 Among many others, see George Lavare, “Virtue”, Augustine through the Ages, 871-874, and Harrison, Christian Truth, 79-114.
Augustine’s constant concern for the moral life of his student, the reader. He is always concerned only to have the student study what imparts true knowledge, just as he is always concerned to keep students away from the knowledge that corrupts or even merely puffs up. As his purpose was in the discussions of the disciplines above, so his purpose is here: to relate even the effort to learn to its ultimate moral goal, which is the double-love.

And to build up to that goal, both in the speaker and in his listeners, Augustine turns to what the goals of the speaker must be:

So the interpreter and teacher of the divine scriptures, the defender of the true 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. (IV.14)

Once the listeners are favorable, interested, or receptive, then the orator has three possible goals: if they need information, he should present them facts; if clarification is needed, he should present rational arguments and evidence; if the listeners must be moved rather than instructed, he must use entreaties, rebukes, rousing speeches, solemn admonitions, and other things which can excite human emotions (IV.15). The Christian orator should be a man who can speak or argue wisely, if not eloquently. This is at least benefits the hearers, though less so than if he spoke eloquently (IV.16). Augustine here emphasizes the goal of expression for the Christian, namely benefiting his hearers, communicating to them the will of God. A man's wisdom is directly proportional to his understanding of the scriptures, and not just intensive reading or memorization, but real investigation and understanding (IV.19). Well does the man who reads scriptures and remembers it but does not understand it; better does the man who does not
perfectly remember it but does understand; best does the man who remembers the scriptures and understands them.

For a person who has to speak wisely on matters which he cannot treat eloquently close adherence to the words of scripture is particularly necessary. The poorer he sees himself in his own resources, the richer he must be in those of scripture. … A preacher who cannot give pleasure with his words may give pleasure with his texts. (IV.21)

As to the man who would be wise and eloquent, he should read the writings of eloquent men and practice imitating them rather than attend a rhetorical school. Best of all is to read those men of the church who are both wise and eloquent. Are the scriptures merely wise or are they eloquent too? Nothing is wise or more eloquent, and indeed, the divine writers have always expressed themselves in the most perfect way (IV.25). Kinds of eloquence are appropriate also to different states in life, so the interpreter must express himself, to fulfill these purposes, but in a suitable way. To those with the highest authority there is an eloquence all its own. “It is appropriate to them and the humbler it seems, the more thoroughly it transcends that of others, not in grandiloquence but in substance” (IV.26). Even in obscure passages, Augustine is confident that the truths are best expressed there. And anyway God made the scriptures obscure to develop our minds by discovery and exertion (IV.27)—once again returning to the moral dimension of both the study and treatment of the scriptures.

Build up the good, destroy the bad: this is the imperative that governs all the Christian speaker is to do. By being of use to his audience, he is of use to himself and he brings all some little ways closer to their ultimate goal: wisdom.

To prove the eloquence of the scriptures, important for showing the harmony between the truths of revealed religion and the laws of eloquence discovered in the world, Augustine gives detailed analyses of a passage from the letters of Paul (2 Corinthians 11:16-30) and from the
prophet Amos (6:1-6). He could discover more rules of rhetoric in all these passages, he says, but for a person of good character the rules do not instruct so well when painstakingly discussed as when passionately delivered. “Such things were not produced by human labor, but poured from the divine mind with both wisdom and eloquence, and it was not a case of wisdom being devoted to eloquence but of eloquence keeping pace with wisdom” (IV.59). Note again that he links good character, not with detailed discussions of rules and injunctions, but, by implication, with a kind of freedom in delivery and with grace. He continues that Christians should certainly not think the sacred writers should be imitated in those places where the writer has hidden his meaning under a cloak of obscurity. They spoke this way to exercise and refine the reader's mind, or to overcome reluctance and whet enthusiasm, or even to cloud the minds of the wicked (IV.61). They also spoke like this so that in the church there might be a second channel of grace that flows from other writers’ explanations of their obscurities. Again, although he has left off systematizing, Augustine returns, or rather keeps always at the forefront of his discussion, the underlying moral purpose that the scriptures serve. But, as in his account of the various disciplines above, he is careful to give the reader injunctions against whatever he considers to go against the basic orientation of both student and speaker: of the first toward discovery the truth of things and signs, of the second toward expressing those truths in order to build up goodness. Augustine does reject the rhetoric of the schools, but he does so on moral grounds, subordinated to that on which all the law and the prophets depend.

To serve best such a purpose, it is better to choose language that can be understood than language that is correct (IV.64-66). On this point too he cites Cicero as authority, again setting himself up against the popular interest at the time in the Silver Age stylists. The orator, he goes
on, must vary his topics and make them as pleasant as he can in order to keep the audience’s interest, even going over well-known matters (IV.67-71).

The eloquent should speak in such a way as to instruct, delight, and move their listeners. … “Instructing is a matter of necessity, delighting a matter of charm, and moving them a matter of conquest.” The first of these three, to instruct, relates to the subject-matter of our discourse, the other two to the style we use. (IV.74)

The speaker aiming to instruct has not succeeded until his audience understands him. If he wishes to delight or move the person he addresses, his style matters. “Your hearer is delighted if you speak agreeably, and moved if he values what you promise, fears what you threaten, hates what you condemn, embraces what you commend, and rues the thing which you insist that he must regret”, also if he rejoices at what you say is joyful, pities what you present is miserable, and shuns those you urge him to avoid (IV.75). If the listeners are merely ignorant, the speaker must instruct them first; sometimes this is enough for them to move themselves; sometimes it is not enough, and it is necessary that the speaker himself move them. Instruction is always necessary, but exhortation to action only sometimes. “The reason why [moving an audience] is a matter of conquest is that it is possible for a person to be instructed and delighted but not give assent” (IV.76). Giving delight is not a matter of necessity since when truth is being expounded “it is not the aim of the eloquence or the intention of the speaker that the truths or the eloquence should in themselves produce delight” (IV.77). Instead, the truths themselves produce delight just because they are true.

Delight has been given an important role in eloquence because some men will not assent unless things are presented sweetly. But this is not enough, since some still will not assent. “If one is giving instruction on the sort of topic in which belief or knowledge is sufficient, consent is

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nothing more than the knowledge that they are true” (IV.78). If the purpose is to move the
listener, it matters little whether he is taught and delighted, if he does not act.

So, when advocating something to be acted on the Christian orator should not only teach
his listeners so as to impart instruction, and delight them so as to hold their attention, but
also move them so as to conquer their minds. … So much attention has been paid to the
charms of style [that just for the sake of delight people often read about evil things, things
they would never do or approve of]. (IV.79)

And so Augustine has kept one eye fixed on the how rhetoric relates to building up the character
of the audience and what the use of rhetoric means for the moral progress of the man using it.

As if to remind us of teaching’s real place on the road to wisdom, Augustine turns to
prayer. The Christian orator should know that his ability comes more from prayer than from
study of oratory; so, “by praying for himself and for those he is about to address, he must
become a man of prayer [orator] before he becomes a man of words [dictor]” (IV.87). As he
prepares for his speech, let the orator pray to God so he can give out what he has drawn from the
scriptures. Many good things about faith and love may be said, but no one can know what is best
for the audience at a particular moment, nor what is the best way for them to hear it. The
Christian orator should learn what subjects he needs to teach and develop his oratorical skill, but
before he speaks, let him pray for guidance. Citing the example of Paul, Augustine makes the
point that even teachers themselves must continue to be taught, even though “it is God himself
who produces the growth” (IV.90). A man must be responsive to God, and without that, not even
the teaching of holy men or angels matters. “The benefits of teaching, applied to the soul through
human agency, are only beneficial when the benefit is effected by God” (IV.95).

But, returning to what can be said about how to speak well and how to teach what needs
to be taught, Augustine discusses style: “The eloquent speaker will be one who can treat small
matters in a restrained style in order to instruct, intermediate matters in a mixed style in order to delight, and important matters in a grand style in order to move an audience” (IV.96). Cicero, he says, could not have illustrated these three from Christian ecclesiastical examples, only from his forensic cases. In those cases, small matters are financial, so decision, great matters are those in which life is at stake, so action, and intermediate matters neither concern action nor decision but only delight (IV.97).

But in our situation, since we must relate everything, especially what we say to congregations from our position of authority, to the well-being of human beings not in the temporal life but in eternity, where there is the added danger of eternal perdition, all matters that we speak of are important. … A small matter is small; but to be trustworthy in a small matter is something important, so much so that not even what a Christian teacher says about acquiring or losing sums of money should be thought of as a small matter, whether the amount is big or little. … The teacher of those things by which we are freed from eternal ills and attain eternal well-being, wherever they may be raised . . . they are important. (IV.98-102)

For the expression of the truths learned from scripture, aimed at helping an audience progress in its journey toward wisdom, even things that seem foolish in the eyes of the world become meaningful for the Christian and his progress in moral inquiry.

He next treats of the three chief styles. In using the restrained style, the teacher's job is not just to reveal what is hidden and solve problems but also to anticipate objections and questions, though he should not do this so much as to undermine his own teaching (IV.110). With the mixed style, “the most attractive parts are those in which there is a graceful flow of phrases each duly balanced by other phrases” (IV.111). On the grand style, he continues,

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. (IV.118)
As before, he provides copious examples of these stylistic points, chiefly from Paul (IV.119-124). He then provides extended examples of the three styles from the Christian Latin writers (IV.125-133) to show that Christian eloquence is not only found in the sacred books. Concluding his treatment of styles, he gives much advice to the orator on how best to apply these styles in various circumstances (IV.134-150). His points throughout this matter-of-fact section all relate to the use of words and their ultimate purpose in building up love in others and oneself. But, despite that, his remarks are practical first of all. He does not organize and distinguish as he once did; instead, he follows those authors he has at hand who provide a useful starting place for his account, he reflects on them, reframes what they say if he finds it necessary, and exhorts the Christian to fulfill his duty of building up the kingdom of love by teaching and exhorting his listeners.

As if to reinforce how practical his focus is here, he turns next to how important it is for the speaker to live himself how he tells others to live:

More important than any amount of grandeur of style to those of us who seek to be listened to with obedience is the life of the speaker. A wise and eloquent speaker who lives a wicked life certainly educates many who are eager to learn, although ‘he is useless to his own soul’, as scripture says. That is why Paul says, ‘Let Christ be proclaimed whether in pretence or in truth.’ Christ is the truth and yet the truth can be proclaimed even by untruth, in the sense that things which are right and true may be proclaimed by a wicked and deceitful heart. … Because good men listen with obedience not to a particular speaker but to their Lord, … even those that behave unprofitably are heard with profit. For they may seek their own thing, but they dare not teach their own words from the elevated position of the episcopal chair, which sound [learning] has established. … There are plenty of people who look for a justification of their own evil lives from those in authority who teach them. … That is why people do not listen with obedience to the man who does not listen to himself and they despise the word of God preached to them as well as despising the preacher. (IV.151-153)

As Paul advised Timothy, the preacher must set an example for his flock.
For such a teacher seeking to be listened to with obedience, it is not impudent to speak not only in the restrained and the mixed styles but also the grand style, because the life he lives is not a contemptible one. He has chosen to live a good life without neglecting a good reputation; and to the best of his ability he aims at what is honorable in the eyes of God and man, by fearing the one and taking thought for the other. When actually speaking, he should chose to satisfy his audience with things rather than words, and not regard any matter as better expressed than another unless it is more truthfully expressed; the words must serve the teacher, not the other way around. (IV.155)

The example of a man’s life is more important than the words he uses or the morals he teaches in those words.

And this brings him back to the beginning. Here, near the end of this long work, Augustine shows how complete his notion of moral inquiry is: for the speaker to learn the truth that comes from God he must study the scriptures; to express such truths he must strive to make himself understood and effective based on his audience’s needs; to be received well by that audience, and thus be effective at bringing them to truth, he must himself live the kind of life that only comes to a man who has grown and continues to grow in wisdom, which very thing Augustine defines as coextensive with the knowledge of the scriptures; and to live that truth out, to have made progress on the way toward wisdom, he must study the scriptures and carry out on himself the moral inquiry that is based on the divinely revealed signs contained therein. The expression of the truth, Augustine’s theory of rhetoric as it is so often called, requires a moral inquiry carried out in full faith and with all earnestness, just as much as any attempt to understand the scriptures themselves in the seclusion of one’s study.

But then he steps back, reiterates what he has reiterated so many times already in Book IV, namely the duties of the orator, and speaks to the man who can speak wisely but not well, and then to the man who cannot even speak wisely.
Surely, then, the art of speaking both eloquently and wisely is a matter of using adequate words in the restrained style, striking words in the mixed style, and powerful words in the grand style, but using them of things that are true and need to be heard. But the speaker who cannot do both should treat wisely what he cannot treat eloquently rather than the reverse. If he is not even capable of this, he should seek to live in such a way that he not only gains a reward for himself but also gives an example to others, so that his way of life becomes, in a sense, an abundant source of eloquence. (IV.158-159)

And so, even for the man who is not a Christian public speaker, or even for the man who is simply a humble preacher not very good with words, Augustine brings his theory of moral inquiry back to them and back to the riches that they are called to give away, as he said in his opening chapter three decades before (I.1). They are called to speak with the abundant eloquence of their lives, illustrating what the scriptures have taught them by deeds, not by words.

Pulling back from such theoretical harmonizing, Augustine strikes what might seem an odd note at this place. For those who cannot compose well, he says, it is acceptable even to read the remarks prepared or the text written by someone else (IV.160-163). This only seems strange because he has moved from what appeared a more lofty subject, that of the life of the speaker and its relation to his own and his audience’s practice of moral inquiry, to something eminently practical, the concession to read the speeches of others if a man does not have the ability to compose them himself. But that is Augustine’s concern throughout his late additions: the practical, what can be of most use to those less well-educated men who he knows are reading him. In his first draft, Augustine took pains to nail down some distinctions that might not have been necessary for the men who would actually be the ones who would read his book, as it turned out not as much the learned ecclesiasts as the less well-educated clergy of Africa and aboard, although in doing that, he built a fine edifice of learning. Now, in his late additions, he adds what he thinks will be most useful to such men rather than what might, perhaps, be the most
suitable for the movement of thought in a philosophical treatise. This is not to suggest that his comments about reading the speeches of others are off topic; they are not. But they do strike the reader as not the same kind of thing as, for example, his account of natural and given signs, nor are they offered in the same spirit. If he was aiming to offer intellectually thrilling or interesting matter in the first draft, he is now trying to do neither; he aims to toe a practical line, to give tools that can help interpreters with their tasks, or at least help them better understand themselves and the practical roles they play in the moral lives of others. He does talk of things and signs still, but when he does his emphasis is less on knowing and more on doing—which is certainly right for that part of the book that was always intended to treat of action.

And, having connected his treatment of rhetoric back to the beginning of the work, he turns last to what must be, for a man with Augustine’s views on grace, the guiding principle at every step:

> Whether they are going to speak before a congregation or any other body or to dictate something to be spoken before a congregation or read by those who are able and willing to do so, speakers must pray that God will place a good sermon on their lips. (IV.164)

Those who deliver a speech written by someone else should pray that God direct the writer and that God direct the one who delivers the speech to do so effectively. The one who is to read someone else’s speech should thank God for the graces that he know he will give, “so that anyone who boasts may boast’ in the one ‘whose hands hold us and our sermons alike’” (IV.165).

Note here, just before the final few sentences, that he does not generalize his remarks on prayer. He has done so earlier, and thus there is not a particular need for it here. Nevertheless, to end Book IV of his *On Christian Learning* with hurried remarks on those speakers who read the
speeches of others rather than give their own does not quite seem a fitting end. His next paragraph and last few sentences simply say that this book ended up being longer than he wanted and he is thankful that God has given him the grace to describe, not the sort of man he is, “but the sort of person that those who apply themselves to sound, in other words Christian, learning ought to be” (IV.166, my translation). What this amounts to, then, is that Augustine ends this whole work with a discussion of men who read the speeches of others to a congregation. Even a quick glance back at the end of Book I or II will convince the reader that the man who ended Book IV the way he did (or Book III for that matter) did not have the same approach or style as he had followed in the first draft.

One might expect there to be a final summing up, a statement that can be interpreted to reach down through the whole work, tying up loose ends, relating all learning to the double love of God and neighbor, in a final crescendo. But Augustine simply ends the book on the question of how to use others’ speeches. It fits into the context of his discussion up to that point and closes out one aspect of it, but it seems to carry little force as an ending for such a book as the *De doctrina christiana*. Of course, this relates to moral inquiry as does his whole account of rhetoric, but how to use others’ speeches relates to moral inquiry only subsidiarily, as a kind of sub-question for the man who thinks he cannot compose well enough. Since delivery is in the hands of God, largely, and since the man has not himself composed the speech, so that he has had no part in seeing that it is well expressed, he can only pray for himself, for the writer, and for his listeners. Having said this, Augustine takes himself to have spoken enough about how a Christian writer should write. With a few words on the book’s length, anticipating detractors and weary readers, he ends noting that he himself does not measure up to the ideal of the Christian man of
learning that he has articulated. And this last note is itself one of criticism of self, one that touches, albeit lightly, upon Augustine’s own moral inquiry. It may well have been customary to deprecate oneself at the beginning or end of a work, so Augustine may have been following convention here. But, as with everything else above, it seems safe to say that Augustine is not merely following convention. He ends his four books on Christian learning with these words: “Ego tamen Deo nostro ago gratias, quod in his quattuor libris, non qualis ego essem, cui multa desunt, sed qualis esse debeat, qui in doctrina sana, id est christiania, non solum sibi sed aliis etiam laborare studet, quantulacum potui facultate” (IV.166)—“with such ability as I was able to.” This work, *De doctrina christiana libri quattuor*, had been with him almost from the beginning of his search for wisdom. It is fitting that it should be at the end too.

Book IV and Its Audience

Book IV’s audience was that of the less well-educated clergy and religious of the early to mid-fifth century, men like Possidius and Prosper of Aquitaine. Such men did not write about rhetoric, and they largely did not write the kinds of handbooks that learned men of the late fourth century had written. Of course, they used rhetoric, the kind of rhetoric they were taught in schools throughout the now troubled Latin world, but that was all. Peter Brown points to a recently discovered letter (*Letter 2*) in which Augustine, in the late 420s, responds to a man from an older more peaceful time, a learned pagan named Firmus, a man who found Augustine’s *De civitate Dei* unconvincing and whom Augustine had previously asked to send along the school declamations of the man’s son. Augustine tells Firmus to remind his son of what Cicero
says the orator should be, a good speaker and a good man, and asks him what Greek and Latin the boy is reading. One can see the old world of the grammatici, or at least what parents expected their children to obtain from such teachers. The evidence does not indicate whether Christian grammatici and rhetors of the mid to late fifth century began to teach from Augustine’s Book IV of the De doctrina. It is certain that a sixth century writer like Ennodius, who practices less of a refined style and more a jewel encrusted style, either never read the work or did not find its arguments and principles convincing. Of course, many of Augustine’s near contemporaries and successors did begin to write in what amounts to a simpler and more straightforward style, but it seems doubtful that this was primarily a response to reading Book IV. For one thing, the most famous writer to develop that low style and begin to use it, the man who received the most extensive training and turned from the refined Ciceronian style to that of a style for simpler men, was none other than Jerome, and he had begun to effect that shift in himself in the mid-370s. In so far as Augustine did affect the literary style of his near contemporaries and successors, which was likely to have been considerably, he did so, not through his own theorizing in Book IV of the De doctrina, but, as would have suited him given what he says in Book IV, through his own example as a writer and speaker, through the hundreds of sermons he gave, which were written down, through his commentaries, his treatises, and even the theological works that he wrote specifically in the simpler style, like De agone christian. Augustine’s theory of the sermo humilis was not nearly so important as his practice of it, and that practice was always carried out,

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29 Brown, Biography, 471-473.
30 See Jerome’s Letter 7 for his own account of this.
as he had said it should be in the *De doctrina*, in the spirit of a deep search into the self, a lifelong moral inquiry.\(^{31}\)

Conclusion

Briefly, my treatment has shown the essential unity of the *De doctrina*. It is a matter of the moral quest each man must undertake for himself, but set in Christian terms, Christian moral inquiry. The study of scripture, hermeneutics, plays a central but subordinate role. Rhetoric too finds it place, not in some educational scheme or other, but in the duty the Christian man of learning has toward his fellows to live a good life, to teach them as he can, to rise up to the demands his time and place put on him. The liberal arts too find a place in the soul’s journey to God, but it is one oriented toward texts that are open to all, even the illiterate, since such texts are proclaimed every day in the churches, and so, by implication, the liberal arts, or at least what matters most from them, their fruits, become available to every Christian by means of the speaking and writing of those learned in the scriptures. What binds Augustine’s treatment of many things in this book together is that he orders them all toward the one goal: wisdom.

\(^{31}\) What Erich Auerback says about how the *sermo humilis* marked a change from ancient models is largely right, but as an account of the literary style of a period, it needs considerably more reflection on the social and intellectual life of late antiquity. His focus is excessively philological, in the broad sense, and that has led him astray. See Auerbach’s *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), on the *sermo humilis*, 25-66, and also his section on purpose and method, 3-24.
Chapter 5

Conclusion: The Subject of the De doctrina christiana

I have so far not given any attention to one question that has exercised commentators. Usually, they broach this subject early on in their treatments, but I have waited until the end. The subject is the word “doctrina”. I have left it to the end because after the foregoing this seems to me a simple matter. It does not seem to me that the word provides any particular key to Augustine’s purpose or method, so I think Press was right to try to shift debate away from what it might mean.¹ Mainly I think this because we do not lose anything by taking the word in one of its ordinary senses. The Oxford Latin Dictionary and Lewis and Short both define “doctrina” as teaching, learning, erudition, or what is learned from study. De doctrina christiana becomes On Christian Learning. Christian doctrina is aimed at moral inquiry, at the man’s pursuit of wisdom and at the help he gives others in their pursuit, but like the learning of the nations, it consists of things learned, things that are ordinarily thought of as part of an education. Augustine widens the purview of what is to be learned, refocusing the efforts of the Christian onto the biblical text and what is needed to interpret it, but he does not move away from something that is recognizably doctrina. Of course, it was not doctrina to the pagans; theirs was a very particular kind of learning, a closed circle of texts. But Augustine’s was still a learning based on texts, guarded by interpreters, still written in the old sainted languages. Indeed, he argues that the pagan disciplines

themselves, or many of them anyway, are based on the order of the world established by God, so that learning, for Augustine, becomes more than just what separates Romans and Greeks from barbarians; *doctrina* becomes some essential part of what makes us human. But Augustine here leaves that to implication. He had no need to make such points, and so he did not. The activity of reading texts, of studying books, of speaking to others, all of this is what *doctrina* is. Whatever Augustine may do, he does not transform the word’s sense beyond recognition. For him, Christian learning is a lot like pagan learning, with a crucial exception: the learning of Christians is and must be aimed at and subservient to moral inquiry primarily. Augustine does redefine what that learning should be, he sets it in Christian parameters with objects relevant to the Christian life. More important than either one for him, however, is the goal that he subordinates all such learning to. Seen in that light, the controversy on what *doctrina* is or how it relates to the work as a whole largely goes away. Of course, many other interesting issues remain. I have not traced the outlines of how Augustine’s notion of *doctrina* differs from that of his Christian contemporaries or what it takes from and responds to in his less (or non-) Christian contemporaries or the works of the previous generation, those of the men who would have taught Augustine’s teachers. I have not followed these lines because it seems to me that, interesting as they are, to discuss them would take me away from how we understand the *De doctrina* as a whole, the essential meaning of the text.

Augustine began work on the *De doctrina* in the mid-390s soon after his elevation to the episcopate. He had thought about the role of the scriptures in the intellectual life of the Christian for a long time, becoming increasingly convinced that the Bible should be the heart of all Christian intellectual endeavors. He had known even before that that the goal of *doctrina* itself
was the pursuit of wisdom, moral inquiry, so it was natural for him to make that subordination clear from the very beginning of his new book on learning. And the political moment was right for such a work too: the Catholic bishops were rallying around the Primate of Carthage to begin an offensive against the three generations old Donatist schism. To do this, they allowed their priests to begin preaching, and for that Augustine must have seen that a work on Christian learning, on the interpretation of the scriptures and how that relates to *doctrina*, would fulfill a growing need. Augustine’s long interest in the liberal arts and scripture came together with a larger movement in the church of his day. He turned, then, to address again some of the issues he had written about a decade before in Milan, but he turned back to them now with a renewed appreciation of scripture, a growing realization that a man’s efforts counted for little or nothing at all beside God’s grace; and, a corollary of that, a firm conviction that the liberal arts did not offer a door to the happy life, but they did offer a doorway to the scriptures, the texts through which Christians grow in wisdom and make progress on their journey toward God. His treatment of the goal of Christian learning and moral inquiry, namely the one true God and the means to reach him, the *gemina caritas*, and his treatment of the kinds of learning a student needs to pursue and how he should pursue them, these were his first two books of the *De doctrina*, and it was these he published as a first edition of his work. This first edition was likely intended to meet needs in Africa among his own clergy and those of Carthage and elsewhere, but it was also written for the larger educated Christian audience of his day, particularly for men of learning like Simplicianus of Milan, Paulinus of Nola, and Jerome. To the first of these, in the capital of the western empire, Augustine sent his first edition by way of the busy bookmakers of
Carthage and at the same time through those bookmakers probably to the church in Carthage and those interested bishops and priests throughout Africa.

But Augustine seems to have had another reason for sending out his first edition. Based on the structure of the text and what we know he changed in his late additions thirty years later, Augustine may well have come upon a problem in the De doctrina, in articulating his program of structuring learning on the double love of God and neighbor, and it was this problem that possibly made him believe in 397-8 that he would likely not finish the text immediately and thus that it made sense to publish a first edition. That he had such a problem helps to explain why he stopped work on the book. The most straightforward candidate for the problem he might have had comes from two linked observations: first, the precise point in the text where he broke off, and second, what changed in his method and approach when he returned to Book III thirty years later.

Augustine drafted the text down through III.78, stopping at the point where his overarching double-love principle could not yield adequate hermeneutic results; he held back the third, now problematic, book, sending the first two out to readers; and then completes the work thirty years later with the same general aim of delineating aids for scriptural interpretation as part of moral inquiry, but no longer expecting such results from the double-love principle. Augustine broke off work on the text right when he was about to reveal how to use the account of things and signs from Book I, creation ordered to the double-love of God and neighbor, to build up an account of how to find true meanings for figurative metaphorical signs. He had remarked that one should remember that things can have many different meanings and that one should not suppose that a word will always have the same meaning. Since nearly every major distinction in
Books I-II is based on an analogous relationship with the double love of God and neighbor, and since Augustine says that he intends to use his account of that love here to provide a way of resolving such ambiguities in scripture, we fully expect him to do it. But he does not. He stops work here, and when he picks it up again in the 420s, he has changed his approach to moral inquiry and *doctrina*. That he did change approach appears from any consideration of all of his late additions. They are far less systematic, they evince few if any relationships of analogy with love, and the advice they give is more practical, meant to be of more use to the reader. Augustine changed then in a way that accords well with much else of what we know about the evolution of his thought. When he returned to the books on Christian learning, it was as a part of an effort to review and revise his works for the benefit of those who would come after him. However he may have changed, he saw in the *De doctrina* something that was worth completing. He changed approach, yes, and that can teach us something about him late in life. But his basic subject and his most important points he does not change or revise. It would be interesting to know to what extent Augustine revised the earlier text of the *De doctrina* during his revisions. I suspect he did very little of it, given his changed purpose, but that can only be a guess, since I have not yet been able to examine the Saltykov-Ščedrin Codex in detail. Doing so is one of the next steps in my research. At any rate, the change in approach and concerns is clear enough, so he certainly did not revise the earlier work substantially. Augustine is as concerned with moral inquiry in his late additions as he was in the first draft. What has changed seems to be more his emphasis: later, he was less concerned with schemes and the knowledge those bring and more concerned with grace and practical rules that can be clearly applied. He used the rules of Tyconius in Book III in the same way that he used the rules of Cicero in Book IV: critically, for his own purposes. Since I
have just spent forty pages outlining how moral inquiry appears in and is treated by Augustine in the *De doctrina*, I will not do the same here again. It is enough to say that helping the Christian in his personal moral inquiry is clearly the goal of all he does in the book. And although he does subordinate *doctrina* to moral inquiry, he is clear that moral inquiry does not necessarily presuppose anything like what we ordinarily think of as *doctrina*. For most ordinary men, *doctrina*, Christian learning in the scriptures, is necessary, but it is not for all: those who have already attained to love have no need of the scriptures except to instruct others. Learning is good for what it does for a man, namely help him toward God, and not for anything else.

One of the most important resources I have deployed here has been Gracia’s theory of textuality. As I said in Chapter 2, I have found that account to be very useful. This may or may not recommend it to others, depending on their other commitments. It has allowed me to distinguish among the four texts of Augustine’s *De doctrina*, as well as to articulate why we should look in those texts for differences in approach and method from his first draft to his late additions. What I have argued is that the best way to characterize those changes is as a shift in the cultural function of the text, or at least in what Augustine perceived that cultural function to be. Broadly, he saw that his audience had changed and with it the set of purposes such an audience would have in reading his book; he no longer needed or wanted to write for anything like the wider learned world of the Christian 390s. Maybe that was because he saw that such a wider world took little notice of his *De doctrina*, or maybe it was because such a wider world simply no longer existed in the same way, or maybe because he was no longer a part of it as it did exist. What I think makes the most sense here is that such a world of well-educated intellectuals as did exist in the Latin west of the 420s was not the primary audience of his *De
doctrina because his focus had shifted to the men he knew were reading his book and to the men he knew could benefit the most by reading it. Men like Jerome he probably never intended to learn from his book so much as appreciate and disseminate it, but by the 420s he no longer wrote for such an audience at all. I have said that the cultural function shifted, rather than changed, because the essential purpose and message of the four books on Christian learning remained remarkably stable for having been written in two stages thirty years apart. Augustine pointed everything in Christian learning toward the interpretation of scripture for the sake of moral inquiry, for the sake of growth in wisdom, progress on the path toward an eternal homeland. Even as he became unconcerned with system and put together his account of rhetoric in a straightforward way with examples and hand rules to guide the student, he kept the moral inquiry that he saw as the heart of human life at the forefront of his mind. This was the exact same purpose he had had at Cassiciacum so long ago, to find a way to pursue the happy life. Now he knew that such a life was not attainable here and that progress in such a life was not made through the liberal arts, though the latter were needed for the doctrina that helped one along the way. But he did know how progress in such a life was made: through the interpretation of scripture, for oneself and for others.
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