

Nodo unitatis et caritatis:

The Structure and Argument of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*

Walter A. Hannam

Much work has been done in the last half-century to shed some light upon the historical background of (and the intellectual motivation for) St Augustine's composition of his great hermeneutical treatise the *De doctrina christiana*.¹ In particular, the reason for the work's interruption and its subsequent completion some thirty years later has been the subject of some debate. Perhaps the most useful examination of this problem, as well as the most convincing conclusion, is found in the essay by Charles Kannengiesser, "The Interrupted *De doctrina christiana*," a paper delivered at the international colloquium entitled "*De doctrina christiana*: A Classic of Western Culture" held at the University of Notre Dame in 1991.² Professor Kannengiesser argues that the interruption of the *De doctrina christiana* was a direct result of a confusion in Augustine's own hermeneutic, precipitated by his investigation of the hermeneutic of the Donatist Tychonius (whose *Liber regularis* Augustine examines in the conclusion to book III of *De doctrina christiana*, under the title of *Liber regularum*). While this insightful and important article postulates answers to many questions about the Bishop of Hippo's intellectual motivation, both for the interruption of his work and for its resumption, it implicitly raises a further question of no little significance—namely, given the interruption of the work and Augustine's personal intellectual development in the intervening years between its interruption and completion, does the *De doctrina christiana* present a unified argument or a coherent philosophical understanding of the work of *doctrina*? For the purposes of this paper

historical references will be secondary, as I will examine the *De doctrina christiana* solely in terms of its structure and argument, as well as its place in the Augustinian philosophy of which it is a part.

It is necessary first to show the place which Scripture holds in Augustine's philosophy as a whole. In his paper "*In Aenigmate Trinitas: The Conversion of Philosophy in St Augustine's Confessions*," Robert Crouse explains that:

By the prompting of the Word externally, the soul is recalled to find and recognise the truth within, *in domicilio cogitationis*. Thus, the conversion of the soul proceeds in dialogue between the Word without, and the same Word within; and that is why the *Confessions*, and, in general, the Augustinian philosophy which follows from it, must have the form of engagement with the Word of God in Scripture (p. 59).

It will be remembered that Augustine makes this identification of the *sapientia* of the Divine Word now incarnate and the *sapientia* found in Holy Scripture in *Confessiones* XI, ii when he entreats divine assistance in his exegesis of the first *Genesis* creation narrative:

obsecro per dominum nostrum Iesum Christum filium tuum, virum dexteræ tuæ, filium hominis, quem confirmasti tibi mediatorem tuum et nostrum, per quem nos quaesisti non quaerentes te, quaesisti autem, ut quaereremus te, verbum tuum, per quod fecisti omnia ... per eum te obsecro ... in quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi. ipsos quaero in libris tuis (*Confessiones* XI, ii, p. 214).

[I beseech you, through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, the man at your right hand, whom you set as a mediator, yours and ours, through whom you sought us who were not seeking you; moreover, you sought us so that we might seek you, your Word, through whom you made all things ... through Him I beseech you ... in whom all the treasures of Wisdom and knowledge are hidden. These same treasures I seek in your books.]

"These same treasures I seek in your books." Augustine's discovery of the word made flesh—the conjunction in Christ of the temporal and spiritual—has allowed him to find in the external words of scripture, written by human hands, the secrets of the true word and wisdom of God, which he can receive and recognise *intus* through the

word uttered within his own soul.³ For Augustine, the *verba* of scripture were a means of turning the mind inwards upon itself, to where Christ the inner teacher dwells, in whom is all truth. Thus, *Audiat te intus sermocinantem qui potest*, "Let him who is able hear you, you who speak interiorly," Augustine proclaims (*Confessiones* XI, ix, p. 228). The truth has revealed himself to humanity in scripture and is, at the same time, the "inner teacher" of our minds. As a result, Christian philosophy must be a *conversio* from the outward images found in scripture to the truth ever present to the mind through Christ. This process necessarily begins with scriptural images (uttered *foris* and, as such, external to the soul); as these images are interiorised and given content by Christ, the inner teacher, the rational soul begins finally to understand (*intelligere*) truth, now appropriated within the mind itself. The *conversio* (turning and returning) of the soul which constitutes Augustinian philosophy takes place in several distinct stages. The soul, under the guidance of grace, "recalls itself from the external to the internal, from the lower to the higher" *ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora* (*Enarratio in Ps. CXLV.5*). This process can be described quickly as a movement of *fides quaerens intellectum*, in which the mind seeks to appropriate the images of scripture, making them accessible to *ratio* "reason" and *intellectus* "understanding."⁴

Augustine's philosophical method, which underlies the structure not only of the *De doctrina christiana* but also of such works as the *Confessiones* and the *De trinitate*, is clearly adumbrated in *De doctrina christiana* II, vii when Augustine expounds the seven *gradus* or "steps" by which one ascends to wisdom. The first two *gradus*—namely *timor Dei* "fear of God" and *pietas* "piety" in the face of scripture—are presupposed in the reader to whom the *De doctrina christiana* is addressed.⁵ Had Augustine's readers not ascended these first two *gradus*, they could in no way be the students of the scriptures whom Augustine addresses in the *Prooemium* (*Prooemium*, 1). The next three *gradus* enumerated are of central importance to this work; indeed, it is these three stages in Augustine's method—namely *scientia scripturarum* "knowledge of the scriptures," *fortitudo* "courage," and *consilium misericordiae* "the counsel of mercy"—which the *De doctrina christiana* spans. The first of these *gradus*, *scientia scripturarum*, is a basic and external knowledge of the images of scripture (the *res continentes fidem* with which Augustine deals in *De doctrina christiana*, book I).⁶ This *scientia*, as will be explained more fully below, is the content of the (at first external) faith which is the first step in the Augustinian philosophical method of faith seeking understanding, *fides quaerens intellectum*. The next *gradus* explains the beginning of the movement *ad intellectum*.⁷ In this fourth *gradus*, one sees the familiar pattern emerging, by which the human soul

possessing faith in its *scientia scripturarum* seeks its *intellectus fidei*—namely, by turning *ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora*. This will be seen to be exactly the pattern of books II and III of the *De doctrina christiana*. The fifth *gradus* (*concilium misericordiae*) corresponds to what is explained in *De doctrina christiana* book IV.

Before turning to comment on the structure of the *De doctrina christiana* as a whole, however, it is necessary to outline briefly the broad implications of the final four *gradus* in general. The fourth and fifth *gradus*, I argue, ought not to be seen as steps in an hierarchical sense, but rather in a logical sense. They are, in truth, the two moments in the *conversio ad intellectum fidei* which has been examined above. The fourth step is the intellective moment of the ascent, the fifth is the affective moment, consisting in love of neighbour as a moment in God's divine love which effects the *conversio* of all creation back to Himself (affective love for God is always prior, however, and thus, as one enters a deeper understanding of the *res fidei*, one realises that the neighbour can only be loved for God's sake). In fact, the sixth *gradus* is the activity of intellectual *conversio* as a whole, of which these preceding *gradus* are necessary and correlative moments. In the sixth step, as Augustine explains, one

ipsum oculum purgat, quo videri deus potest ... in hoc autem gradu ita purgat oculum cordis, ut veritati ne ipsum quidem praeferat aut conferat proximum, ergo nec se ipsum, quia nec illum, quem diligit sicut se ipsum (II, vii, 11).

[purifies the eye itself by which God can be seen ... Moreover, in this step (*gradus*) one so purifies the eye of the heart, that one neither favours nor compares even one's neighbour to the Truth; therefore, neither does one favour nor compare oneself to the Truth, because this one will not even do for the person whom one loves as oneself]

The content of Christian *fides* has both an intellective and a moral content. Therefore, the movement *ad intellectum fidei* must have both an intellective (*oculus quo videri deus potest*) and an affective (*oculus cordis*) moment. These moments are seen in steps four and five. In step four, one comes to understand the *res fidei* "realities of the faith." This intellective aspect of the faith consists principally of the Trinity and the incarnation, and secondarily of creation's descent from and return to God through providence. The *res fidei* are the principles of the moral aspect of the faith. In other words, as these realities (that is, first, the Trinity, the divine self-love, and second, providence and the incarnation, expressions of divine love for creation) become

more fully understood as true, they are necessarily affectively sought as good, and one must, as it were, "act out the faith," in proclaiming the *intellecta* to one's neighbour in word and deed (step five). This activity is itself a moment of the *conversio* of all intellectual natures (and indeed of all creation) back to God through Christ. This twofold activity, ruled over by, and done for the sake of, God, is the activity by which the Christian philosopher attains the full *intellectus fidei*. The seventh *gradus*, *sapientia*, I argue, is not attained fully in this life, but only in the unending *perfruedum* of the Trinity in eternity.⁸ The life of the Christian *doctor* is summed up in the activity of the sixth *gradus* with its two constitutive moments, the fourth and fifth *gradus*.

This structure of the *De doctrina christiana* will become clear as we examine the work itself more closely. Returning to the beginning of the work, it is necessary first to examine briefly the *Prooemium*, which is important, not simply as a polemic against possible objectors, but as a philosophical underpinning upon the understanding of which the entire method of the work depends.⁹ The argument in this section takes the form of an *aporia* and argues, at once, against those who are wanting in divine grace, and hence, attempt to understand scripture solely through human teaching, and against those who believe *totum quod de illarum litterarum obscuritatibus laudibiliter aperitur, divino munere fieri posse* "that everything about the obscurities of Scripture which is uncovered in a praiseworthy manner can be done simply by divine gift" (*Prooemium*, 2). Both of these classes of reader suffer from the sin of pride, *superbia*: the first class is too proud to ask for divine assistance and the second too proud to accept the assistance given by God through human activity—namely, the work of *doctrina christiana* in the church. What neither of these classes of objectors has accepted are the full consequences of the incarnation; that is, they have not accepted the connection of the material and spiritual worlds which at once allows human beings to receive divine assistance through grace, and allows God to act through human agents.¹⁰ It is precisely as members of Christ's body (that is, as members of the church—an institution which is, at least partly, human) that people are redeemed; this redemption comes about, however, not only through human agency, but by the agency of the divine in the world. As Augustine says:

Nam omne verum ab illo est, qui ait: Ego sum veritas. Quid enim habemus, quod non accepimus? Quod si accepimus, quid gloriamur quasi *non* acceperimus (*Prooemium*, 8).

[For every truth (*verum*) is from Him who said: "I am the Truth" (John 14: 6). For what do we have which we have not received? If we have received these things, why do we glory as though we have *not* received them? (cf. 1 Cor 4: 7).]

Having once accepted the full consequences of the incarnation, Augustine's reader is ready to proceed to the argument of the *De doctrina christiana* itself. Augustine opens the body of his treatise with a very important distinction, upon which, he says, all treatment of Scripture depends: the *modus inveniendi quae intellegenda sunt* and the *modus proferendi quae intellecta sunt*—the way of finding those things which must be understood, and the way of making known those things which have been understood (I, i, 1). To the first of these, Augustine dedicates books I through III and to the second, book IV. Before Augustine begins to explain these two processes, however, he quickly examines the necessary nature of an act of love performed through God's grace. Such an act cannot remain internal but must turn outside of the human self as an expression of love: *Omnis enim res, quae dando non deficit, dum habetur et non datur, nondum habetur, quomodo habenda est* "For every thing (*res*) which is not reduced by being given away, so long as it is possessed and not given, is not yet possessed as it ought" (I, i, 1). This is, of course, the very nature of love: as St Paul expresses it, love *non quaerit quae sua sunt* "seeketh not her own" (1 Cor 13: 5). This will become important when we come to examine how it is that the *modus proferendi* arises naturally out of the *intellecta*.

Augustine next divides the *modus inveniendi* into two aspects—the study of realities and signs (the famous *res/signa* distinction of book I). Book I becomes Augustine's *Liber de rebus continentibus fidem* and in books II and III he deals with *signa*. It is necessary to see, however, what sense can be made out of this division in terms of my earlier assertion that the *De doctrina christiana* runs along the lines of steps three through six of book II, chapter vii. A fundamental distinction must be borne in mind, a distinction less apparent than those already discussed, which Augustine maintains throughout the *De doctrina christiana*—namely, the distinction between *scientia* and *intellectus*. To know something (*scire* or *nosse*) is not the same thing as to understand it. Although English is very loose in its use of these words, even, at times to the point of synonymy, the Latin is explicit and precise: the verbs *scire* and *nosse* connote an acquaintance with something—knowledge in the most external sense. *Intellegere*, on the other hand, connotes knowledge which has become interior to the mind itself—understanding in its fullest sense. *Scientia*, therefore, is simply the

knowledge that something is so. *Intellectus*, on the other hand, is the understanding of why and how it is so, demonstrated through necessary reasons. For example, Augustine says in book II, chapter ix, that the first step *ad sapientiam* is "to know (*nosse*) these books, even if not yet to the point of understanding (*etsi nondum ad intellectum*)" (II, ix, 14). Moreover, in this step,

illa, quae in eis aperte posita sunt, vel praecepta vivendi vel regulae credendi, solertius diligentiusque investiganda sunt ... In his enim, quae aperte in scripturis posita sunt, inveniuntur illa omnia, quae continent fidem morisque vivendi, spem scilicet atque caritatem, de quibus libro superiore [book I] tractavimus (II, ix, 14).

[those concepts which are stated clearly in these books, whether precepts of living or rules of believing, ought to be more skilfully and more diligently investigated ... For in those passages which are stated openly in the Scriptures are found all those things which contain faith and the morals of living (namely, hope and charity) about which we treated in the preceding book.]

Thus we begin to see where the first book—the *liber de rebus continentibus fidem*—fits into Augustine's schema. This is the book in which he deals with *scienda*: those things with which the Christian *doctor* must first become acquainted *in fide*. It is important to note here how Augustine maintains the two aspects of Christian *fides*—namely, intellective and moral (*fidem moresque vivendi*), which were noted earlier in the examination of steps (*gradus*) four through six. At this point in the argument the exegete develops a *regula fidei*—that is, a set of *credenda* (containing both intellective and moral aspects) which must be first believed, as Augustine makes most clear later:

consulat regulam fidei, quam de scripturarum planioribus locis et ecclesiae auctoritate percepit, de qua satis egimus, cum de rebus in libro primo loqueremur (III, ii, 2).

[let him consult the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) which he gathered from the plainer passages of the Scriptures and from the authority of the Church, which we discussed enough when we spoke about realities (*de rebus*) in the first book.]

We begin to see here a familiar pattern developing—the Augustinian pattern of *fides quaerens intellectum*, the dialogue of the word without with the Word within, which

was spoken of earlier in this paper. But what is the content of this *fides in rebus* which is acquired in book I? In brief, we learn of God who is immaterial, ineffable, and triune. In a traditional Christian/Neoplatonic pattern of *exitus/reditus*, we realise that we are *peregrinantes a domino* and yet, as a result of the incarnation, we are able to use (*uti*) creation in order to attain to and enjoy (*frui/amore inhaerere propter se ipsum*) God, Wisdom itself.¹¹ Moreover, we learn the proper ordering of our loves of God and neighbour: that is to say, we are to love God for His own sake, and our neighbour for God's sake—as fellow rational natures and fellow travellers on the *via ad patriam*. We must believe this, but, further we must *hope* for the accomplishment of our redemption and return to God:¹²

Porro si et credit et diligit, bene agendo et praeceptis morum bonorum obtemperando efficit, ut etiam speret se ad id, quod diligit, esse venturum (I, xxxvii, 41).

[Further, if one both believes and loves, by acting well and obeying the precepts of good morals, one acts so as indeed to hope that one should arrive at that which one loves.]

But, as Augustine explains, "the knowledge of a good hope does not make one vaunt oneself, but makes one lament" (II, vii, 10). This state leads one to implore divine assistance by which, Augustine tells us, one reaches the fourth *gradus*—*fortitudo*:

Hoc enim affectu ab omni mortifera iucunditate rerum transeuntium sese extrahit et inde se avertens convertit ad dilectionem aeternorum, incummutabilem scilicet unitatem eandemque trinitatem (II, vii, 10).

[For with this affection, one disentangles oneself from every deadly pleasure of transitory realities (*res*) and, averting oneself from these, turns (*convertit*) to the love of eternal realities, to wit, the immutable unity which is, at the same time, Trinity.]

We see in this moment the familiar Augustinian pattern by which the human soul possessing faith seeks its *intellectus fidei*—namely, by turning *ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora*. And this is exactly the pattern we discover in books II and III, when Augustine comes to explain the means of uncovering the meanings of the *signa* of scripture.

After book II, chapter ix, in which Augustine concludes his explication of *scientia*, he explains: *duabus ... causis non intelleguntur, quae scripta sunt, si aut ignotis aut ambiguis signis obtequntur* "Things which are written are not understood (*non intelleguntur*) for two reasons—namely, if they are veiled under either (i) unknown or (ii) ambiguous signs" (II, x, 15). These *signa* he further subdivides into *signa propria* and *signa translata* (proper and figurative signs). In book II, Augustine deals with *ignota signa* (first proper and then figurative). *Ignota signa*, in general, are signs which in their immediate form are inaccessible to the intellect; that is to say, the *signum* (in this case the written word of scripture) is not understood because it is somehow inhibited from being absorbed by the intellect—it remains external and is not able to be grasped interiorly. The process by which *ignota signa* are made accessible to the intellect is a movement *ab exterioribus ad interiora*—it is the process of grasping interiorly the *verbum quod sonuit foris*.

Augustine begins his discussion of *ignota signa* with an examination of *ignota signa propria*. The inaccessibility of "proper signs" to the intellect results from not knowing for what *res* a *signum* properly stands. Since we are dealing here with scriptural signs, the *signa* in question are words, or groups of words, in human language. The inaccessibility of *verba* is at first the result of not being familiar with the language in which scripture is written: therefore, [*contra ignota signa propria magnum remedium est linguarum cognitio*] "a knowledge (*cognitio*) of languages is a great remedy against unknown proper signs" (II, xi, 16). The *cognitio linguarum* is the first means through which human intellect can have access to a scriptural text; without this primary *cognitio* the realities of which the word of scripture speaks must remain utterly *foris*. *Ignota signa propria* can be more fully apprehended through the comparison of various translations, by learning their relative accuracy and the regard in which each is held by the church.

When Augustine moves on to explain *ignota signa translata*, we begin to see his method even more clearly. He states that these signs can be understood *partim linguarum notitia parim rerum* "partly by a knowledge (*notitia*) of languages, partly by a knowledge of things (*res* or realities)" (II, xvi, 23). *Signa translata*, since they are signs which have secondary significations connoting something other than those things which are indicated by the signs' primary significations, can either be *ignota* because the symbolic connotations given certain words in certain languages can escape us, or because the nature of the thing primarily signified by the *translatum signum* is not known. Again, the study of language is a more or less external study—a *scientia*

of external language and its connotations. In the study of things, however, there is a most definite movement *ab exterioribus ad interiora*. Augustine explains that in the study of things (*res*), *duo sunt genera doctrinarum* "there are two sorts of *doctrinarum* or learning" (II, xix, 29). Of these *doctrinae*, one sort teaches of things instituted by humans, the other of things instituted by God. Some things instituted by humans are superstitious and others not. The knowledge of superstitious institutions is useless to the Christian exegete because it deals with unrealities: that is to say, it treats the created order as if it were itself divine—an absolute denial of truth and an *aversio* from God, *Ipsa veritas*. Of those human institutions which are not superstitious, one ought to avoid those which are superfluous, since they lead to an inordinate love of the created order as opposed to the proper love of creation in relation to God. Human forms of learning (*doctrinae*), however, *quae ad usum vitae necessarium proficiunt, nequaquam est fugienda christiano* "which help with the necessities of life, by no means ought to be avoided by the Christian" (II, xxv, 40).

A knowledge of all institutions put in place by God, however, is useful for the Christian since it can be an exegetical aid: it must, however, be seen as such by the person using it so that it might be used in the right way. These sciences are enumerated in the order of their increasing interiorisation in the human person. The first two, Augustine tells us, pertain to the bodily senses, *ad sensus corporis*. History is the study of past events which *in ordine temporum habenda sunt, quorum est conditor et administrator deus* "are situated in the order of time, of which God is both creator and administrator" (II, xxviii, 44). Because history studies these events simply as events, however, it is basically empirical, dealing with external objects. Natural science, as well, is simply an empirical science which studies the order of things as they are—the study, in other words, of the order of creation as instituted by God. Of the arts (which deal with realities made by humans) and games or play (which are activities done for their own sake) Augustine bids us attain a cursory knowledge, *ne omnino nesciamus quid scriptura velit insinuare, cum de his artibus aliquas figuratas locutiones inserit* "lest we should be altogether ignorant of what Scripture wishes to recommend when it introduces certain figurative expressions concerning these arts" (II, xxx, 47). What must be borne in mind about these *doctrinae* is that their objects, although intelligible because created by God, as corporeal always remain in a certain sense external to the mind.

In chapter xxxi, however, we begin to move truly *ad interiora*, for the last group of divine institutions which Augustine investigates are not only instituted by God, but

pertain to the soul's reason, *ad rationem animi*. The laws of logic and number, and most especially the objects of Platonic philosophy, are truly interior to the human mind, the highest point of our human nature.¹³ Indeed, it is by means of the eternal laws of reason, the faculty which deals with all of these *doctrinae*, that the mind is enabled to turn *intus* in order to allow the word spoken externally to resonate with the Word eternally present to, although above, the human soul. Exactly how this stage of the ascent to wisdom operates is seen most clearly in the *De trinitate*. Having outlined the *regula fidei* in books I-IV of *De trinitate*, Augustine sets up the road of ascent by investigating the universal category of relation which is at work within his own soul, in order that the word spoken *foris* and received in faith might become interiorised and that the soul might tend from this interiorisation of the word *ad superiora*, which is exactly the process described in *De doctrina christiana* book III.

If book II of the *De doctrina christiana* equips the Christian *doctor* with the tools which allow a turning *ab exterioribus ad interiora*, book III explains the process by which one's knowledge of the now-interiorised scriptural *signa* can move *ab inferioribus ad superiora*. This book, which deals with *signa ambigua*, is at the first level concerned with the mind's ability to deal with ambiguities of speech in such a way that no mere literal meaning (in the modern, not Augustinian, sense) is gleaned from the passages investigated. Augustine explains: *Neque ulla mors animae congruentius appellatur, quam cum id etiam, quod in ea bestiis antecellit, hoc est, intelligentia carni subicitur sequendo litteram* "Neither is anything more fittingly called the death of the soul than when that which in it indeed distinguishes it as being above the lower animals—that is, the understanding, *intelligentia*—is subjected to the flesh by following the letter" (III, v, 9). The structure of this book again moves from that which is most external, namely the ambiguities of punctuation in *signa propria ambigua* (which are cleared up by means of pointing the external text in such a way as not to disagree with the *regula fidei*), to the more internal—that is, to the ambiguities of *signa transata ambigua*, whose difficulties are cleared up within the mind itself. When these difficulties have been cleared and the mind has ascertained the spiritual (non-corporeal or interior) meaning at its highest point, then the mind, indeed, *ab omni mortifera iucunditate rerum transeuntium sese extrahit et inde se avertens convertit ad dilectionem aeternorum, incummutabilem scilicet unitatem eandemque trinitatem* "disentangles itself from every deadly pleasure of transitory realities, and, averting itself from these, turns to the love of eternal realities, to wit, to the immutable unity which is, at the same time, Trinity" (II, vii, 10), as Augustine explained in the fourth *gradus*.

Augustine concludes book III by stating that:

non solum admonendi sunt studiosi venerabilium litterarum, ut in scripturis sanctis genera locutionum sciant, et quomodo apud eas dici aliquid soleat, vigilanter advertant memoriterque retineant, verum etiam, quod est praecipuum et maxime necessarium, orent, ut intellegant (III, xxxvii, 56).

[Students of the Venerable Letters ought to be counselled, not only so that they might *know* the varieties of expression in the Holy Scriptures and vigilantly direct their attention and hold in their minds how things are customarily said in them, but also, that which is especially and most of all necessary, so that they might pray in order that they might *understand*.]

This is to say, when the realities, *res*, of *fides* are studied in the way described above, they become the realities of *intellectus*. The human mind investigating scripture must move *ab exterioribus ad interiora per scientiam ad superiora*. The *fides* of book I seeks and finds its *intellectus* by the methods set down in books II and III. The word spoken *foris* resonates in dialogue with the Word held *intus* as faith is proven by true and necessary reasons. This exegetical and theological method is found most fully developed in the *De trinitate*, in which Augustine moves from the *regula fidei* of books I-IV, through the eternal and interior categories in books V-VII, and finally ascends *ad intellectum* by ascending to a true spiritual (non-corporeal) meaning of the *res fidei* by means of the "images" of the final books.¹⁴

But how, it may be asked, does the fourth and final book of the *De doctrina christiana* fit into this ordering of things? I argue that it corresponds to the fifth *gradus* of book II—the *consilium misericordiae* in which, Augustine says, one *in dilectione proximi naviter exercet* "is occupied entirely in the love of neighbour" (II, vii, 11). This point clears up the vague introduction to the work of exegesis given by Augustine in I, i. Remember Augustine's admonition that *omnis ... res, quae dando non deficit, dum habetur et non datur, nondum habetur, quomodo habenda est* "every thing, *res*, which is not reduced by being given away, so long as it is possessed and not given, is not yet possessed as it ought" (I, i, 1). The Christian *doctor*, if the realities of Scripture have been properly learned *intus*, will naturally follow the order of love found there—that is, to love God for His own sake and the neighbour for God's sake. This necessarily entails a sharing of the truth learned: "this is my hope, therefore I speak," says Augustine in his *Confessiones* (X, i): the intellectual discovery of the truth of divine love and affective participation in it (the turning to God for His own sake) necessitate the

turning outward from the self to one's neighbour in love (for God's sake), a love which desires the salvation of all people.

Augustine's last book is about the *consilium misericordiae*, the love bestowed by the Holy Spirit which unites the church on earth. He is not writing a *liber de rhetorica*, as he tells us in IV, i. If book IV is examined carefully, it becomes apparent that, although the Christian orator is allowed to study the art of rhetoric, the principal duty is to expound the truths of scripture in plain terms understandable by the people. Moreover, the truth of scripture itself will be the real force behind the Christian teacher's delivery. Further, it is also made clear, as Augustine explained in the beginning of the *De doctrina christiana*, that the entire work of *doctrina*, theological exegesis, and Christian teaching, depends upon the work of grace. The teacher can do nothing in preaching but expound the simple truths clearly and in a spirit of Christian love. A teacher cannot force people into faith, for faith is effected by grace alone working in the human soul. Therefore, the preacher will succeed: *pietate magis orationum quam oratorum facultate* "more by the piety of prayers than by the faculty of the orator" (IV, xv, 32).

The structure of the argument of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* is clear. The structure is one of *conversio* and *confessio*. The first three books constitute the movement of *conversio* as *fides* moves *per scientiam ad intellectum*, the soul moving through the methods of book II *ab exterioribus ad interiora* and by the methods of book III *ab inferioribus ad superiora*. In this structure, which Augustine obviously intended from the outset of his work (as can be seen in his description of his intended treatise in book I, chapter i and from the structure of the books completed before 397), is prefigured the structure of all of Augustine's most important works including, especially, the *Confessiones* and the *De trinitate*. Moreover, this coherent argument of *conversio fidei ad intellectum* and *confessio coram multis testibus*¹⁵ sets the stage for the entire medieval Augustinian tradition including, though not exclusive to, such philosophical luminaries as Boethius, Eriugena, St Anselm of Canterbury, St Bonaventure, and St Thomas Aquinas.¹⁶

Boston College

Endnotes

1 A shorter version of this paper was presented at a joint colloquium of the Canadian Society of Patristic Studies, the Canadian Society of Medievalists, and the

Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies at the Learned Societies Conference held at Brock University, St Catharines, Ontario, in June 1996 while I was a graduate student in the Department of Classics at Dalhousie University. Financial support for my attendance at the conference was provided by Dalhousie, and for the completion of this paper by the trustees of the Killam Memorial Trusts and Dalhousie. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are from the *De doctrina christiana*, and all translations are my own.

2 Professor Kannengiesser argues that Augustine's interruption of *De doctrina christiana* was the result of his confusion over the enterprise of Tychonius Afer in the *Liber regularis*. Augustine in 396, "still infused with the allegiance to the Platonizing high culture which he had enjoyed so much in Milan" had "failed to grasp the significance of Tychonius's enterprise." (pp. 7-8). This explanation of the interruption of the *De doctrina christiana* stands in marked contrast to that of E. Hill, who argues that Augustine was engaged in the writing of a hermeneutical manual at the request of his primate, Aurelius of Carthage. In Hill's opinion, Augustine was not conscious of any lack of understanding on his part of Tychonius' *Liber regularis*, but, on the contrary, feared using the work of a known Donatist without his primate's permission. The interruption can, therefore, be explained, for Hill, by saying that "perhaps Aurelius never answered, or perhaps he decided against Tychonius for the time being" (p. 445). Both Kannengiesser's and Hill's theories hinge upon the interpretation of Augustine's *Epistula XLI: Nam et ego quod iussisti non negligo et de Tyconii septem regulis vel clavibus sicut saepe iam scripsi cognoscere quid tibi videatur expecto*. Kannengiesser argues that Augustine had written Aurelius for clarification, while Hill opines that Augustine had rather written for Aurelius' permission to use Tychonius. The answer to this question can only be resolved, as Professor Kannengiesser has rightly explained to me in several conversations, by investigating how Augustine's own exegetical method changed throughout his life and by showing how much this change was influenced by African exegetical methods such as that of Tychonius.

3 Cf. *Confessiones*, XI, viii: *ipsum est verbum tuum, quod et principium est, et loquitur nobis. sic in evangelio per carnem ait, et hoc insonuit foris auribus hominum, ut crederetur et intus quaereretur, et inveniretur in aeterna veritate, ubi omnes discipulos bonus et solus magister docet* "This is your Word, which is the Principle, and speaks in us. Thus He spoke in the Gospel through the flesh, and this sounded externally (*foris*) in the ears of the hearers, so that they might believe and seek interiorly (*intus*), and find the Eternal Truth, where the One and Good Teacher teaches all [His] disciples." This understanding of the "Inner Teacher" had been clear to Augustine as early as his

composition of the *De magistro*. Adeodatus responds: *utrum autem vera dicantur, eum docere solum, qui se intus habitare, cum foris loqueretur, admonuit, quem iam fvente ipso tanto ardentius diligam, quanto ero in discendo provecior* "[I have learned that] ... whether true things are spoken, He alone teaches, who, although he speaks externally (*foris*), reminds us that he dwells interiorly (*intus*); now, by His help, may I love Him more ardently, the more I advance in learning" (*De magistro*, xiv, 46).

4 The movement of this *conversio mentis* begins necessarily with faith (*fides*), since it is only in this mode that the words of scripture, as external image, are initially accessible to human cognition. The movement *ad interiora* is a process in which the images of scripture, which *qua* image are inaccessible to reason, are given a content which can be grasped by the mind *rationaliter*. That is to say, the images of scripture are given a form which is accessible to human reason, a form in which human *scientia* is able to grasp them and to move discursively, *rationaliter*, to an understanding of them, *intellectus*. This process is not instantaneous, however, nor will all truths necessarily be grasped by the intellect; *fides*, therefore, remains an important aspect and cannot be dispensed with in this life. Although the images have been given a content which can be grasped by reason, nevertheless they are still at this stage only potentially understood. Augustine, therefore, warns the philosopher: *si intellectu capi non potest, fide teneatur donec inlucescat in cordibus ille qui ait per prophetam: Nisi credideritis non intellegetis* "if it is not able to be grasped by the intellect, let it be held in faith until He shines in our hearts, who said through the Prophet: "Unless you will believe, you will not understand (Isa 7: 9)" (*De trinitate*, VII, vi, 12). The most obvious example of this portion of the philosophical movement (the movement *ad interiora*) in the Augustinian corpus is, perhaps, found in books V-VII of the *De trinitate*: it is also seen, however, in *Confessiones*, X. Cf. Crouse, "St Augustine's *De trinitate*," p. 508, and also Crouse, "*Recurrere in te unum*: The Pattern of St Augustine's *Confessions*," where it is argued that: "In no way arbitrary or accidental, the structure of the *Confessions* is the precise literary embodiment of St Augustine's *Itinerarium [mentis in Deum]: ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora,*" (p. 392). See also on this point in the *Confessions*, Crouse, "*In Multa Defluximus: Confessions X, 29-43,*" who suggests: "Book X of the *Confessions*, where St Augustine turns *ab exterioribus ad interiora*, and prepares for the ascent *ad superiora* in the final three books, forms the logical centre of the argument" (p. 182). Finally, having rendered the images of scripture in a form accessible to the mind, the philosopher prepares for his ascent within his own soul, *ab inferioribus ad superiora*. Augustine describes this ascent in the *De trinitate: tendimus per scientiam ad sapientiam* (XIII, xix, 24). That is to say, through the exercise of discursive reason the human mind is elevated to

understanding, an *intellectus* which one achieves most fully in *sapientia*. This process can occur since, for Augustine, human reason has both an inferior sciential part which deals with external, discursive objects which have been rendered intelligible, as well as a superior or sapiential part, in contact with the eternal reasons in the *Verbum Dei* itself, by which the truth of these objects is both known and judged. Cf. *De trinitate*, XII, ii, 2: *Sed sublimioris rationis est iudicare de istis corporalibus secundum rationes incorporales et sempiternas quae nisi supra mentem humanam essent, incommutabiles profecto non essent, atque his nisi subiungeretur aliquid nostrum, non secundum eas possemus de corporalibus iudicare. Iudicamus autem de corporalibus ex rationem dimensionum atque figurarum quam incommutabiliter manere mens novit* "But it belongs to the higher reason to judge concerning these corporeal things according to incorporeal and sempiternal reasons, which, except they were above the mind, would not be actually immutable; and unless something of ours were joined to these, we would not be capable of judging corporeal things according to these. Moreover, we judge corporeal things by reason of dimensions and figures, which the mind knows remain immutably." The images of scripture, once made accessible to reason, must be raised to the *apex mentis* through a continued interiorisation of the truth grasped in them. See the astute comment of David Hassel: "*Scientia* is, then, inferior to wisdom in the sense that it must subordinately cooperate with the latter if it is to achieve the good of the knower. This simply means that the higher and more interior part of man must exercise control if the sciential use of *sensible things* is to be ordained to a better and truer life." The understanding of the truth of scripture is, therefore, deepened as discursive reason, under the direction of the higher reason which is in direct contact with the *rationes sempiternae* in the *Verbum Dei*, moves towards a fuller and more perfect *intellectus*.

5 *De doctrina christiana*, II, vii, 9: *ante omnia igitur opus est dei timore converti ad cognoscendum eius voluntatem, quid nobis appetendum fugiendumque praecipiat. Timor autem iste cognitionem de nostra mortalitate et de futura morte necesse est incutiat et quasi clavatis carnibus omnes superbiae motus ligno crucis affigat. Deinde mitescere opus est pietate neque contradicere divinae scripturae sive intellectae, si aliqua vitia nostra percutit, sive non intellectae, quasi nos melius sapere meliusque praecipere possimus, sed cogitare potius et credere id esse melius et verius, quod ibi scriptum est, etiam si lateat, quam id, quod nos per nos ipsos sapere possumus* "Before all therefore, it is necessary to be converted by the fear of God to knowing His Will—what He enjoins us to strive for and avoid. This fear must lead to thought of our own mortality and future death and, just as if our bodies had been nailed, it fixes all prideful impulses (*superbiae motus*) to the wood of the Cross. Then it is necessary to become gentle through piety, and not to

contradict Holy Scripture, whether understood (if it strikes down certain of our vices) or not understood (as if we are able to discern or to enjoin a better way); but rather, it is necessary to understand and believe that what is there written is better and more true, even if it be hidden, than that which we are able to discern by ourselves."

6 *De doctrina christiana*, II, vii, 10: *ad tertium venit scientiae gradum, de quo nunc agere institui. Nam in eo se exercet omnis divinarum scripturarum studiosus, nihil in eis aliud inventurus quam diligendum esse deum propter deum et proximum propter deum, et illum quidem ex toto corde, ex tota anima, ex tota mente, proximum vero tamquam se ipsum, id est, ut tota proximi, sicut etiam nostri dilectio referatur in deum. De quibus duobus praeceptis, cum de rebus ageremus, libro superiore tractavimus. Necesse est ergo, ut primo se quisque in scripturis inveniat amore huius saeculi, hoc est temporalium rerum, implicatum, longe seiunctum esse a tanto amore dei et tanto amore proximi, quantum scriptura ipsa praescribit. Tum vero ille timor, quo cogitat de iudicio dei, et illa pietas, qua non potest nisi credere et cedere auctoritati sanctorum librorum, cogit eum se ipsum lugere. Nam ista scientia bonae spei hominem non se iactantem, sed lamentantem facit* "[next] one arrives at the third step (*gradus*), that of knowledge, which I have now begun to discuss. For in this step, every student of the Holy Scriptures works to find in them nothing else than that God ought to be loved with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the mind, and that one's neighbour, indeed, ought to be loved as oneself—that is, so that our love of neighbour, as indeed all our love, might be brought back to God. We treated these precepts in the preceding book, when we discussed realities (*res*). It is therefore necessary that anyone find first in the Scriptures that, since one is entangled with the love of this age (that is, of temporal realities, *res*), one is far separated from the love of God and of neighbour which alone Scripture prescribes. Then, indeed, that fear, by which one knows the judgment of God, and that piety, by which only one is able both to believe and concede the authority of the holy books, drives one to bewail oneself. For this knowledge, *scientia*, of a good hope does not make one vaunt oneself, but makes one lament."

7 *De doctrina christiana*, II, vii, 10: *impetrat sedulis precibus consolationem divini adiutorii, ne desperatione frangatur, et esse incipit in quarto gradu, hoc est fortitudinis, quo esuritur et sitiatur iustitia. Hoc enim affectu ab omni mortifera iucunditate rerum transeuntium sese extrahit et inde se avertens convertit ad dilectionem aeternorum, incommutabilem scilicet unitatem eandemque trinitatem* "One procures by zealous prayers the consolation of the Divine Help, lest one be broken by desperation, and ascends to the fourth step, *gradus*, that is, to courage, *fortitudo*. In this step one hungers and

thirsts after justice, *iustitia*. For in this step, one disentangles oneself from every deadly pleasure of transitory realities, *res*, and, averting oneself from these, returns, *convertit*, to the love of eternal things, to wit, the Immutable Unity, which is, at the same time, Trinity."

8 *De doctrina christiana*, I, v, 5: *Res igitur, quibus fruendum est, pater et filius et spiritus sanctus eademque trinitas, una quaedam summa res communisque omnibus fruentibus ea, si tamen res et non rerum omnia causa, si tamen et causa* "The reality, *res*, therefore, which ought to be enjoyed, *fruendum*, is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and the same Trinity, the one highest reality, common to all who enjoy Him; if, indeed, He is a reality, and not the cause of all realities, *rerum omnium causa*, and even if He is the cause."

9 H.-I. Marrou, who argues that the *De doctrina christiana* represents a "redemption" of pagan literary culture for the Christian, describes the *Prooemium* as "une préface polémique à justifier par avance son entreprise, à répondre à des opposants qui précisément estimaient une telle culture inutile au chrétien" (p. 389). Eugene Kevane argues that the preface is addressed to members of the African church, "persons of [Augustine's] own day ... [who will] disagree with his approach and attack it," who represent (in the tradition of Tertullian) a definite anti-*paideia*, "although Augustine does not name them" (p. 162). Kannengiesser, on the other hand, argues expressly against Kevane that "[f]ar from fighting here an 'anti-*paideia*' current, deeply rooted in the African church, Augustine addresses contemporary fellow Christians who know very well what a consistent interpretation of Scripture means. ... Fighting against [those who are experienced interpreters of Scripture], he nevertheless realizes that 'they are already equipped to expound the sacred books.'" Moreover, Kannengiesser argues that Augustine's *tertium genus* of objectors might represent the sort of interpreter epitomised in Tychonius Afer—that perhaps the *Prooemium* is addressed at Tychonius himself, or was at least composed in light of Augustine's first reading of the *Liber regularis* (p. 7).

10 On a similar point, cf. the comments of Mark Jordan: "To become redemptively manifest in human life, the Word takes flesh. Just so, thought takes on word-sounds in order to be spoken and heard. In the same way, again, the continuity of knowledge about God requires a 'fleshly' community within which it can become active. To put the proportion perhaps too naively: what the assumed human person is to the Son, that the spoken word is to the inner word of thought, and that the believing community is to the context of revelation" (p. 179).

11 *Frui* is defined as *amore inhaerere alicui propter se ipsum* (I, iv, 4).

12 Just as there are two moments within Christian *fides* (intellective and affective), so also in the *conversio* of the human soul there are two moments: the first, *fides*, is intellective and consists in a knowledge (which at first remains in its undemonstrated form) of one's proper end; the second moment, *spes*, is affective and it is this moment which allows the actual *conversio* or "movement" of the soul to God through consummating Love.

13 Augustine's use of Platonic philosophy is too large a question to deal with here. It is enough to remember two things. First, philosophy (which in Augustine's case is really a Christian Platonism) is the highest of the disciplines enumerated in *De doctrina christiana*, book II. That is to say, the other disciplines are, as it were, *ancillae philosophiae*—they are necessary for philosophy's activity, yet they find their true place only when aiming towards their consummation in philosophy, the highest science. Secondly, Augustine places philosophy at the end of book II because it is only through the realities discovered in Platonic philosophy (namely, the ideas and eternal reasons) that one can ascend, in book III, *ab inferioribus ad superiora*. Perhaps the most helpful treatment of Augustine's use of Platonic philosophy is found in Crouse, "In Aenigmate Trinitas," pp. 53-62.

14 Cf. R.D. Crouse, "St Augustine's *De Trinitate*," pp. 501-510.

15 Cf. *Confessiones*, X, i.

16 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II, IIae, 181, 3: *Respondeo dicendum quod actus doctrinae habet duplex obiectum: fit enim doctrina per locutionem; locutio autem est signum audibile interioris conceptus. Est igitur unumobiectum doctrinae id quod est materia sive obiectum interioris conceptionis. Et quantum ad hoc obiectum, quandoque doctrina pertinet ad vitam activam, quandoque ad vitam contemplativam: ad activam quidem, quando homo interius concipit aliquam veritatem ut per eam in exteriori actione dirigatur; ad contemplativam autem, quando homo interius concipit aliquam veritatem intelligibilem in cuius consideratione et amore delectatur. Unde Augustinus dicit, in libro De verbis Dom.: Eligant sibi partem meliorem, scilicet vitae contemplativae; vacent verbo, inhient doctrinae dulcendi, occupentur circa scientiam salutarem: ubi manifeste dicit doctrinam ad vitam contemplativam pertinere. Aliud obiectum doctrinae est ex parte sermonis audibilis. Et sic obiectum doctrinae est ipse audiens. Et quantum ad hoc obiectum, omnis doctrina pertinet ad vitam activam, ad quam pertinent exteriores actiones* "I answer it must be said that the act of *doctrina* has a twofold object: for *doctrina* is performed through speech; but speech is the audible sign of an interior concept. Therefore, one

object of *doctrina* is the matter or the object of the interior concept. And so far as it is oriented towards this object, sometimes *doctrina* relates to the active life, and sometimes to the contemplative. Indeed, it relates to the active life when one interiorly conceives any truth such that through it he is directed to an exterior action; it relates to the contemplative life, however, when one interiorly conceives any intelligible truth in the contemplation and love of which he delights. Whence Augustine says in the book, *De verbis dom.*: "He chose for himself the better part," namely the part of the contemplative life; "they will have time for the Word, they will gaze in wonder at the most sweet doctrine, they will be occupied with the saving knowledge." Here he manifestly says that *doctrina* pertains to the contemplative life. The other object of *doctrina* is on the part of audible words. And thus the object of *doctrina* is the hearing itself. And inasmuch as it is directed towards this object, *doctrina* is related to the active life, to which exterior activities pertain."

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