

Bishop, Preacher, Teacher:  
A Social Approach to St. Augustine's Educational Theory and Practice

by

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## Abstract

This thesis takes a social approach to St. Augustine's preaching, arguing that his theoretical and practical model for Christian education transforms the prevalent model of secular education in response to the social reality of his audience. A traditional Roman education placed him among an elite that defined itself through the literary culture, rhetorical excellence, and social values imparted through education. It is unlikely that the same elite formation was prevalent among his audience at Hippo. Augustine's *Confessions*, *De Doctrina Christiana*, and *De Catechizandis Rudibus* confront this social reality with an educational theory that reverses elitist values, by changing the focus of education from stylistic perfection to content, especially the content of the creed and basic moral teachings, available to all Christians regardless of social or educational background. The *Sermons* apply this especially to the grammatical model, transforming its approach to text with the same focus on the basic content of Christianity.

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## Introduction

I now set myself to work hard at teaching rhetoric in Rome, the task for which I had come. My first move was to gather students together at my house, and I began to make a name for myself among them, and more widely through them. But what did I then discover, but that abuses prevailed in Rome which I had not been obliged to contend with in Africa? It was obviously true that acts of vandalism by young hooligans did not occur there, but, I was told, “A crowd of these young men conspire together, and in order to avoid paying their fees to their teacher suddenly leave him for another. They betray their good faith, and because they hold wealth so dear they account justice cheap.” My heart was filled with hatred for these youths, but it fell short of perfect hatred, for I probably hated what I might suffer at their hands more than the crimes they might commit against anyone else.<sup>1</sup>

Augustine had not always been Saint Augustine, had not always been Augustine of Hippo, had not always been a bishop and preacher. At one time his conversion had still loomed in the distance, and in the meantime he had been a teacher of rhetoric, intent on collecting his fees and filled with disdain for students who threatened his livelihood: he experienced the encounter with students as a burden. If, however, the story of teaching is inevitably also the story of encounters, his later educational encounters, as bishop, show how different in nature the encounter can be. Not many years separate his experience of secular teaching and Augustine’s new career as presbyter, and subsequently bishop, of Hippo. He found himself again engaged in teaching, for preaching was one of his most important duties. No longer, however, were his students young fee-paying (though they might do their utmost to avoid paying) pupils in the capital of the Empire, but the Christian population of Hippo, a middling provincial town in Africa.

The basic facts of Augustine’s past as a teacher, and the considerable change in

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<sup>1</sup> *Conf.* 5.12.22.

his circumstances after conversion, raise a number of questions about the nature of his Christian teaching: What was Augustine's attitude towards his new audience? How far was his theory and practice of education influenced by his experience of secular teaching? What change did his new faith bring to it? Who exactly was in his audience, and how did they differ (especially in educational and social status) from his former students? How conscious was he of the social reality of his new audience, and was his educational approach adapted in response to it?

Augustine's past as a student and teacher in the fourth century Roman educational system is not merely a biographical fact, however, it is also a major focus of the autobiographical narrative of the *Confessions*. The depth of his reflections on the subject make these questions even more compelling. Fortunately, the work also suggests some answers. His identity was deeply marked by his educational experience, and the account of his conversion to his new Christian identity shows him reacting forcefully against that formation. Aside from the expected discontent with its pagan subject matter, Augustine criticizes the goal of bringing students to wealth and honor, and its focus on creating rhetorically polished orators. Augustine is reacting against the values of the elite, to which he had striven to conform as a young man, but he does not reject every aspect of his education. In fact, he expresses gratitude for the skills he acquired through it. Augustine apparently sensed that he belonged in a new social world, and was not satisfied with applying secular social norms to the education of his new community.

A consideration of the social context of Hippo, and the place of Augustine's congregation in it, suggests that the audience of his preaching is indeed highly unlikely to have belonged overwhelmingly to the elite educated classes. It seems likely, therefore,

that Augustine's reaction to his former career was at least partly formulated in response to his new social context. His positive program for Christian teaching, in the *De Doctrina Christiana* and *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, only strengthens this impression. While these works owe much to the traditional curriculum of grammar and rhetoric, their emphasis is emphatically on content rather than rhetorical perfection. More strikingly, this content is that of the simple formulations of the faith, accessible to, and indeed memorized by, all baptized Christians, regardless of social or educational background. His preaching, moreover, conforms to the theoretical approach of his educational treatises. His sermons adopt many of the strategies of the secular teacher (especially of the grammarian), but a new focus underlies their use. As he preaches, Augustine constantly finds references in scripture to basic doctrines of the faith, and strives to encourage his audience to appropriate those truths of scripture as guides for their own thought and life.

In considering the social dimension of the educational activity of Augustine's preaching, a number of questions had to be passed over as outside the scope of the project. To give due consideration to the role of philosophy in the development of his educational program, for instance, would involve another study of at least equal depth as the present one. While Augustine's search for truth and his focus on content rather than rhetoric clearly began with his discovery of the philosophy of Cicero's *Hortensius*,<sup>2</sup> his approach to education underwent great developments before he was teaching as a presbyter and bishop. His first experiments in Christian education (before ordination)

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<sup>2</sup> *Conf.* 3.4.7.

were indeed modeled on philosophical dialogues.<sup>3</sup> The Socratic dialogue, however, is clearly unsuited to teaching a crowd in a large basilica, and the nature of its content far different from the simple formulations on which he later advocates building Christian education. While there is no doubt that the influence of philosophy lives on in his works (especially those written for a highly educated audience), his preaching apparently owes more to the grammatical model than philosophy.<sup>4</sup> The evolving role of philosophy in Augustine's thought is too complex to do it justice as a secondary strand in a study focused on the social transformation of grammatical education. Indeed, while the question of social context might be productively applied to the philosophical aspect of Augustine's culture as well, it must lie beyond the scope of this project.

Likewise, it has been impossible to look at the influences of Christian (or Jewish) traditions on Augustine's preaching. While the relevance of these is obvious, the focus of the question had to be narrow: the issue is not so much what influenced Augustine, but how he developed his Christian educational model as a deliberate redefinition of the dominant secular culture. Of course he owed much to religious and philosophical traditions, but here I can only ask how he used his own model (whatever its origins) to reform grammatical culture in particular.

The role of rhetoric in his preaching and the level of language used have also had to be passed over: again, while clearly relevant, they do not answer directly the question of Augustine's transformation of grammatical culture. While the level of language would certainly illuminate further the practical application of Augustine's emphasis on content

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<sup>3</sup> The philosophical focus is patent in the theoretical discussion of education in the *De Magistro*, for instance, as well as the dialogue form in which its argument is developed.

over rhetoric, the question could not be included in this project. At any rate, the content of Augustine's scriptural commentary shows this transformation well enough. As concerns the implications of Augustine's language for the composition of the audience, the possible conclusions are problematic. Does rhetorical language really presuppose an educated audience? Or simple language an uneducated one? If we were certain about the composition of the audience, we could indeed draw conclusions from the rhetorical level about the relationship between language and audience, but without that certainty possible interpretations are tenuous, and hence it did not seem worth sacrificing depth in other areas of enquiry in order to focus on the question of language.<sup>5</sup>

If the scope of this project is narrow, it nonetheless touches on a number of much wider questions. The most obvious of these is the nature of Christian culture and its relationship to Roman culture. The social perspective on Augustine's thought shows how multi-faceted approaches to Christian culture can be. Instead of merely asking how Augustine proposes that Christians should educate their young (or their clergy), we can begin to ask how Augustine perceives the relationship of the Christian (of whatever status or rank) to culture, both secular and Christian. We can enquire more deeply into his approach to the conversion of culture. As we look into other aspects of Augustine's culture (and that of other early Christians thinkers) we can expect more than a linear and easy conversion (such as the general adoption of Roman educational curricula, with the substitution of Christian texts). Instead we should look for redefinitions of culture in all its aspects, conforming (or not) its many facets to a particular Christian ideal.

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<sup>4</sup> Nor have I been able to delve into the philosophical or psychological dimensions of Augustine's thought on the cognitive process of reading, for which see esp. Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap P, 1996).

Likewise my questions belong in the context of the social landscape of early Christianity. They shed some light on the social and cultural tensions inherent in the gradual incorporation of the highly educated elites of the Roman Empire into the Church. My conclusions also suggest a possible factor in the appeal of Christianity (and what seems more improbable to the modern reader, the appeal of Augustine's sermons) to the less educated members of the Christian congregation. The sermons might well be long and relatively difficult, but the audience would have gained from them a sense of inclusion in a kind of textual culture from which they had otherwise been excluded.

The thesis belongs, finally, in the more general context of the questions surrounding culture and literacy. The conclusions reached suggest that it is worth setting cultural developments in a broader social context, and that culture and education are not manifestations of the work of the intellect alone, but belong in a social environment, in the encounters between individuals and groups. It shows too that literary culture can exist in an environment other than one strictly defined by the limits of literacy: literacy and literary culture certainly do not exist independently, but the relationship between the two need not be defined as simply as the dependence of the latter on the former. Instead, education, literacy, and literary culture can be seen to belong in the context of a great number of intersecting realities. Augustine's culture in particular answers some of the problems arising from social and cultural conflicts inherent in this complexity. It would surely be productive to apply some of the same questions to other thinkers of the Early Church and beyond.

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<sup>5</sup> If non-rhetorical language were used with a highly educated audience, for instance, it could be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to challenge the value they accorded to rhetoric.

## Chapter 1 - Augustine's Education

The educational encounter between the bishop of Hippo and his audience is a meeting of two very distinct parties. If we are to understand the interaction between them, we must attempt to gain some understanding of the two parties, especially as regards their educational background and experience. It is only within the context of this encounter that we can begin to understand the social dimension of the educational activity of the sermon. The preacher is of course Augustine: a highly educated and intellectually developed man and formerly a teacher of rhetoric, who after his conversion devoted his life to the service of God and Church. His writings allow us to reconstruct with some certainty his educational experiences and thoughts, to the point even of sensing a certain intimacy with him. Listening to Augustine, on the other hand, is an audience about whom we know very little: certainty about its size, social and educational status, composition, age, and other attributes is elusive. Deduction and conjecture allow us to make some suggestions, but direct evidence is sparse. This first chapter will focus on the better known half of the encounter, Augustine's educational background, while the following will attempt to reconstruct the audience's educational experience. The aim in what follows will be to bring to the fore the kind of literary and educational culture that had formed Augustine, the background with which he approached his audience, and against which he shaped his own educational theory and practice.

Before his conversion and ordination, Augustine had followed an educational career with exceptional success, which led him to an important position as a teacher of rhetoric in Milan. His *Confessions* provide ample information about this career, allowing

for the reconstruction, in outline, of the education he received. His qualitative judgments must be left aside for the moment, in order to concentrate on the progression and nature of his education: what he was taught, how he was taught, and what the aims of his education were. The deprecatory nature of many of his statements will inevitably surface in the passages here, but the reader will have to wait until the third chapter for a fuller treatment of Augustine's educational theory.

While the *Confessions* do not offer a full account of a late Roman education, Augustine claims that his education followed the traditional Roman curriculum, which by his time had a long history. He describes coercion as a tradition in elementary education: "many a pupil had undergone it before we did, laying down those rough roadways along which we were now being driven, as we bore our part in the heavy labor and pain allotted to the sons of Adam."<sup>1</sup> When describing his rhetorical studies, he again mentions the conformity to the Roman educational tradition: he followed "the customary course of study." The evidence for Roman education, as we shall see, substantiates Augustine's claim.<sup>2</sup> We can, therefore, complement Augustine's description with better-known evidence concerning Roman education in general. Indeed, we must do so if we are to understand some of the associations that his comments would have induced in the mind of an audience who took that educational system for granted. Two major features of Roman education in particular stand out as relevant to the enquiry of this thesis and will be given emphasis in this chapter. The first is the elitist nature of Roman education, which limited the nature of traditional Roman educational encounters. The second is the

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<sup>1</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.14.

<sup>2</sup> *Conf.* 3.4.7. Cf. S.F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome. From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (London: Methuen, 1977). Bonner's survey of Roman education, drawing on literary sources, mainly

difficulty and length of the process of learning how to read competently and independently, which were overcome through the education received from higher studies under a grammarian, which further limited the experience of textual culture in Roman society.

The former leads to my questions about the educational experience of a non-elite audience of a sermon, as well as my questions about the social implications of that experience: does his audience contain uneducated Christians? If so, how does a bishop trained in an elitist educational system approach those of his flock who are excluded from that educational culture? Did he formulate an educational program of his own? Was Augustine less elitist than secular teachers? Did he bring elements of a classical education to an audience otherwise excluded from it? If so, was this move deliberate on his part?

It is perhaps inevitable that an education that is untouched by the modern ideal of universal education and lacks state support should be elitist, at least in a certain sense. The math is simple: education is expensive (not only does a teacher need to be paid, but the student is economically unproductive for the time he is studying, and if he has to leave home to study, needs to be housed separately from his family). It will therefore be out of the reach of some and will serve as a marker, dividing those who can and cannot afford it. The model is in theory clear, and I hardly need to labor the point. We must question, however, the extent to which this was true in the particular context of the Roman Empire, and how much it became part of its ideology, rather than simply an

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authors of the republican and first century of the imperial period, and especially Quintilian, confirms that Augustine's education did indeed follow the traditional Roman curriculum in the points that he describes.

inevitable fact.<sup>3</sup>

The second feature of Roman education that will be addressed is the difficulty of mastering full literacy. It relates to the elitist nature of education, but is of added interest on account of the comparison that I will make in this thesis between grammatical education and preaching. Education in literature involved far more than the acquisition of a merely functional literacy, and the manuscript form of ancient texts and the nature of literary culture combined to limit this higher literacy to a very small elite, who acquired the skills necessary for handling text through grammatical training. As we shall see, moreover, the educational activity of Augustine's preaching is most closely comparable with the exegetical commentary of the grammarian. Both he and the preacher are teaching their audience to read a text in the higher sense, which includes interpretation and personal appropriation of the text. Remarkably, however, precisely at the level where the elitism of textual culture becomes most marked in ancient education, Augustine finds a way of bridging the gap between elite and non-elite education. This comparison, however, will be developed in a later chapter. For the moment I will try to show, as I follow Augustine's educational career, how much the ancient student's textual ability was defined by grammatical education, and his culture formed by an elitist educational system.

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<sup>3</sup> See R. A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language. The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: U California Press, 1988), T. Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). Both these studies are guided by just this question. Kaster, for instance, suggests that making and marking cultural status was one of the most important roles of late Roman grammatical education. Theresa Morgan applies the same question to the Hellenistic and Roman educational curriculum as whole, and comes to much the same conclusion. My analysis of the educational system to which Augustine reacts and responds is much indebted to the compelling evidence offered by both studies.

## Elementary Education

The narrative of the *Confessions* begins with Augustine's infancy, but the account of his formal education begins when, as a boy (*puer*), he "was sent to school to learn my letters."<sup>4</sup> In an earlier passage, where Augustine contrasts the process of learning to speak with the teaching of literacy at school, Augustine informs us about the teaching method he experienced: "it was not that older people taught me by offering me words by way of formal instruction, as was the case soon afterward with reading."<sup>5</sup> The Latin *certo aliquo ordine* suggests more than formal instruction, however; it implies at the least an ordered course of studies, and perhaps more specifically the learning of lists of words in correct order. Memorization was at any rate the method of learning arithmetic, according to Augustine in the form of chants: "Already the jingle, 'One and one make two, two and two make four,' was hateful to me."<sup>6</sup>

This early education was apparently typical of the ordered curriculum that taught literacy to young Roman pupils, with a successive introduction of letters, syllables, words, sentences and short texts.<sup>7</sup> The elements of reading, writing and arithmetic were learned by rote, either orally (like the sing-song memorization of arithmetic that Augustine describes) or with the help of written lists.<sup>8</sup> Having memorized his letters, the student had to learn to write them, again through a laborious process of repeated practice. At first the teacher guided his hand to form the letters, and then he proceeded to write them unaided. Letters were followed by syllables; lists of syllables, each consonant

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<sup>4</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.14.

<sup>5</sup> *Conf.* 1.8.13.

<sup>6</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.22.

<sup>7</sup> Bonner, 164.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 166.

coupled with each vowel, had to be pronounced and then copied. Finally the student learned monosyllabic and polysyllabic words.<sup>9</sup> In short, the student progressed in degrees through a long process of memorization, learning by heart lists of progressively greater units of language and text. It is not too difficult to see how the young Augustine might have found this boring and repulsive.

Greek education was also part of Augustine's elementary education (when he was a *puerulus*), and it was as distasteful to him as the rest:

Even to this day I have been unable to make up my mind why I hated the Greek that was dinned into me in early boyhood. Latin studies, on the contrary, I loved, not the elementary kind under my first teachers, but the lessons taught by masters of literature; for the early lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic had been no less burdensome and boring to me than all the elements of Greek.<sup>10</sup>

Learning Greek was clearly as difficult and tedious for Augustine as elementary literacy and arithmetic. The difficulty, as he sees it, lay in learning foreign words, and it is easy to suppose that these were learned by rote like Latin letters and numbers:

It was so difficult; and the difficulty of thoroughly mastering a foreign language seemed to sprinkle bitterness over those fabulous narratives for all their Greek sweetness, because I knew none of the words, and the threat of savage, terrifying punishments was used to make me learn them.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly the physical compulsion to memorize only heightened his displeasure. Indeed, this is a theme that arises repeatedly in the discussion of his education, and it cannot be passed over: "I would be beaten whenever I was lazy about learning;"<sup>12</sup> he was "beaten because I played ball as a boy, and was hindered by my game from more rapid progress

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 167-69.

<sup>10</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.20.

<sup>11</sup> *Conf.* 1.14.23.

<sup>12</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.14.

in studies which would only equip me to play an uglier game later?”<sup>13</sup>

## Grammatical Education

The next stage of schooling, the lessons of the grammarian, were much more enjoyable for Augustine: “Latin studies, on the contrary, I loved, not the elementary kind under my first teachers, but the lessons taught by masters of literature.”<sup>14</sup> He mentions in particular Virgil’s *Aeneid* and the literary characters with whom he learned to identify:

I was forced to memorize the wanderings of some fellow called Aeneas, while forgetting my own waywardness, and to weep over Dido. [...] I wept for Dido, “slain as she sought her last end by the sword,” while I myself was abandoning you to seek the last dregs of your creation; dust I was, and unto dust returning. If forbidden to read those tales, I was saddened at being prevented from reading what would sadden me.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Augustine’s claim that he was forced to weep over Dido, he clearly came to enjoy reading literature, which brought with it emotional engagement. He also mentions the pleasure associated with reading Terence: “I learned these things eagerly and took pleasure in them; and so I was accounted a boy of high promise.”<sup>16</sup> The praise of Augustine as a boy of promise suggests what is confirmed elsewhere, that his studies were highly valued by those around him. When criticizing the ideals of his education he laments common opinion: “how insane it is to regard these studies as more civilized and rewarding than the elementary lessons in which I learned to read and write!”<sup>17</sup> A negative comment by Augustine also reveals that part of its esteem lay in the initiation to elite culture: “Curtains may well hang at the entrance to schools of literature, but they

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<sup>13</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.15.

<sup>14</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.20.

<sup>15</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.20-21.

<sup>16</sup> *Conf.* 1.15.26.

<sup>17</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.22.

serve less to signal the prestige of elite instruction than to conceal error.”<sup>18</sup> He also read Homer, but without the enjoyment experienced with Latin epic: “Homer was just as skilled at weaving stories, and he too was empty in a thoroughly entertaining way, yet as a boy I found him distasteful.”<sup>19</sup> As we have seen already, it was because learning Greek involved the hard and unpleasant task of learning a new language.

Though Augustine’s progress in reading text and literature under the grammarian appears to be as typical as his foundation in literacy, his account needs supplementing with some further detail on the early stages of the student’s progress through texts of increasing complexity. Having mastered the elements of literacy, the student would begin by reading short, continuous texts, usually poetry, especially moral maxims. With these, the student had to master the basic mechanics of reading and writing, developing the skills he had begun to practice with letters, syllables and words. As an aid to reading and a first step in writing, he would copy out passages before reading them. An important skill developed at this point was the ability to decipher text written without word divisions, necessary before any progress could be made with longer texts. As he began to read these short texts, finally, he was also primed in the rudiments of grammar.<sup>20</sup>

The content of these exercises vividly demonstrates the elitism of Roman educational values. The genres of text used for practice in reading and writing were predominantly *gnomai*, (short literary quotations read independently as moral maxims) and *chreiai* (stories of famous individuals who espoused particular moral qualities), remains of which have been found on papyri in Egypt. In the moral content of this

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<sup>18</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.22.

<sup>19</sup> *Conf.* 1.14.23.

<sup>20</sup> Bonner, 173-74.

material, which students copied, learned by heart, and manipulated, consistent patterns are identifiable. The texts praise wealth but not its acquisition, a reinforcement of the values of a plutocratic society with little social mobility. The same message is imparted in their treatment of fortune, which suggests that one should remain content with one's lot in life, discouraging the impulse seek improvement. They idealize virtues by which the elite define themselves, such as justice and honesty. They extol the social structures of the elite, such as the contractual and patronizing friendships of the wealthy. A high value is placed on education and its fruits: literacy, intellectual qualities, and power of educated speech. They abound, finally, in deprecatory comments about women. While these sayings do not form a consistent rule of life or system of values, they would have instilled in the student a sense of the acceptability values based on a culture of wealth and elitism.<sup>21</sup> In short, the *gnomai* articulate that the valued members of society are the wealthy educated males. As we shall see, it is precisely these kinds of values (especially the desire for wealth and honor) that Augustine criticizes when discussing his education. These mores were reinforced throughout education, for instance when the student of rhetoric practiced by rewording fables that illustrate the same values.<sup>22</sup> The student did not merely learn to read and write, in short, but learned from the start to structure his thought around an elitist value system.

This intermediate stage, where the student began to read short texts, was followed by more lessons on grammar. The student learned to approach poetry through the grammarian's lens, describing its grammatical features, imitating its language and eventually developing his own linguistic style. He began with letters once more,

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<sup>21</sup> Morgan, 123-44.

studying their phonetic value and classifying them as consonants and vowels, diphthongs, semi-vowels, mutes, aspirated consonants, etc. After letters, he studied syllables and their scansion, and practiced this new knowledge as he read passages of Homer and Virgil.<sup>23</sup> Other grammatical lessons followed, such as the classification of the parts of speech, and we can well imagine that all these were part of the elementary exercises that Augustine disliked for their tedium, as the only thing he describes himself as enjoying is the content of the Virgilian stories. Further reading of the poets involved Homer and Latin epic (by Augustine's time Ennius had long since given way to Virgil) in the curriculum, as well as Greek and Roman tragedy and comedy, and some lyric and elegiac poetry.<sup>24</sup> While not complete, then, Augustine's account of education clearly reflects the prevailing norm of teaching the classical literary canon, though by his time Roman literature had clearly come to dominate the curriculum.

The place of the literary canon in Roman education begins to come into focus as we realize that the student not only read it, but from the start applied his newly learned grammatical skills to these texts. If the earliest exercises emphasized a particular value system, the selection of texts itself could serve as an identifier for the educated, through a common experience, in increments, of a canon of texts.<sup>25</sup> As the student learned to read and write, with Homer and Virgil as authoritative sources, he would begin to experience the common culture of the educated. Partial knowledge, however, would leave the less

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 223.

<sup>23</sup> Bonner, 189-92. For the grammatical and rhetorical stages see also M.L. Clarke, *Higher Education in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

<sup>24</sup> Bonner, 212-19.

<sup>25</sup> Morgan, 4.

All these people will have read some of the same texts, and what they learned, combined with who they were when they learned it and who they later became, made literate education both a binding and a differentiating force, an indicator and a transformer of cultural status

educated at the bottom of a hierarchy of knowledge. If the student proceeded no further than elementary education, where he learned that Homer makes one cultured, he would be left with the knowledge that he lacked the fuller knowledge of Homer necessary for inclusion in the cultural elite; the ability to quote only a limited number of short passages (or none) would be seen as unrefined.<sup>26</sup>

The function of a cultural canon can be seen to extend even further than the selection of texts, however. Through *enarratio* (which is treated more fully below), the student was also exposed to a canon of set interpretations or types of interpretation, which with the authoritative use of the same texts as sources for correct language (the focus of the interpretation) reinforced the canonical authority of the texts, and students' common experience of them.<sup>27</sup> Since Roman students were all taught the same reading practices, a particular experience of textual culture became universal among the educated, and consequently a badge of belonging to the literate elite. Since the grammarian taught these practices, his classroom was a source of status: not only did the student acquire knowledge of the necessary texts for cultural attainment, he also learned to read them correctly.<sup>28</sup>

Grammatical education, in short, worked to define an elite experience of literature. As we shall see, even the mastery of literacy sufficient to gain access to the basic meaning of the text was hardly direct and easy for the late Roman student. By initiating them into a canon of texts and interpretations, however, grammatical education further removed those without an education from the experience of the literate. Even if

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 74-78.

the uneducated had access to text, they would be excluded from the common understanding of the elite, because the true meaning of the text is considered accessible only through the commentary that belongs with the reading of the canon. This use of the literary canon, as we shall see, stands in sharp contrast with Augustine's later insistence that the scriptural canon can be comprehended in its entirety through the basic truths of the faith condensed into a formula (the creed) accessible to all the faithful.

### **An Education in Literary Culture**

Augustine does not describe in detail how he was taught to read by the grammarian, nor the difficult and lengthy process of mastering literacy. The emotional engagement that he describes, however, in the context of reading poetry, probably derives in large part precisely from this method, which encouraged expressive reading of literature. We must look at the process in some depth, for in it lie more clues to understanding the elitist nature of Roman education and textual culture.

The grammarian's classroom was an initiation into the world of literature. The task at this stage was to acquire the skills necessary for reading and interpreting a text, to learn to reach its meaning with more limited assistance than the elementary teacher had offered with shorter passages. The student would already have mastered the elements of literacy: the alphabet, syllables, words, sentences, and short passages of text. Much labor still lay ahead, however, before he would be at ease reading longer passages of text. He would have to learn to forego, for instance, the copying that had been a companion of his

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture. 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 20-21. Kaster aptly summarizes the relationship between literacy and the teaching of the canon: "Grammatical culture reveals that literacy is always literacy of something."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 55.

earlier and less ambitious reading, which by increasing the student's familiarity with the passage would have greatly assisted the reading process.<sup>29</sup>

Much of the difficulty of reading clearly lay in the manuscript form that he was handling. Before the text could be read aloud, the students would have to decipher the separation between words laid out in continuous text, sometimes by physically marking the text. The teacher would assist where possible readings might cause ambiguity. Sentences also needed deciphering, with the addition of punctuation and correct accentuation. This textual work had been preceded, moreover, by a basic introduction to the text, the *praelectio*, in which the teacher presented information about the text, its genre, meter, style, and purpose, as well as any particular textual problems that the students might encounter. The author would also be discussed, with the provision of any known biographical information. The goal of the preparation was the *lectio*, an expressive and performative reading, where the student had to read the text aloud in tones appropriate to its genre, characters and emotions. The teacher would read the text first, at first line by line, explaining the sense, and then continuously; the student would imitate under the scrutiny of his teacher, eventually mastering the ability to read without assistance.<sup>30</sup>

The *lectio* was followed by *enarratio*, or interpretation, of the text by the grammarian. This included commentary on basic grammatical features, on the one hand, such as the parsing and scansion, reinforcing the student's earlier lessons in grammar. It also included semantic commentary and glosses on words that were unfamiliar or used in an unusual way. Further commentary focused on such things as etymologies of proper

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<sup>29</sup> Bonner, 172.

names, the use of tropes and figures, and the explanation of the historical or legendary characters, places and events that were mentioned, with an emphasis on mythology. The student might also learn to see the poets as a source for philosophical wisdom or rhetorical perfection, and appreciate the propriety of the arrangement and diction of the work. Finally, there was some place given to the criticism and emendation of texts. In short, the grammarian taught the student to read in a higher sense than basic literacy, which included comprehension and appreciation of the many aspects of the text.<sup>31</sup>

It is striking how much more difficult and comprehensive this reading is than a mere decoding of text. The skills learned from the grammarian must have been decisive step between halting literacy and the ability to read literature. Only at this stage could the student begin to read without the teacher's help at every stage, to scan, read and interpret text effectively and accurately.<sup>32</sup> Not only did the grammatical school teach the art of interpretation, the culturally normative companion of reading, but the skills involved in *lectio* itself would also have been a requisite for reading ancient texts, lacking as they were in distinctions between words and sentences. The task of separating the letters on the page into intelligible elements of speech, especially given the highly inflected nature of the language and the fluidity of word order (not to mention the difference between poetic diction and regular spoken language) would demand an excellent command of grammar, especially for reading a text without physically marking all the divisions and accents on the page, in other words with any speed and proficiency.

The manuscript form encountered by the student is notable for its unlikeness to

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 219-26.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 227-49.

modern printed text, and as I have suggested, this would have had a significant impact on the cognitive process of reading and the facility with which it was accomplished. The grammarian's approach to teaching, moreover, was heavily influenced by the nature of the text he was handling. The nature of *lectio* is obviously rooted in the use of continuous script, since its techniques are needed to decipher meaning. As well, however, the integration of *enarratio* into the activity of reading may be seen to be derived from the same source: as the reader had to add markings (such as punctuation) to the text to clarify its meaning, it became natural also to add glosses and commentary. Since all this was visually integrated on the page, these components of the text would come to be conceived of as a unity in the reader's mind.<sup>33</sup> This is only one level at which one might see a connection between grammatical activity and textual form, however. The relationship between the textual form of literature and literate culture is complex, and the mutual influences difficult to tease out. Nonetheless it will be useful to look at a few suggestions that have been made in this regard, if only to show that the manuscript form had a significant role to play in the overall elitist nature of grammatical education.

William A. Johnson contextualizes the cognitive aspects of deciphering continuous text within ancient literary culture and its aesthetic and social dimensions. He argues that ancient reading was essentially an elitist activity, closely integrated with the culture of feasting and leisured life among friends. The fine craftsmanship and high cost of manuscripts were themselves facets of an elitist approach to reading. Within this context, moreover, literature was experienced more as a social and esthetic activity than

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Morgan, 175. Morgan focuses especially on the student's perception of his progress in reading, as another aspect of the self-identification of the elite through education.

<sup>33</sup> Irvine, 17.

for the practical purpose of retrieving information. The form of the text was optimized for reading aloud in this elite social context, which explains the persistence of what appears to us an unwieldy form. The physiology observed in modern readers provides an enlightening counterpoint to ancient practice. It has been observed that as the eye scans text, it only stops to focus directly every fifteen or twenty letters. The rest of the text can be processed from the periphery of the field of vision. Within the text found in this field of vision, and without consciously analyzing the text, the reader groups words together to form meaning, such as an article and a noun. Johnson refutes Paul Saenger's argument that the lack of spaces in ancient text made reading more difficult and slow, by hindering the recognition of word shapes in that periphery, and hence led to the practice of reading aloud, a slower process than reading silently. Johnson argues that the significance of the cognitive process lies elsewhere, namely in the fact that the column width in ancient manuscripts corresponds to the fifteen (or so) letter length of the field of vision and eye-voice span (the distance that the eye keeps ahead of the voice when reading aloud). The reader could easily process the text, as he only needed to focus once at every line. The correspondence of the eye-voice span with the column width assisted with (without necessarily being caused by and rather than resulting in) the process of reading aloud, hence encouraging its continued use. The text and reading method worked together, and word spaces would have been far less critical than today, given the very short length of a line of text. The textual form did not need to facilitate easy reference, moreover, for the intended realization of the text was a performative realization: the text did not contain the literary work, it was the reader's task to raise it from the text. He observes that school exercises often did have words breaks, as did all known early Roman literary texts,

suggesting that their absence was advantageous rather than a result of a lack of ingenuity.<sup>34</sup>

Johnson's and Saenger's differing views on the relationship between reading aloud and manuscript form show the difficulty of understanding the ancient reading process. Nonetheless they do suggest the significance of the link between grammatical reading and textual forms. I would like to suggest another possible interpretation, namely that the highly inflected nature of Latin and Greek, along with the peculiarities of grammatical training, helped make the manuscript form highly satisfactory to ancient readers. If a space in the text helps the modern reader to distinguish the end of words and sentences, I would suggest that inflected final syllables would have performed the same function in an ancient text. The eye would become accustomed to picking out the kind of syllables that came at the end of a word. The method of teaching literacy would certainly have made this a natural task. The emphasis, as we have seen, was on learning syllables: the ability to list all possible syllabic formations and the writing of the same. This training would accustom the reader to look for syllables in the text, rather than the words that the modern English reader picks out. This would be more efficient than it at first seems, for even if the reader recognized words, he would still have to pick out the syllables of inflected words in order to understand their grammatical function in the sentence. The recognition of certain syllables would also signal the end of a word shape.

At any rate, whether the approach to reading led to or derived from the manuscript form is largely immaterial. What is significant is that the two worked

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<sup>34</sup>William A. Johnson, "Towards a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity," *American Journal of Philology* 121 (2000): 212-27. Cf. Paul Saenger, *Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford UP, 1997) 1-17.

together closely to provide easy, but guarded, access to the text. Access to the text was controlled by grammatical education, for a strong grasp of grammar would be needed for the reader to be able to quickly decipher word endings, phrasing, and sentences from continuous text. While a very basic literacy might suffice for decoding an inscription or even a short document (which would not only be short, but formulaic in its composition) the reading of literary texts would require a higher level of education. What seems a difficulty to us would not be for the fully literate elite, and they would hardly have reason to introduce a change in manuscript form simply to assist those without the practice afforded by a long education. Reading belonged in an elitist social and cultural context that was defined by the acquisition of the ability to read with ease, and it would only be for people outside that context that reading would present a particular difficulty. In short, whatever the causal relationship between elite culture, reading practices, and textual form, a combination of the various factors arising from them helped to maintain literary culture as an elite commodity.

### **An Education in Eloquence**

If the grammarian's lesson was a decisive step in the student's ability to read and the formation of a particular type of literacy and literary culture, reading was not the only skill emphasized at this level. The grammatical stage of the student's education also foreshadowed the next, that of rhetoric, and again Augustine's account of his experience reflects the general trend in Roman education. Augustine describes a rhetorical exercise that he was assigned:

An exercise was set for me which was fraught with worrying implications, for I hoped to win praise and honor if I succeeded, but if not, I ran the risk of being caned. I was required to produce a speech made by Juno

expressing her anger and grief at being unable to repulse the Trojan king from Italy, but in words which I had never heard Juno use. We were obliged to follow the errant footsteps of poetic fantasies and to express in prose what the poet had said in verse. That boy was adjudged the best speaker who most convincingly suggested emotions of anger and grief and clothed them in apt words, as befitted the dignity of the person represented.<sup>35</sup>

Again Augustine is describing a typical feature of Roman education. The student began to practice the art of speaking well, through a series of rhetorical exercises that would eventually lead to imitations of trials and debates under the rhetorician. The first exercises were undertaken under the instruction of the grammarian, as a preparation for the rhetorical school. They consisted of recasting in prose themes from sayings, maxims, fables and mythological narrative.<sup>36</sup> A similar exercise was applied to historical narrative. Both type of exercise developed the student's ability in constructing narrative, an important element of stating a case in court. They also began to train him to meet the requirements of a good speech: that it should be clear, concise, and plausible.<sup>37</sup> At a basic level these exercises were the first step in being able to compose and deliver well. Further exercises were more explicitly directed towards litigation: the student learned to denounce vice and praise virtue, first those of character types (such as a traitor) and then of historical or legendary characters. These prepared the student for speeches for a client or against an opponent in a real case. Another type of exercise required the student to impersonate a historical or mythological character. Here we recognize Augustine's description of the rhetorical exercise, the rewriting the speech of Dido, as once again typical of Roman education. Other exercises yet taught the art of composing impressive

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<sup>35</sup> *Conf.* 1.17.27.

<sup>36</sup> Bonner, 250-53.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 260-63.

descriptions, arguing a thesis, and discussing the merits of a law.<sup>38</sup> All of these preliminary exercises looked forward to a fuller education in rhetoric, where the student would learn to defend and prosecute accused criminals.

Naturally these exercises involved also the correction of the student's language. Augustine emphasizes, however, that linguistic perfection was overwhelmingly the most valued quality sought through education:

The models proposed to me for imitation were people who would have been caught out and covered with confusion if they had related any of their doings—deeds not wrong in themselves—in a barbaric accent or with grammatical blunders, whereas to relate licentious deeds in correct and well-turned phrases, in ample and elegant style, would have won them praise and honor.<sup>39</sup>

The passage is a witness to Augustine's perception of the goals of education (my third chapter will look in some detail at the implications of Augustine's qualitative judgment of that goal), but it also hints at the connection between the course of the grammarian and training in rhetoric: imitation. The standard of correct style was based on the authority of tradition, it was the language canonized in the classical authors. Augustine continues by commenting more emphatically on the strong influence of this traditional literary language: "consider how carefully human beings observe those orthographic conventions and syllabic quantities which they have received from earlier orators."<sup>40</sup> The arts of grammar and rhetoric, and their primary focus on reading and writing, respectively, did not exist in isolation, and even at the grammatical stage there was a strong emphasis on the use of language. The student's barbarisms, solecisms, and errors in spelling and pronunciation were corrected. The grammarian, using the reading of literature as a

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 264-75.

<sup>39</sup> *Conf.* 1.18.28.

foundation, also provided the student with positive rules for correct usage, drawing on strategies such as analogy, etymological analysis, and the appeal to common usage and the authority of older writings to support his position when ambiguity arose.<sup>41</sup>

This emphasis on correct language can be seen as yet another attempt to create elite culture. On the one hand, the perception of the value of communication often depends on the quality of its expression. In Roman society, the qualitative judgment of language was based on rhetorical norms, to which only those with sufficient education could conform.<sup>42</sup> I suggested earlier that the use of texts as an authority for language reinforced the value of the canon, but the influence of the two aspects is mutual, and the canon likewise reinforces the value of a particular acceptable style. The value of good style is emphasized throughout the curriculum, reinforcing the student's perception of his long course of studies (from reading to writing) as the source of his rhetorical abilities, and hence his place in society, especially within its elite.<sup>43</sup> This analysis of the stylistic emphasis should not surprise us, for it is not hard to imagine how a style acquired at significant expense (not unlike style in clothing or interior decoration) might serve as a marker of elite culture, a commodity from which those of lower standing are excluded. If the argument is correct, we can see that this is yet another respect in which the education Augustine received served to create and uphold elitist cultural norms in the student.

If it is hardly surprising that style might be used as a status-marker, there are of course other possible interpretations. On the one hand, linguistic ability is necessary for

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<sup>40</sup> *Conf.* 1.18.29.

<sup>41</sup> Bonner, 199-209.

<sup>42</sup> Morgan, 234-39.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 175-77. Cf. Kaster, 12. "The grammarian's school did one thing superbly, providing the language and mores through which a social and political elite recognized its members." Throughout his study of

clear formulation of ideas. Thus even if the focus of education were on content, an emphasis on clear diction is naturally at least a secondary concern. Likewise, rhetoric is an indispensable tool for good government, in either a republic or democracy. It is difficult to see, moreover, where the line between the teaching of rhetoric as an important tool and its glorification as a class-marker lies. Certainly we may imagine that the linguistic focus of Roman education at least originates in the need for good republican government and the efficient communication of ideas. Its interpretation as a class-marker, however, finds support in Augustine's reaction to his education. As we shall see (in the chapter devoted to his educational theory), he perceives the rhetoric that he was taught to be empty and divorced from content. Other comments, moreover, more explicitly concern the commodity value of ancient education and the elitist values inculcated through the curriculum. Augustine at least seems to agree with the suggestion that elitist self-definition was an integral part of the Roman education of his time, and the focus on rhetorical perfection apparently fits into the same pattern.

Another important aspect of grammatical education is revealed in Augustine's description of the rhetorical exercise, namely the change in the incentives used to encourage the student in his task. While punishment still awaited him if he failed, success brought with it the promise of praise. This use of competition as a motivating force epitomizes the differentiating process of Roman education. Not only were the more educated separated from the less educated, but even within the elite circle of students precedence was constantly being delineated.<sup>44</sup> While epitomized in the competition

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grammatical culture in late antiquity, Kaster emphasizes the unflagging esteem in which rhetorical skills were held.

<sup>44</sup> Morgan, 79.

between elite students, the whole cycle of education plays into the process, for while one's earliest education leads to the higher (and possibly the highest success) and teaches one to value the climb, the pinnacle is in fact out of reach for all but the wealthiest members of society. A marginal education might only serve to remind one of one's failure to attain the universally valued goal.<sup>45</sup>

We can tell from Augustine's comments that he was enjoying his education, and shared its values. Not only did he enjoy reading the classics, but the competitive spirit of the rhetorical exercises also clearly drove him to succeed. He excelled and received the hoped-for praise. Only in retrospect does he question the value of his success: "What did it profit me, O God, my true life, that my speech was acclaimed above those of my many peers and fellow-students? Was it not all smoke and wind?"<sup>46</sup> At the time, he clearly had no qualms about the competitive nature of his studies and the success with which he distinguished himself not only from the uneducated, but even from his peers.

## **Rhetorical Education**

The subsequent narrative of the *Confessions* shows how keenly Augustine appropriated Roman educational values. Already we can conclude that he clearly did not lack the skills and motivation to pursue his studies further. His studies were interrupted, however, in his sixteenth year, on account of a lack of funds. He returned home from Madauros, where he was studying grammar, and spent a year in idleness:

In that same year, my sixteenth, my studies were interrupted and I was brought back from Madaura, a nearby city where I had been lodging for instruction in literature and rhetoric. The reason for this was that my father was saving up to send me further afield, to Carthage, though it was

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 170-71.

<sup>46</sup> *Conf.* 1.17.27.

his shameless ambition that suggested the plan, not his wealth. [...] Owing to the state of family finances in this sixteenth year of my life there was an interval of leisure for me, during which, being free from all schooling, I began to spend time in my parents' company.<sup>47</sup>

The break was only temporary, and after a year he moved to Carthage and became fully engaged in his studies.<sup>48</sup> He studied rhetoric, with the aim of becoming an advocate: “the prestigious course of studies I was following looked as its goal to the law-courts, in which I was destined to excel.”<sup>49</sup> Given his previous comments on the role of rhetorical perfection, it is not surprising that rhetoric is here described as prestigious (*honesta*). Indeed, this was regarded as the crowning stage of education, and had been the goal all along, as he stated when describing his earliest education: he was sent to school “so that I might get on in this world and excel in the skills of the tongue, skills which lead to high repute and deceitful riches.”<sup>50</sup> Augustine was indeed destined for success, as he says, and it was not long before he was at the top of the class, and delighted at the fact: “Already I was the ablest student in the school of rhetoric. At this I was elated and vain and swollen with pride.”<sup>51</sup> Without question Augustine was captivated by the values prized by his teachers.

We learn little about the course of these studies, except that he studied Cicero at the rhetorical level, and that these studies followed the usual curriculum.<sup>52</sup> This usual rhetorical curriculum was a continuation of the preliminary exercises we have already looked at. The student learned the art of rhetoric through theory and more advanced exercises than he had encountered under the grammarian: he began with *suasoriae*, or

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<sup>47</sup> *Conf.* 2.3.5-6.

<sup>48</sup> *Conf.* 3.1.1.

<sup>49</sup> *Conf.* 3.3.6.

<sup>50</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.14.

<sup>51</sup> *Conf.* 3.3.6.

speeches of advice given to a famous individual making a crucial decision. In the final stage, he began to practice the type of speech that most closely resembled real advocacy. He learned how to structure a speech of defense or prosecution, how to win the audience's sympathy, and how to make a convincing argument.<sup>53</sup> As Augustine suggests, the curriculum included reading as well as theory and practical application: the class would read a speech by Cicero for instance, and analyze the features that made it stand out as good oratory.<sup>54</sup>

### **Augustine's Teaching Career**

When his schooling was finished, he did not become an advocate, but a teacher of the arts he had worked so long to acquire:

Throughout those nine years, from my nineteenth to my twenty-eighth year, I and others like me were seduced and seducers, [...] publicly through the arts reputed "liberal," [...] we pursued trumpery popular acclaim, theatrical plaudits, song-competitions and the contest for ephemeral wreaths, we watched trashy shows and indulged our intemperate lusts.<sup>55</sup>

He became a teacher, in other words, of the values he had learned, and remained captivated by the search for honor and a competitive spirit. The subject he taught was rhetoric: "during these years I was teaching the art of rhetoric, selling talkative skills apt to sway others because greed swayed me."<sup>56</sup> He soon moved to Rome however, impelled by two considerations:

I did not want to go to Rome because my friends promised me that there I would command higher fees and enjoy greater prestige—though these arguments were not without force for me; the principal and almost the sole

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<sup>52</sup> *Conf.* 3.4.7.

<sup>53</sup> Bonner, 270-97.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 304-05.

<sup>55</sup> *Conf.* 4.1.1.

<sup>56</sup> *Conf.* 4.2.2.

reason was that I heard that young men there study more quietly and are controlled by a more systematic regime of strict discipline.<sup>57</sup>

While Augustine stresses that it was not his main motivation, he admits that the desire for wealth and honor still had a firm hold on him. To his horror, however, he found that Roman students had a habit of clubbing together to avoid paying fees by switching teachers as the day for payment drew near.<sup>58</sup> A final move in his teaching career brought him to Milan, where he secured a municipal teaching post.<sup>59</sup>

We learn from this experience a bit more about the rhetorical curriculum, though mainly it confirms what we have seen so far. The rhetoric he taught included the art of defense and prosecution, “without any trickery on my part I taught them the tricks of the trade, never such as would secure the condemnation of the innocent, though sometimes such as were calculated to get the guilty acquitted.”<sup>60</sup> He also taught reading, however, once again demonstrating the link between the two stages of education: “the literature that I, as a master of rhetoric, was teaching to the young men of Carthage.”<sup>61</sup> An anecdote about his friend and former student Alypius shows Augustine explaining a text to his students, just like a grammarian:

One day when I was sitting in my usual place with my students around me he came, greeted me, sat down and applied his mind to the subject we were studying. I chanced to have a text in my hands, and while I was expounding it an apt comparison with the circuses occurred to me.<sup>62</sup>

Such, then, was Augustine’s secular education and teaching career, as related in the *Confessions*, for it was from this post that Augustine retired upon conversion to the

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<sup>57</sup> *Conf.* 5.8.14.

<sup>58</sup> *Conf.* 5.12.22.

<sup>59</sup> *Conf.* 5.13.23.

<sup>60</sup> *Conf.* 4.2.2.

<sup>61</sup> *Conf.* 5.7.13.

<sup>62</sup> *Conf.* 6.7.12.

Catholic Church, ending his career in the Roman schools of rhetoric.

I believed it to be pleasing in your sight that I should withdraw the service of my tongue from the market of speechifying, so that young boys who were devoting their thoughts not to your law, not to your peace, but to lying follies and legal battles, should no longer buy from my mouth the weapons for their frenzy.<sup>63</sup>

He remained in his post until the coming holidays, and then formally gave up his job, using a bout of ill health as an excuse for the abandonment of his profession.<sup>64</sup> Thus a long educational career came to an end, a career which followed, as we have seen, the traditional Roman curriculum. As a young boy Augustine had learned reading, arithmetic and some Greek through memorization, encouraged by the threat of corporal punishment. Having mastered these elements, he graduated to the grammarian's school, where he read Virgil, Terence and some Homer, was encouraged to identify emotionally with the stories, and began to practice the art of public speaking, driven now by the competitive spirit of his classes as well as the fear of punishment. Finally he proceeded to the rhetor's school where he read Cicero and further practiced the art of Public speaking. Throughout there was an emphasis on good Latin style, and throughout Augustine excelled. Having finished his studies, he himself became a teacher of rhetoric, inculcating the same skills in his students, teaching them in turn to read and speak correctly and persuasively.

### **Faustus and Augustine's Typical Education**

Augustine's encounter with Faustus the Manichee summarizes his view of the type of education he received. Augustine had been expecting to meet this man of reputed learning for some time, hoping that he would be able to clear up some questions for him.

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<sup>63</sup> *Conf.* 9.2.2.

<sup>64</sup> *Conf.* 9.2.2-4.

He was disappointed, however, to recognize him as no more than a product of a conventional literary education. Augustine's reaction, whether justified or not, allows us to piece together what at the time seemed to him a normative grammatical education.

After waiting so long and so eagerly for this man, I was certainly delighted with his lively and spirited style in debate, and by his apt choice of words to clothe his thought, words that came to him readily. [...] I put to him some of the problems that preoccupied me, then, before even coming to anything deeper, what I found was a man ill educated in the liberal arts, apart from grammar, and even in that schooled only to an average level. He had read a few of Cicero's speeches and one or two books by Seneca, and some volumes fairly well written in Latin for his own sect, and because in addition to this he was accustomed to preach daily, he had acquired a fair command of language, which was rendered the more glib and seductive by his skillful management of what ability he had and a certain natural charm<sup>65</sup>

This, then, is in outline what Augustine thought to be a usual education, *usitato modo*, recalling the wording he used to describe his own rhetorical education, the *usitato iam discendi ordine* that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter.<sup>66</sup> Faustus's knowledge corresponds to the standard expected by Augustine of a graduate of the grammatical school: knowledge of Cicero, some Seneca, and poetry, as well as the grounding for reading independently (in Faustus's case applied to Manichaean writings) and developing one's oratorical skills (which Faustus accomplished by frequent practice). It confirms, in short, the nature and focus of a conventional education as we have already seen it, a course of reading and rhetorical training, with a particular emphasis on stylistic perfection.

Throughout this chapter we have seen that the education Augustine received conformed to a traditional Roman education at almost every point, from learning the

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<sup>65</sup> *Conf.* 5.6.11.

<sup>66</sup> *Conf.* 3.4.7.

elements of literacy through his progression in reading literature to the rhetorical exercises that completed his training, though his account needs supplementing where he relies on his reader's familiarity with that tradition to create the intended associations. In particular my survey has tried to show that the education Augustine describes is especially characterized by elitist values. The student was presented with material that explicitly supported the elite value system, in the form of short sayings (when he was beginning to read), to the stories of famous individuals that he later read and manipulated. The whole system, moreover, implicitly delineated a culture by which the elite could recognize its members. It prepared the student for participation in a textual culture that belonged in an elitist social context. The very form of the manuscript, moreover, and the comprehensiveness of the process of reading frustrated the uninitiated and made grammatical education the threshold for full participation in that textual culture. Augustine himself refers, as we have seen, to the veils at the door of the grammarian's classroom, referring by his report to the initiation into elite culture. Even the focus on rhetoric apparently helped to create an elite, which recognized itself by the language of its members. This is the education by which Augustine was formed, and to which we will see him reacting in his educational theory. Before examining that reaction, however, we must consider also the likely educational background of Augustine's audience.

## Chapter 2 - The Background of Augustine's Audience

It is clear, then, that Augustine was a highly educated intellectual, who abandoned a promising educational career to devote himself to religious life, and then found himself in the position of a priest and finally a bishop, in charge, among other duties, of educating his congregation through sermons. But who were they? What was their previous (or other) experience of education, literacy and texts? With what other cultural experience (or with what sense of exclusion from cultural experience) could they compare and contextualize their experience of the sermon? In other words, compared to their experience in the secular world, was their experience of Augustine's sermons novel?

Answers to these questions are hard to find, as we have little useful direct evidence. On the one hand, we can interpret scattered references in the sermons themselves, deducing the audience from the message (for instance exhortations on the use of wealth might imply a largely wealthy audience). We can also try to weigh the importance of the segments of the audience addressed explicitly in the sermons. On the other hand, we can use our knowledge about social and educational realities in the wider church and Roman society in general to create a probable or at least possible picture of Augustine's audience in particular. With either approach we are faced with the inevitable disadvantage of relying on sources other than the audience members themselves, and any answers are much less certain than would be ideal.

Despite the problematic nature of the evidence and the tentative nature of any conclusions, the attempt is important, for the implications of the educational background of the audience are significant. If most of Augustine's congregation were from a highly

educated elite, then potentially at least his educational practice would be as elitist as secular culture, remaining inaccessible to most of the population. It would allow the elite to retain their culturally defined status, despite the new textual canon and Christian content. Christian education could be used to the same end as secular studies, reinforcing the association between culture and elitist values, even giving it new force with the religious authority that the Church provides. His practical development of Christian culture, in other words, would be supporting the socio-cultural status quo. It would certainly be hard to interpret Augustine's theoretical approach to education as a reaction to elitism if his own Christian education merely created an educated elite of a new kind. If, on the other hand, his audience is largely drawn from a population who has no other education, the use of traditional educational paradigms in Augustine's sermons and educational theory can be read as an attempt to bring education (and the cultural identity that comes with it) to an audience otherwise excluded from it. The uneducated and illiterate would be given a chance to participate in the literary and educational culture from which they had always been excluded (*mutatis mutandis*, of course), and attempts by educated Christian culture to define themselves as an elite would be impeded to some extent. Within the Christian community, in other words, the easy link between education and social status would be broken, opening the way for a redefinition of culture in the light of its new social context. Certainly Augustine's apparent reaction to the elitist values of secular education would make more sense in this context.

This chapter, therefore, will be given over to an attempt to situate Augustine's audience in the educational spectrum, or at least to determine how prevalent the culturally defining grammatical education discussed in the previous chapter was among them. The

sermons themselves provide the most direct evidence, and this evidence will naturally be discussed in the course of this chapter. Because that evidence is not abundant, however, and much of it is problematic, I will also draw on more circumstantial evidence, namely the probable reach of grammatical education in a town like Hippo as well as the social and economic levels in the Church of the first three centuries, in order to discern a context within which the Christian audience of fourth century preacher at Hippo should be defined. I will then turn to the evidence of Augustine's own writings, especially the *De Catechizandis Rudibus* and *Confessions*, from which some further suggestions about the likely composition of this audience may be drawn. While I cannot offer conclusive proof about the socio-economic composition and exposure to literary culture of Augustine's audience, I hope to show that the weight of probability, at least, is balanced towards a non-elite audience with limited experience of literary culture.

The basic general introductions to Augustine's pastoral ministry and preaching suggest that his audience was mixed, balanced towards the poor and illiterate rather than the highly literate.<sup>1</sup> That some illiterates at least were present is suggested by Augustine's occasional comments about illiteracy, and the contrast between reading and listening to scripture. More often than not he talks about listening to scripture, as in the following: "what the Christian man most needs is to make a regular habit of listening to the word of God while he is in this world."<sup>2</sup> Listening might of course be the main contact with scripture for the highly educated as well, since in Church the scripture was

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Michele Pellegrino, "General Introduction," trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, *Sermons*, ed. Edmund Hill, vol. I (1-19), *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century* (New York: New City Press, 1990) 84-88, Maurice Pontet, *L'exégèse de saint Augustin prédicateur.*, *Théologie 7* (Paris: Aubier, 1946) 55-62, F. Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, trans. Brian Battershaw (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961) 132-40.

always read aloud. At times, however, Augustine explicitly states that some of his audience can read the scriptures for themselves while others must access the text through hearing it read, as when he says: “Those who can read the scriptures may confirm for themselves what I say; those who cannot read them must just believe me.”<sup>3</sup> At least on occasion, then, there were some in his audience who were not literate, let alone members of the highly educated elite.

Ramsay MacMullen, however, argues for a more elite audience, in his article on the composition of the audience of fourth century preacher, which addresses levels of education and the socio-economic reality on which they depend. He too draws mostly on internal evidence from sermons, but with a particular focus on John Chrysostom, on account of the number of extant sermons that may be used as evidence. From it he generalizes an argument about the social composition of congregations throughout the fourth century Church. On the one hand, he argues that the rhetorical and exegetical level of the sermons implies a highly educated audience, since the language would be inaccessible to an audience with a lesser education. He also examines the passages where Chrysostom and others explicitly address a particular segment of their audience, finding that most often it is the rich who are addressed and themes relevant to them that are treated. The poor, when addressed or discussed, moreover, are not absolutely poor, but only poor compared to the wealthiest citizens, for even the poor are mentioned as slave-owners, and Augustine, for instance, talks of small landowners as poor. On special feasts and martyrs’ festivals, however, the preacher is seen addressing other segments of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Serm. 5.1. Frequenter admonui Charitatem vestram, fratres dilectissimi, ut his lectionibus quae diebus istis in Ecclesia recitantur, non hoc tantum attendere debeamus, quod ex littera sonare cognoscimus.*

<sup>3</sup> *Serm. 51.14. Qui Scripturas legunt, recordentur nobiscum: qui non legunt, credant nobis.*

population: tradesmen, farmers, and women. He argues, finally, that churches were too small to hold much of the population, and therefore that it was most likely an unrepresentative segment of the population that was present: aristocrats, wealthy tradesmen, lesser landowners, a few of the genuinely poor, and finally slaves of the wealthy aristocrats, no doubt grouped at the back of the church. Women, moreover, were present in fewer numbers than men, or else were not addressed directly. Only on special occasions would there have been more variety in the composition of the audience.<sup>4</sup>

According to MacMullen's interpretation of the evidence, then, the rich were addressed predominantly in fourth century sermons, and therefore prevailed in the audience. The rhetoric of preachers, furthermore, required an educated audience, and the Churches could only hold a small proportion of the audience, who must have been the wealthiest segment of the population. In other words, the preacher's audience was a group assembled by recruiting mostly from the top of the social pyramid. His analysis strikes me as uncertain, however, for he very readily assumes the implications of his evidence, without addressing other possible interpretations. The certainty of his conclusions, moreover, hardly seems warranted by the limited amount of evidence presented. Is it indeed certain that educated rhetoric implies an educated audience, for instance? Would it not be possible for a Christian to develop an understanding of rhetoric by frequent exposure to preaching? Were there other instances in which an illiterate merchant or tradesman might be exposed to rhetorical language and be expected to understand it (at court, for instance, in the theatre, or in a public speech) without necessarily having the ability to reproduce it himself? Was rhetorical language that

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<sup>4</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, "The Preacher's Audience (AD 350-400)," *Journal of Theological Studies* 40

difficult to understand? The assumption that addressing the rich implies the absence of other Christians might also be questioned.<sup>5</sup> Is it not possible that the preacher felt they were in greater need of being addressed directly? One could as easily imagine a scene where many segments of the population are present, but the rich with their elitist assumptions flock together in one part of the church, close to the preacher, for instance;<sup>6</sup> he turns to them, gesticulates towards them and exhorts them to use their wealth wisely. One might even argue that those addressed directly are in fact a minority of the audience, selected for exhortation by the preacher, and that when the majority is addressed there is in fact no need to call attention to the fact. The size of the church, finally, proves little about its composition, for even if the congregation were as small as he suggests, MacMullen's conclusions that it was therefore unrepresentative depends on his interpretation of the other evidence. If the Church did attract the wealthiest, the size of the Church might show just how far down the pyramid recruitment went, but unless we begin with that assumption, it proves no more than the limit on the size of the audience.

Raising these problems with MacMullen's argument does not of course disprove his conclusions; at best it offers an alternate set of propositions. An analysis of Augustine's particular reality, moreover, cannot meet his arguments about Chrysostom

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(1989): 503-11.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wendy Mayer, "Female Participation and the Late Fourth-Century Preacher's Audience," *Augustinianum* 39 (1999): 139-47. Mayer raises the same issue with regard to the presence of females in the audience, and argues from further evidence that in fact Chrysostom's preaching would normally have had much more of a female audience than MacMullen suggests. She points to male preachers' habit of using examples reflecting a male point of view and the use of the masculine as the default grammatical form as encouraging an inaccurate interpretation of the evidence. She marshals evidence for the presence of women in the Church, such as architecture that provides for the presence of women, as well as evidence for their presence in Gregory of Naziansus and Chrysostom's sermons. One reference is found in a sermon which elsewhere addresses men exclusively, showing that it is possible that women were also present in other instances when men alone were addressed. She argues that the exclusive presence of males in the sermons is more a reflex of the preacher's approach to gender than the actual composition of the audience.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Van der Meer, 132.

head to head. Nonetheless it must be noted that the question is not yet resolved, and the reader should be aware of the difficulty of inferring conclusions from limited evidence. MacMullen's approach does, however, form a springboard from which to embark upon an exploration of the evidence pertaining to Augustine. While the rhetorical level of preaching seems too problematic to be a clear indicator of the audience's education, an examination of remarks addressed to particular segments of it must certainly be part of the attempt to locate the audience within the social spectrum. Though my study is focused on Augustine rather than Chrysostom, I can at least make the argument that MacMullen's argument should not be generalized to include Augustine's preaching.<sup>7</sup> I will argue, moreover, that the social realities of fourth century Hippo, combined with the size of the basilica, make it very unlikely that the audience was prevalently rich, elite and highly educated. If my argument is no more overwhelmingly conclusive than MacMullen's, it can at least alert us to alternate possibilities for interpreting the evidence.

### **The Poor in Augustine's Audience**

While the main focus of this chapter will be the prevalence of grammatical education in Augustine's audience, its economic situation is hardly an extraneous issue. Since the theme of wealth is addressed relatively frequently in the sermons, moreover, a number of comments allow us to make some deductions about the social composition of

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<sup>7</sup> Cf., however, Wendy Mayer, "John Chrysostom: Extraordinary Preacher, Ordinary Audience," *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian Homiletics*, eds. Mary B. Cunningham and Pauline Allen (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 105-37. Mayer makes an attempt to open up new perspectives for the study of Chrysostom's audience, which would take into account more subtleties than MacMullen's account, such as the distinction between rhetorical stances and reality, the differences between the audiences of the Churches in which and the occasions on which Chrysostom preached, personal and social factors which influence the composition of the audience, the accessibility of the Church for different individuals, linguistic realities, the complexities of the demographic context of the society in which he preaches, etc. She shows that analysis

the audience. Augustine certainly addresses the poor in his sermons, and sometimes they are presented as the majority of the audience.<sup>8</sup> Thus he says, for instance: “Most of you are poor; you at least must try to understand.”<sup>9</sup> While it would be impossible to cite here all the references to the poor present before him, we should note one passage where the ideal of the Church as an assembly of the humble is set out. Augustine addresses himself to those of lowly status, comforting them with the knowledge that Christ preferred to build the Church from the poor rather than rich:

But someone may say, perhaps, “Even if he was born in humble circumstances, he wanted to be able to boast about the nobility of his disciples.” Well, he didn't choose kings, or senators, or philosophers, or orators; on the contrary, he preferred to choose common people, poor people, uneducated people, fishermen. Peter was a fisherman, Cyprian an orator. Unless the fisherman had faithfully led the way, the orator would not have humbly followed. None of you should despair of yourselves because you are disregarded and treated as of no account. Hold on to Christ, and your hope will not let you down.<sup>10</sup>

We should note, too, that in precisely the sermons concerned with fasting and almsgiving, where his audience is warned against replacing foods that are abstained from with more costly alternatives (implying the presence of generous means), Augustine also addresses the poor. As he discusses abstinence and almsgiving he insists at every turn on the inner dimension of these acts. With almsgiving in particular, a recurring theme is the ability of the poor to give away inner riches of the heart, namely forgiveness.<sup>11</sup>

These examples do not of course solve the problem raised by MacMullen, that the

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of the preacher's audience must go deeper than assembling passages in which the composition of the audience seems to be presupposed.

<sup>8</sup> Pontet, 55, Van der Meer, 135.

<sup>9</sup> *Serm.* 85.2. *Plures estis pauperes, vel vos apprehendite.*

<sup>10</sup> *Serm.* 197.2. *Sed forsitan dicet aliquis: Etsi ipse humiliter natus est, in discipulorum nobilitate jactare se voluit. Non eligit reges, aut senatores, aut philosophos, aut oratores: imo vero elegit plebeios, pauperes, indoctos, piscatores. Petrus piscator, Cyprianus orator. Nisi fideliter praecederet piscator, non humiliter sequeretur orator. Non de se quisquam desperet abjectus: teneat Christum, et spes ejus falsa non erit.*

word “poor” is a relative term. Augustine himself is not unaware of the difficulty of defining poverty, and opens a sermon with the question ‘who is poor?’ though he is aiming at defining a more interior poverty, his words still hint at the nature of poverty within the community.

We have been singing to the Lord and saying: *To you has the poor man abandoned himself, you will be a guardian for the orphan.* Let's look for the poor man, let's look for the orphan. Don't be surprised at my suggesting we should look for what we see and experience so much of. Isn't the whole place full of poor people? Isn't the whole place full of orphans? And yet in the whole place I am looking for the orphan.

But first I must show you, in your charity, that what we are thinking of is not what we are looking for. Those who are poor, toward whom God's mandates are carried out and alms given them, [...] there are certainly plenty of people like that, but this poor man has to be understood in a more profound way than that. [...] There are poor people who don't have any money, can scarcely find enough to eat every day, are so in need of other people's assistance, of their pity, that they are not even ashamed to beg.<sup>12</sup>

The poor to whom alms are given (the poor in the literal sense) are plentiful and truly destitute; they lack food and are reduced to begging. Unfortunately, however, we cannot tell if the “this place” referred to is the city of Hippo or the basilica itself. Nonetheless we can conclude that poverty is not always used merely as a relative term, and Augustine's vision certainly reaches beyond the relatively wealthy (referred to by MacMullen) who define their wealth and poverty in comparison with one another.

The relativity of wealth itself becomes an explicit theme in one of Augustine's

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<sup>11</sup> *Serm.* 206-211.

<sup>12</sup> *Serm.* 14.1.

Cantavimus Domino, et diximus, *Tibi derelictus est pauper, pupillo tu eris adjutor.* Quaeramus pauperem, quaeramus pupillum. Nec mirum sit quod admoneo ut quaeramus, quos sic abundare cernimus et sentimus. Nonne pauperibus plena omnia? Nonne pupillis plena sunt omnia? Tamen inter omnia quaero pauperem, quaero pupillum. Ac prius ostendendum est Charitati vestrae, id quod putamus, non hoc esse quod quaerimus. Qui enim dicuntur pauperes et sunt, in quos a Deo mandatae eleemosynae fiunt, [...] abundat quidem hoc genus hominum; sed altius intelligendus

sermons on almsgiving, as he makes the point that even those in his congregation who think themselves poor can always find someone poorer, to whom they may give whatever resources they have, however small, even if all they can give is inner wealth.

Everyone of us has the means to do so. Nobody should say, "I'm poor." Nobody should say, "Let the rich do it." Those who have more should do more for more people. Does that mean the poor too don't have the means to do anything? [...] Anyone who hasn't got a boat and nets, who hasn't got the wealth of Zacchaeus, who hasn't even got the two coins that widow had, at least has a cup of cold water. [...] But then perhaps at the proper moment, you can't even lay your hands on a cup of cold water to offer a thirsty man. You can't lay your hands on one, and you feel for the thirsty person. God sees what you have inside you; he doesn't have eyes for the capacity of your hand, what he does have eyes for is the will of your heart.<sup>13</sup>

This passage is directed at anyone who perceives himself to be poor, but the degree of poverty exceeds a mere lack of wealth: he concedes that some of his audience may not be able to give even a couple of coins. Though he might not be talking to the absolutely destitute, he is certainly addressing (among others) those with very limited means indeed.

Augustine, moreover, concerns himself with the spiritual state of the poor. He is not content merely to set up poverty as an ideal, nor the poor man as an opportunity for good works. As we saw with the sermons for Lent, it is the interior dimension of almsgiving that is demanded of the soul. He likewise insists that poverty itself is not a virtue, and emphasizes the importance of humility, as, for instance, in the continuation of the first passage I cited: "Any of you inclined to boast about your poverty, beware of

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est iste pauper. [...] Sunt pauperes non habentes pecuniam, victum quotidianum vix inveniētes, alienis opibus, misericordia sic indigentes, ut etiam mendicare non erubescant.

<sup>13</sup> Serm. 359A.12. *Quisquis unde habet faciat. Nemo dicat: pauper sum. Nemo dicat: Faciant divites. Qui plus habent, et plura faciant de pluribus. Numquid et pauperes unde faciant non habent? [...] Quisquis non habuerit navem et retia, quisquis non habuerit divitias Zacchaei, quisquis non habuerit duos nummos quos habuit vidua, habet vel calicem aquae frigidae. [...] Sed forte ad horam nec calicem aquae frigidae invenis et quem porrigas sitiēti. Non invenis et compateris cum sitiēte. Videt deus quid intus habeas, non videt in manu potestatem, sed videt in corde voluntatem.*

pride, or you may be beaten to the post by the rich who are humble.”<sup>14</sup> This type of evidence from the sermons (and I have only been able to cite a representative selection of many such comments) suggests not only that poverty of some degree was to be found among his audience, but also that “poor” was not a trivial descriptive for Augustine, and that he was aware of the relative nature of people’s perception of poverty. He was well aware of the basic needs of the abjectly poor, but was also concerned with the spiritual temptations particular to the poor within his congregation. We remain unable to answer, however, just how far down the economic scale his congregation stretched, nor can we conclude from this evidence what the proportionate representation of different classes might have been.

If any progress is to be made, the scope of the question must be narrowed, in order to reach the goal of this chapter and determine what precedents shaped the audience’s experience of Augustine’s preaching, especially as an educational activity. The factors that influence a person’s experience of an educational activity are, of course, nearly infinite in number, even if we only take into account social and education realities. Nonetheless I propose a very specific question: what proportion of Augustine’s audience might have had a grammatical education? I choose this level of education as a threshold for significant literary experience since, as I outlined in the previous chapter, it was a critical stage in the student’s experience of textual culture. Not only did it give him the skills for deciphering texts with ease and interpreting them correctly, but it also formed the cultural context within which he experienced literature thereafter. Basic literacy is ultimately less relevant to my thesis than a grammatical education, for it neither provided

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one with the interpretive tools closely integrated with reading in ancient literary culture (or even the skills necessary for reading with ease), nor did it ensure one a place among the educated elite. Furthermore, the actual skill of reading was not one that was exercised during a sermon, except by the lector, and therefore does not provide a helpful point of comparison to the experience of a sermon. The audience participated in the reading and interpretation, but was not expected to read themselves. They were, however, brought into the same kind of interpretive environment as the grammatical school, where a teacher guided their exegesis of literature. Nonetheless, higher literacy in the Church belongs in the context of general literacy rates, and it is with general literacy rates that this study will begin.

### **Ancient Literacy**

W.V. Harris's study of ancient literacy, which attempts to quantify the rates of literacy in the Greek and Roman world from the eighth century to the fifth century A.D., provides a good starting point for the contextualization of Augustine's audience within general literacy rates.<sup>15</sup> Despite the acknowledged paucity of hard data and the difficulty of defining literacy,<sup>16</sup> Harris insists on the importance of trying to establish probable statistical limits for ancient literacy, in order to avoid vagueness and over-optimism. He defines three broad categories of literacy rates: "scribal literacy," which implies the

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<sup>14</sup> *Serm.* 85.2. *Quicumque de paupertate gloriamini, cavete superbiam, ne vincant vos humiles divites.*

<sup>15</sup> William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> While Harris does not in his introduction explicitly define the level of ability that qualifies as "literacy" for his study, the rest of the work seems to assume a fairly basic level, approximating the UNESCO definition cited, being able to "with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on everyday life." (3) Something beyond signature literacy is sought, in other words, and yet something much less than what is referred to as literacy in much of the literary evidence, namely cultural proficiency. (5-6) More than anything else it is a literacy that would enable one to function in the literate domain of

literacy of a small number of specialists; “craftsman’s literacy,” where most craftsmen (and not women or lower levels of society) are literate; and mass literacy.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the work, Harris relies on comparative methodology, arguing that if what have in modern studies been found to be preconditions for widespread literacy are absent, literacy rates will be reduced accordingly. He also looks at the requirement of literacy for various types of activities, for instance the military, legal, literary, political and economic spheres of public and private life, in order to ascertain which segments of the population would have found literacy to be a distinct advantage. His estimates of literacy are never high. While in some Greek cities of the classical period rates may have risen in as high as 50%, he does not think that literacy in the Roman Empire would have risen above 10%.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, while he estimates that male literacy in the imperial Italy may have been, at best, as high as 20-30% (and no higher than 10% for women),<sup>19</sup> he doubts whether literacy rates in the western provinces were ever as high as 5-10%.<sup>20</sup> He argues (without quantifying) for a further decline in rates in late antiquity.<sup>21</sup>

Harris’s very pessimistic estimates have not been received uncritically. Most notable of the critical assessments is a supplement to the *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, devoted to a discussion of his arguments and their implication for the Roman World, in an attempt to broaden the scope of the discussion and the evidence called upon.<sup>22</sup>

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documents, inscriptions, etc, rather than the world of literature, as his list of the uses of literacy, heavily weighted towards public and private documents, attests. (26-27)

<sup>17</sup> Harris, 1-24.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 259.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 272.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 312-21.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Beard, Alan K. Bowman, Mireille Corbier, Tim Cornell, James L. Franklin, Ann Hanson, Keith Hopkins and Nicholas Horsfall, *Literacy in the Roman World*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*. Supp. 3. (Ann Arbor: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991).

Nicholas Horsfall, for instance, questions the unrelenting statistical approach that has to depend so heavily on comparative evidence, and leads Harris to preconceive a conclusion that remains almost impervious to any evidence for more general literacy.<sup>23</sup> James L. Franklin looks at parietal inscriptions at Pompeii, and argues that some were written by individuals outside (according to Harris's statistics) the literate classes.<sup>24</sup> Alan Bowman likewise questions Harris's all too ready focus on statistics, as well as his neglect of possible exposure to and participation in literate culture despite illiteracy through the use of documents, signatures, etc.<sup>25</sup> None of these authors, however, questions Harris's fundamental argument that literacy levels were very low. They call into question, rather, Harris's overriding emphasis on the fact, which leaves too little room for nuances, exceptions, or a vision of the nature and implications of literacy beyond the fact that one can or cannot write. Bowman, for instance, writes

Therefore the interesting thing is not that there was no mass literacy in the ancient world but that ancient society could be so profoundly literate with a reading-and-writing population of, let us say, less (perhaps much less) than 20%, the precise figures being insignificant.<sup>26</sup>

Levels of literacy were low, wherever in the range below 20% they might have fallen, and yet we must not infer the implications of illiteracy too readily. This reservation need not concern us unduly here, for we are looking for the prevalence of an even higher literary education (the nuances of basic functional literacy are largely irrelevant to this thesis), and Harris's figures at least provide some limits of the population within which the highly literate may be placed. The low rates of literacy in the general population provides the background against which can begin to build a picture of the Augustine's

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 59-76.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 77-98.

Christian audience and their literary experience.

### **Grammatical Education as Definitive Literary Experience**

Before seeking to further define the limits of the higher literacy gained through grammatical education, it is worthwhile to question how much Augustine's audience might have made a habit of reading literature, beyond (or as an alternative to) the grammatical education of the secular schools. I will leave aside here particularly religious textual cultures (such as the monastery or the education of lectors). What I would like to explore is the probability of a significant culture of secular literary reading among his audience, in a non-institutional setting.

First of all we may note that any reading habit would depend on the availability of books: if one could not acquire books, one could not read. One of the major factors in this regard is the affordability of books, a subject tackled by John J. Phillips. He argues that though fine and antique manuscripts might be very pricy, a cheap book would probably have sold for around 4 *sesterces*, and been within the reach of "a skilled artisan or a man with a little property and income," though he does not venture to argue that many of this class actually did buy books. Of course, we must never lose sight of the fact that some with little means might well seek out books, dedicating more than seems affordable to purchasing them (or acquiring them by other means such as borrowing), while others with abundant means would not bother to spend on books.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the affordability of books (as well as other economic factors) will in large part determine the overall patterns of reading and education among those of limited means. We can

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 119-32.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 122.

already conclude, then, that we should at least not expect much reading activity among small merchants, craftsmen, peasants and other poor citizens, beyond whose economic reach lay the purchase of books.

Beyond the ability to buy books, moreover, a habitual reader would need leisure to read them, an obvious fact, but easy to overlook. Also easy to overlook is the lack of electric lighting. To read at night would require a significant budget for oil, and even then one has to imagine it as a strain on the eyes.<sup>28</sup> Worse yet, the situation of those living in crowded flats cannot have been conducive to reading (especially at night), with noise as a constant feature, coming not only from one's own flat but those around as well. Certainly an Augustine or an Ambrose would not hesitate to work late into the night, but their dedication to learning would surely not be equaled in most. Ambrose's solitary study-habits are notable, moreover, not only for his great dedication to his work but also for his reluctance to burden others with the task of nighttime scribal activities.<sup>29</sup> It is hardly difficult to imagine that unfavorable lighting was a factor in his perception of the burden of nighttime reading and writing (though the simple desire for sleep cannot be discounted as the main consideration). Augustine too is remarkable for his dedication,

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<sup>27</sup> J.J. Phillips, "Book Prices and Roman Literacy," *Classical World* 79 (1985): 36-38.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Horsfal, "Rome without Spectacles," *Greece and Rome* 42 (1995): 50.

Vitruvius is well aware of the ideal orientation for a private library. Very nice, if you had one, if your architect had remembered that morning light was best, if your heaviest intellectual commitments did not occur during winter, when Roman hours of daylight are very short, and if you are free to write and read mostly in your own library.

[...]

If not daylight, then oil lamps: 'the lamp' becomes symbolic of prolonged study, research, careful composition, even too much hard work as a substitute for inspiration. It is a pleasure to work with modern oil-lamps, with regulated wicks and glass cylinders: such refinements were not available at Rome. St. Jerome complains in old age that he cannot read Hebrew *ad nocturnam lumen*.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Philip Rousseau, "The Preacher's Audience: A More Optimistic View," *Ancient History in a Modern University. Proceedings of a Conference held at Macquarie University, 8-13 July, 1993*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) 395.

working well into the night.<sup>30</sup> Augustine and Ambrose read and wrote late into the night, but in this respect, as in most others, they were exceptional and remarkable men.

It seems, then, that we should imagine that most would seek leisure for reading in daylight hours, if at all. For the wealthy, reading as part of evening activities of course demanded less dedication, for they could employ the service of literate slaves to do the actual reading. Indeed, the use of lectors helped to overcome a number of limitations on reading ability: not only poor reading conditions, but also frequent vision problems such as ophthalmia or the failing eye-sight of old age, greater hindrances than today since eye-glasses were unknown. As a matter of course, wealthy Romans employed well sighted and literate slaves to read and write for them, writing with one's own hand being the exception, for instance as a personal touch at the end of a letter.<sup>31</sup> Clearly reading conditions were often far from ideal, and that barring recourse to a lector, reading, especially outside of daylight hours, would have demanded a very high dedication to the cause.

Daytime leisure, then, would be the preferred circumstance for reading, a scarce luxury for all but the most wealthy, as not only work but many other activities placed a demand on the time of most. Augustine himself recounts that in his youth he could scarcely find time to read (apart from his professional reading, of course):

But where is it to be sought? When, even? Ambrose is not available and

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. P.R.L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A New Edition with an Epilogue* (London: Faber, 2000) 433.

<sup>31</sup> Horsfall: 49-56, Myles McDonnell, "Writing, Copying, and Autograph Manuscripts in Ancient Rome," *Classical Quarterly* 46 (1996): 469-91. McDonnell seeks to nuance Horsfall's argument, with the counter-argument that dictation and writing in one's own hand had varying places in the habits of the writing elite, that many often chose to write themselves, and that doing so held some significant advantages over dictation, such as the ability to set one's pace (neither tempted to work too fast on account of the scribe's speed, nor delayed by his slow writing) as well as "secrecy, decorum, convenience, and efficiency." This nuance does not, however, diminish the significance of the fact that the wealthy often had recourse to readers or scribes to overcome poor reading conditions.

we have no time to read. [...] Our pupils occupy our morning hours, but what are we doing with the rest? Why do we not get on with it? Ah, but in that case, when are we to pay court to our important friends, whose patronage we need? When prepare the lessons we sell to our students? When refresh ourselves and relax our minds from concentrating on these problems?<sup>32</sup>

Augustine's profession involved reading literature, and many other professions for men of his status (such as advocates) no doubt entailed a fair amount of reading too. But reading literature for pleasure or intellectual or spiritual improvement appeared to elude the young Augustine, despite all his fire for learning and ardent quest for truth and wisdom. It is hard to imagine that others of his status, in a similar position, would have found much more time for study. It is even harder to imagine that many of lower status or wealth would have had ampler opportunity for daytime leisurely reading, as business, errands, and other necessary activities that required light must have been priorities.<sup>33</sup> The serious and difficult task of reading undoubtedly belonged to people without many demands on their time (or with slaves to do the difficult work for them). Indeed, the Roman culture of reading belongs in the context of a generally leisurely lifestyle, which includes exercise, bathing, literary entertainment, dining, and socializing, but not gainful employment.<sup>34</sup>

A particularly notable and frequent locus of literary activity was the dinner party, and reading in this context was more performative than cognitive, an entertainment rather than a source of information. We have already seen the close association of the

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<sup>32</sup> *Conf.* 6.11.18.

<sup>33</sup> Even in the modern western world, with almost universal literacy, reading for pleasure is hardly a habitual activity for the majority of the population. The kind of reading that does have wide popular appeal, moreover, such as novels and magazines, easily read at moments when no other activity presses upon the reader, for instance late at night in bed, while on public transit or traveling, etc., has no real ancient equivalent.

<sup>34</sup> Johnson: 621-24.

manuscript form and reading aloud, as well as the emphasis on performative reading at school. Text as performance is realized with particular fullness in public reading at dinner parties, for it was the reader's task to interpret the text and make it a meaningful and entertaining experience for his listeners.<sup>35</sup> Even when literary activity was no more than a pretense to culture, it could take the form of recitations and reenactments of literature at a dinner party, as in the case of Petronius's *Trimalchio*, where, moreover, it was closely integrated with other attempts at an appearance of wealth, such as silverware decorated with mythological scenes: the attempts at engaging in literary activity are social, not private or scholarly.<sup>36</sup> Reading for pleasure rather than business belongs, in short, in a very particular social context, and like education is an attempt to define cultural status.

On the basis of this admittedly limited body of evidence, then, I venture to suggest that quite apart from the question of literacy, the likelihood of the existence of a wide habitual reading public is low, at least as far as literature is concerned. Many even of those who could afford a grammatical education would have found it hard to find the time to read. For most, the experience of literature must not have been added to much since their school days, except in a performative context which strove more for social prestige than learning, and which closely reflected the reading habits learned at school. For those without such an education, who were not part of the elite who attended dinner parties, the experience of literature is likely to have been more limited still. As a rule, therefore, the decisive literary experience for Augustine's audience would have been, if at

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*: 618-22.

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Horsfal, "The Uses of Literacy in the *Cena Trimalchionis*: I," *Greece and Rome* 36 (1989): 74-89.

all, a grammatical education and social activities that reflected the reading habits learned at school, rather than a habit of reading and interpreting literature by private initiative (except for an undoubtedly diminutive proportion of the population, whose lives were dedicated to leisure or studies, and who devoted much of it to reading).

### **The Prevalence of Literary Education in Hippo**

Who in Augustine's audience might have had such an education? We may begin to answer the question by answering another: who in Hippo might have had such an education? Augustine himself may serve as a kind of liminal figure, because a full grammatical and rhetorical education was beyond his father's means, though he could afford some schooling. As we have seen, he was recalled from his studies at Madaura, so that his father could try to gather the needed funds for studies in Carthage.

In that same year, my sixteenth, my studies were interrupted and I was brought back from Madaura, a nearby city where I had been lodging for instruction in literature and rhetoric. The reason for this was that my father was saving up to send me further afield, to Carthage, though it was his shameless ambition that suggested the plan, not his wealth, for he was no more than a fairly obscure town councillor at Thagaste.<sup>37</sup>

It was not for lack of zeal that Augustine's father could not find the means to educate his son, for he received praise for the efforts to which he went to educate his son.

At the time I speak of anyone would have heaped praise upon my father, a man prepared to go beyond his means in spending as much money as was needed to send his son away to study, even in a distant city. No such efforts were made on behalf of the children of many other citizens who were far richer.<sup>38</sup>

Many with similar and even greater means did not provide their sons with education.

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<sup>37</sup> *Conf.* 2.3.5.

<sup>38</sup> *Conf.* 2.3.5.

Even Augustine's cousins were left without an education.<sup>39</sup> Patrick, it seems, was spending more than he could afford. Augustine, then, sits on the threshold of the educated class; those of his own means may or may not have had an education, those with more probably did, and those with less probably did not.

If he is going to be a meaningful threshold, we have to place him somewhere on the socio-economic scale. He claims this father was poor, but that is only a relative term, for Possidius's biography informs us that he was of the curial class, which made him part of the municipal elite of Thagaste.<sup>40</sup> When describing his theft of pears, moreover, Augustine himself informs us that not only did his father have a vineyard, near which the pear tree was found ("close to our vineyard"), but also that he had pears that were better than the ones Augustine stole: "I already had plenty of what I stole, and of much better quality too."<sup>41</sup> Augustine's family owned land, a vineyard, probably an orchard<sup>42</sup>, and even slaves, as had Monica's family.<sup>43</sup> It seems then, that in North Africa it is among the decurions (and their superiors) that we should look for those with a literary education.

If we could calculate, therefore, the number of decurions in Hippo, we would have an approximate estimate of the spread of literary education in the same. We can in fact make some rude calculations on the basis of the knowledge we have about the socio-economic realities of the later Roman Empire. While a thorough study of the questions of economics involved is beyond the scope of this thesis, we can at least make a start at

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<sup>39</sup> Brown, 9. Brown, citing *De Beata Vita* 1.6, writes: "His cousins were less fortunate, they remained without a proper education; and would have to face the poverty and boredom of a life of unlettered squireens."

<sup>40</sup> *Vita* 1. *de numero curialum parentibus honestis et christianis progenitus erat*

<sup>41</sup> *Conf.* 2.4.9.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine* (New York: Penguin, 1999) 19. Wills suggests that the orchard probably belonged to Augustine's patron Romanian (who also came to fund his education) rather than his father.

trying to contextualize the education of Augustine's audience. Before looking at the realities of Hippo, however, we should note that Augustine had to leave Thagaste to go to Madaura for the beginning of his grammatical education, and to Carthage for his the completion of his education as a *rhetor*. In a town of a few thousand, as Brown estimates the size of Thagaste,<sup>44</sup> there does not seem to have been enough demand to sustain its own school of grammar. It is likely therefore, that the extent of education would have been more reduced than in a slightly larger town. Since Hippo was a slightly larger town, more education might have been available locally, and hence more affordably and accessibly. I begin, therefore, by postulating that at least all the male all the adult male decurions at Hippo would have had a grammatical education. Since my inclination is to believe that rates of education were very low, I would rather overestimate the reach of education than underestimate it (I will also try to be generous as I make my calculations). As we shall see, however, we are still faced with very low rates of literary education.

Hippo was neither a small town nor a large metropolis. It probably numbered among the larger sized cities of North Africa, with a population estimated at twenty to thirty thousand.<sup>45</sup> As for the size of the territory, Holmes van Mater Dennis estimates it about forty square miles.<sup>46</sup> With these figures we can at least begin to imagine the reality of Hippo. From the territorial size, moreover, we can calculate the maximum number of decurion families it could support, if the whole territory were arable land in the hands of decurions who all had the minimum required land holding. These conditions on the

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<sup>43</sup> O'Donnell on 2.3.5.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, 8.

<sup>45</sup> François Decret, *Le Christianisme en Afrique du Nord ancienne* (Paris: Seuil, 1996) 13. Decret does not specify whether this figure applies to the city alone, or to the whole *territorium*.

<sup>46</sup> Holmes Van Mater Dennis, *Hippo Regius. From the Earliest Times to the Arab Conquest* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1970) 31.

calculation are of course absurd, but at least we can reach an upper limit for a probable figure. A.H.M. Jones suggests that the minimum landholding for a decurion was around 150 *iugera*.<sup>47</sup> If we divide *territorium* of Hippo into landholdings of 150 *iugera*, we have a total number of 273 decurion landholdings.<sup>48</sup> Of course not all land is arable, nor would all the arable land have belonged to decurions: some might be imperial or municipal land, some owned by the Church, some by wealthier landowners, and some by peasants. If even half of all the land belonged to decurions, that would only make 136 holdings of the minimum size. If decurions owned on average twice the minimum land holding (if we assume a smaller average landholding, it becomes difficult to imagine how any social stability would prevail in the face of lean years, division of inheritances, etc.) the figure would have to be reduced further to about 70. This number would not be inconsonant with the normal number of 100 decurions (often 30 in smaller towns),<sup>49</sup> and the fact that cities often had trouble retaining decurions in the later empire.<sup>50</sup> If each of these decurion families was comprised of a grown man and his dependants, we would be counting at most 70 fully educated men in the decurion class (and it is natural to think that in a bigger city, the decurions would be wealthier than in a small town like Thagaste,<sup>51</sup> and consequently more widely educated), in a city of twenty or thirty thousand. If we postulate a further 30 or so grown men from wealthier families, perhaps

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<sup>47</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964) 738-39.

a constitution issued by Valentinian II [...] which authorizes any citizen or resident of a city whose property exceeds 300 solidi to be enrolled on its city council, was no doubt of general application. [...] 300 solidi represented something like 150 *iugera*.

<sup>48</sup> For the equivalencies between *iugera* and modern measurements, see *Ibid.* xv. A *iugera* is 5/8 of an acre. 40 square miles is 25 600 acres, or 40 940 *iugera*, or 273 lots of 150 *iugera*.

<sup>49</sup> R.P. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire. Quantitative Studies*, 2 ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982) 283-85.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, 737-57.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 738.

30 educated slaves, 50 or so wealthy craftsmen or merchants who afford an education, as well as perhaps 25 women, the fully literate population would still only amount to about 200, 1% of a population of 20 000, or about .66% of 30 000. While my numbers are highly conjectural, I have tried to proceed with as much optimism as I can. Moreover, if Harris is right in suggesting that more basic rates were below 5% in the Western provinces, then a rate of grammatical education as low as .5-1% is perhaps even an overestimation.<sup>52</sup> I would not, in short, expect more than a couple hundred citizens of Hippo to have a full grammatical education.

These figures suggest that the broader context within which we should place the Augustine's audience is a provincial town where very few had the education that initiated students into the Roman literary cultural experience. It does not, of course, answer the question of the composition of Augustine's audience in particular. Was it the most educated of Hippo who were present, as MacMullen suggests? Was it a representative selection? Was it weighted towards the lower or higher end, or somewhere in between? Before attempting an answer, I will also try to set the question in the context of the social composition of the Church of the previous three centuries, which has been amply discussed in modern scholarship.

### **The Social Composition of the Church of the First Three Centuries**

The emphasis (and conclusions) of scholars varies with the types of evidence used. A.H.M. Jones, for instance, argues that before the 3rd century, Christianity was an urban religion, which hardly penetrated the upper classes, (as exhibited by the Latin and

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<sup>52</sup> If Decret's figures refer to the population of the city alone, then literacy rates for that population would probably be rather higher, as literacy would be concentrated in cities, and 1% the population having

Greek of Christians, for instance, which was not the Latin and Greek in which the upper class was educated): it only began to make progress among the highest classes in the fourth century.<sup>53</sup> R.M. Grant reaches a similar conclusion from the relative lack of disrespect shown by Christians towards trades that were acutely unacceptable to higher ranks of Romans. He also notes the presence of slaves among Christians, and the supposition on the part of Christian authors that most of the faithful originated from the middle class (however one might define that).<sup>54</sup> Wayne Meeks' analysis emphasizes the urban nature of Christianity, and presents the Pauline Church as representative of urban society (except for the wealthiest), which excludes, for the most part, the peasant population. Artisans, small traders, freedmen, women of all ranks, and slaves are some of the segments of society known to have been present.<sup>55</sup> Robin Lane Fox depicts Christianity as beginning among the relatively poor, but free, population, attracting some of the more educated classes in the second century, with a significant, or even majority, proportion of women by the third century. By the mid third century the Christians would have been a small minority concentrated in cities and towns, using the various living literary languages (but not the many spoken dialects), still with a predominance of poorer free citizens and women of all classes.<sup>56</sup> All these analyses are in broad agreement that the Christianity of the first three centuries, while not a proletarian movement drawing from the abject poor, nonetheless drew from the humbler and poorer segments of the

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grammatical education would also seem more reasonable.

<sup>53</sup> A.H.M. Jones, "The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity," *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) 17-37.

<sup>54</sup> R.M. Grant, "The Christian Population of the Roman Empire," *Early Christianity and Society: Seven Studies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 1-95.

<sup>55</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983) 51-73.

population.

Rodney Stark reviews the scholarly material, emphasizing the recent revision of the earlier scholarly position that the earliest Christianity was a movement of the most socially disadvantaged people of the Roman Empire, especially slaves and the peasant masses. His own contribution is a comparison with new religions in modern times, which argues that Christianity, like modern cults (and unlike sects), was a movement that drew mainly from the middle classes.<sup>57</sup> His comparative and sociological approach has drawn mixed (many of them forceful) reviews.<sup>58</sup> One major problem is the attempt to compare anything from the Roman Empire with the middle class of modern times. The middle (especially upper-middle) classes who in Stark's account are attracted to modern cults are defined by college education: one table used by Stark shows that 65-100% of the members of various cults are college educated.<sup>59</sup> As we seen, however, education is not, in the ancient world, the property of the middle classes. The ancient middle class (if such a thing can be identified at all) is nothing like the modern suburban masses. Even basic literacy escaped them. I labor the point to stress that even if we locate the Christianity of the first three centuries among the middle rather than the bottom of the social scale, it is still far from the elite culture of the grammatically educated, fully literate summit of the social pyramid. It is clear, then, that up until the third century, Christianity was not prevalently the religion of the upper classes, the highly educated and highly literate.

Had this reality changed by Augustine's time? There is no doubt that especially

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<sup>56</sup> Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Middlesex: Viking, 1986) 293-312.

<sup>57</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996) 29-47.

<sup>58</sup> See for instance Elizabeth Clark, "Rodney Stark's *The Rise of Christianity*. A Discussion," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 162-267.

<sup>59</sup> Stark, 39-44.

after Constantine's conversion Christianity began to appeal more to aristocrats and the upper classes. But had the Church's social composition changed so drastically that Augustine found himself preaching to a predominantly elite audience, who had received the same education as he had? If so, where had the poorer Christians gone? In Africa, of course, we have a possible solution in Donatism. W.H.C. Frend argues that while the Catholic Church resonated with wealthier, more Romanized and urbanized populations of North Africa, Donatism was the religion of the poor and rural peasants (who remained more traditionally African) and was the dominant Church among the masses.<sup>60</sup> Like MacMullen, he describes Augustine speaking to the wealthy in the polished language of the wealthy, concerned with issues of relevance to the wealthy.<sup>61</sup> The Donatists, on the other hand, while they possessed their share of wealth and wealthy members, preserved the sense that they were the Church of the poor, of the masses of Berber speaking peasants, with a concern for social justice.<sup>62</sup> One of the key factors in his argument is the concentration of Donatism in the less Romanized Numidia.<sup>63</sup> The movement becomes for him not so much a battle over ecclesiology, but over social realities, especially clear in its association with the Circumcellions' terrorism against wealthy landowners.<sup>64</sup>

The contrast he sets up is fairly sharp, between rich cities and the impoverished countryside, and while he argues that the lower classes of towns were perhaps never fully Romanized,<sup>65</sup> he does not give a very full picture of the motivations acting on different segments of the population. Whether or not his thesis is correct, it easily leads to a very

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<sup>60</sup> W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952. revised 1985).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 327-28.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 331.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 48-59.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 73-75.

narrow vision of social interaction.<sup>66</sup> Frend's book does touch on the religion of the urban population with modest resources. He argues that urban artisans would have had more in common with peasants than with wealthier Latin speaking citizens, and that the artisan would have been attracted to the Donatists rather than the Catholics.<sup>67</sup> All the same, when approached with the particular questions of this thesis, it leaves one wondering how the complexities of social interaction and the infinite gradations of wealth and status fit into the picture of the conflict between rich and poor. Even if Frend is correct about the general social trends of the two movements, his findings do not go very far in defining Augustine's audience more specifically. His evidence convincingly suggests that we should not look for the bulk of Augustine's audience among the poorest even of the city. It does not seem entirely realistic, however, that with the conversion of the upper segments of society the classes that had been the Church's heart for the first three centuries (who, as we have seen, cannot have been included among the fully educated) disappeared entirely or in North Africa became Donatists. I should expect that, if nothing else, then at least the influence of the wealthy would keep many in the Catholic Church.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. W. H. C. Frend, "Religion and Social Change in the Late Roman Empire," *The Cambridge Journal* 2 (1949): 488. The potential is realized in this very polarized depiction of social class and religion:

But the sources tell us mainly about the beliefs and evolution of a comparatively small Latin-speaking minority. Augustine's sermons, for instance, were addressed to a literate audience who could appreciate quotations from the classics, wealthy people who could afford ivory beds, or evade ecclesiastical fasts by indulging themselves in fancy dishes. The Berber peasant spoke little if any Latin, slept on a mat as does his present-day descendant and ate a rough and scanty fare. Augustine's friends were members of the senatorial and land-owning class, his own ideal of life as expressed in the Confessions was an *otium liberale* on some great landed estate; his monastery had little to do with evangelical poverty, but was rather a projection of this leisured ideal into the life of the African Catholic Church.

Frend's account apparently suggests that we should simply fill Augustine's basilica with an audience selected from the uppermost levels of society. And yet one has to ask where, in this account, we should

A particular problem with the assumption that the Donatists and Catholics were socially polarized sections of the population is Augustine's constant polemic against them, in sermons and treatises, which makes little sense if there is no contact between the two groups. Either we must imagine that the Catholics present were likely to convert to Donatism, or that some Donatists were present, or, finally, that there would be some interaction between the two groups outside the Church. If the two groups were separated by a social chasm, it is hard to imagine how Augustine's words could have any impact whatsoever, for his words would not reach beyond the Catholic population. It seems, rather, that we should imagine a mix of social classes in both groups (with perhaps a differing balance in each) as well as some attendance at meetings of groups other than one's own. As we shall see, Augustine at least envisioned an occasional Manichee in his audience, just as he himself had experimented with the two versions of Christianity as a young man.

Even if we were to posit that MacMullen's and Frend's arguments are correct, however, and that Augustine's audience was drawn from the uppermost segments of society, we must question whether this would imply a wholly educated audience who shared the cultural formation of the preacher. We have already seen that the population with a full grammatical education was very small, perhaps less than 1% of the general population in Hippo, or around 200 people. Even basic literacy, if we accept Harris's maximum of 5%, would only make for at most 1000-1500 literate citizens in Hippo. But what would have been the attendance at Augustine's sermons?

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look for those who neither sleep on ivory couches or a mat, for the smaller merchants and artisans of the city, or even small land owners, who might be Latinized and yet lack an education in the classics.

<sup>67</sup> Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in North Africa* 66.

## The Basilica at Hippo: Capacity and Social Composition

While the size of the audience is not directly correlated with social composition, it is certainly more likely that a large crowd would be more diverse. If, as I have argued, there were only about 200 fully literate adults in Hippo, any greater audience certainly argues for the presence of other segments of the population. Augustine certainly makes frequent enough reference to the size of the crowd, but even more than with poverty, size is always expressed in relative terms: words such as large, small, more, and fewer provide no quantitative data.<sup>68</sup> Augustine comments, for example, that his audience is smaller than at Christmas, when he had to put off discussing a difficult question.<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere he complains that he went unheard in the presence of a large crowd.<sup>70</sup> Such references might be multiplied, but they only really show that the size of the congregation varied significantly. One hint at the actual size of a large crowd is given in an illustrative description of the basilica being torn down because it can no longer contain the faithful.<sup>71</sup> Even with the allowance for rhetorical exaggeration, the fact that such a scenario is imaginable suggests that the basilica was indeed quite crowded on occasion. It still does not answer the question of how many, however.

MacMullen's suggestion (without further elaboration on the subject) that the size of fourth century basilicas limited the possible composition of the audience to the most wealthy and educated elites of the city offers a possible approach to the question of the size and composition of the crowd, but we must approach the relationship between size and capacity in some more detail.

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<sup>68</sup> Pellegrino, 84-85.

<sup>69</sup> *Serm.* 51.1.

<sup>70</sup> *Serm.* 68.1.

Augustine preached in the basilica in Hippo. The *quadratum populi* (the main area of the church where his audience stood) measured 40m by 18.5m. It was divided into three sections by columns. The central section was 9m wide, and the side sections were each 4.75m wide.<sup>72</sup> The whole *quadratum*, then, measured 740m<sup>2</sup>, divided into a central 360m<sup>2</sup> section, flanked by two measuring 190m<sup>2</sup>. As a point of comparison, for determining capacity, we might consider the layout of a fairly typical small modern Church, the Anglican Church in Spiritwood, Saskatchewan. Its pews are 225cm long and 55cm deep, set apart so that the total space that each pew occupies, including the space in front of it (where one stands), is 90cm. These same pews fit 4 generously built people comfortably. In other words, the area that each person occupies, when the church is full, not counting the aisle between the rows of pews or the area of the Church not occupied by pews, is 56cm by 90cm, or almost exactly half a square meter. (If we add the aisle, which is about a meter wide, the space occupied rises to an average of three quarters of a square meter). This allows the members of the congregation room to sit on a pew, kneel or stand in front of it, and with the aisle to move around in the church, exit or enter, etc. The pew itself takes half that space, so when standing each person has the same amount of surface area around them as they occupy. If we were to fill the basilica, then, leaving its occupants the same amount of room (not counting the aisle), we could fit 1480 people in it (or 987 counting the aisle space). I am not proposing that it was often so filled, indeed without the aisles and other free areas that density perhaps be unsupportable. Surely, however, a square meter is ample room to allocate, and we could imagine a capacity crowd of at least 750 people, maybe even 1000 fairly comfortably. I am being

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<sup>71</sup> *Serm.* 15A.8.

cautious, but F. Van der Meer suggests boldly that, considering the lack of furniture, we might imagine as many as 2000 people crowding the basilica on a feast day.<sup>73</sup>

If, as I have discussed, a possible figure for the grammatically educated elite in Hippo is around 200, then even if we were to imagine all of them attending Augustine's sermons, they would hardly fill a space capacious enough for 750 or more. Even with their wives and some children, they would hardly fill a Church built for 750. Moreover, while I am not proposing that we should expect a capacity crowd on a regular basis, neither can we imagine that all the elite would have been in the Basilica on a regular basis. We must take into account the religious (not to mention secular) competition in a Roman North African town: besides Donatists (of whom some at least must have been educated, as they produced literature to rival the Catholic writings), some would be Pagans,<sup>74</sup> others belong to some mystery sect, or be Manichees, Jews, or even belong to other Christian sects that we do not know existed in Hippo. If even half of the educated males were catholic Christians (about a hundred, according to my calculations), we can allow plenty of room for literate or illiterate women as well as men who were either literate in a very basic sense or not at all. Furthermore, it is hardly likely that all the catholic Christians (many of whom remained catechumens for life) would have attended on a frequent and regular basis. In short, there would have been plenty of room for the population of a lower status and educational level to attend Augustine's sermons if they wished. Indeed, if neither a significant number of females (with much lower levels of literacy than males) or males with lesser education were present, the Church would have

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<sup>72</sup> I. Gui, *Basiliques chrétiennes d'Afrique du Nord*, vol. 1 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1992) 348.

<sup>73</sup> Van der Meer, 23.

been very empty indeed (perhaps no more than 75 people?), and would hardly be a sign of the victory of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

All this circumstantial evidence cannot show who was present to hear Augustine's sermons. I have tried to show, however, that it is not unlikely that a good number of them came from a class that did not have a full literary education, or at least that there is no compelling circumstantial evidence that they did not. The number of fully literates was very small, the Church had not long before been composed mostly of non-elite members, and the Church would have been very empty if only (or mostly) grammatically educated elite men had been present. Indeed, the evidence found in Augustine's own writings, to which I will turn next, seems to corroborate these conclusions from the more circumstantial evidence.

### **Illiterates among the Christian Congregation**

While it addresses catechesis in Carthage, rather than preaching in Hippo, Augustine's *De Catechizandis* offers some direct evidence about the audience of Christian teaching. Before outlining his model catechesis, he bids the reader imagine the intended audience:

But still, let us suppose that someone has come to us who desires to be a Christian, and while of the uneducated class, yet not a man from the country but a townsman such as you must come across in great numbers at Carthage.<sup>75</sup>

He does also discuss more educated students, but these are the exception rather than the

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Henry Chadwick, "New Sermons of St. Augustine," *Journal of Theological Studies* 47 (1996): 88. In a number of texts Augustine addresses the hold of paganism on the upper classes, and their disdain at sharing the religion of the lower classes.

<sup>75</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 16.24. *Sed tamen faciamus aliquem venisse ad nos, qui vult esse christianus, et de genere quidem idiotarum, non tamen rusticorum, sed urbanorum, quales apud Carthaginem plures experiri te necesse est.*

rule, those for whom the curriculum needs to be modified. The bulk of the intended audience is the unlearned townsfolk. It is not surprising that the peasants are absent, for the setting is the city. I would not imagine that the situation would be that different in Hippo. In fact, if anything we should expect less wealth in Hippo than in Carthage, the latter being a large city and hence more attractive to the wealthy and cultured. The audience of Augustine's catechesis at least was not drawn mostly from among the highly educated elite, though there remains, of course, the possibility that those who came to hear sermons represented a different segment of the population than the audience of catechesis.

It was not only the catechumens, however, who were characterized by lack of education, for even the clergy were not all well educated. Very soon after Augustine was ordained a priest, he was asked to speak to an assembly of Bishops in Hippo; he presented to them a very simple treatment of the Creed, a subject and treatment that suggests a lack of education among them.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, when discussing the direction to be given to catechumens with a grammatical education, one of his chief concerns is that they might disdain the uncouth or garbled Latin they hear from less educated clergy.

Thus they will not smile contemptuously if they happen to observe that some ministers of the Church either fall into barbarisms and solecisms when calling upon Almighty God, or do not understand and badly punctuate words which they are pronouncing.<sup>77</sup>

If the clergy in North Africa lacked education, it seems unlikely that his flock would not; if the Church were mostly composed of the educated, would they not choose their leaders from that group? They would hardly choose a lesser man and then look down on him if

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<sup>76</sup> Brown, 135.

there were a large pool of educated candidates. Indeed, the zeal with which the congregation of Hippo compelled Augustine's ordination, and the haste with which he is put to the job of preaching to both the flock and bishops,<sup>78</sup> further suggests that his education was as exceptional education as his talent.

It is interesting to note, furthermore, with what ease Monica moved among the Bishops of the Church, despite being an uneducated female. Twice in the *Confessions* she is depicted as being in close contact with a bishop. The first time occurs while Augustine is still in Carthage, when she approaches a bishop about trying to persuade Augustine to leave the Manichees.<sup>79</sup> In Milan, she spent much of her time at the Church listening to Ambrose preach, nor did she go unnoticed, for when Augustine spoke to Ambrose, he praised Monica's piety.<sup>80</sup> Nothing in the account suggests that it was unexpected or unwelcome to see a pious woman attending the sermons of a highly educated Bishop, or even talking to him in private. The degree of her piety was certainly exceptional, but there is no indication that her presence at Church was. Indeed, as a youth Augustine once took the opportunity offered by the presence of women at Church to look for a girlfriend, and begin an affair!<sup>81</sup> Surely the young woman who accepted his advance is not to be numbered among a rare group of exceptionally pious women. If this is the same concubine we hear so much about later in the *Confessions*, moreover, she would have been well below his station, for she is discarded as unfit to be the wife of an upwardly mobile young teacher. The evidence from Augustine's writings, then, does not

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<sup>77</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 9.13. *ita enim non irridebunt, si aliquos antistites et ministros Ecclesiae forte animadverterint vel cum barbarismis et soloecismis Deum invocare, vel eadem verba quae pronuntiant non intellegere perturbateque distinguere.*

<sup>78</sup> Brown, 131-35.

<sup>79</sup> *Conf.* 3.12.21.

<sup>80</sup> *Conf.* 6.2.2-3.3.

suggest the absence of women from the preacher's audience.

As a point of comparison, we may draw, finally, on the evidence of Faustus and his Manichee audience. The Manichees were able to draw in the educated, like Augustine himself and the friends he met in Carthage and Rome, even influential ones like those who helped him secure the teaching post at Milan.<sup>82</sup> They used the kind of intellectual language that answered some of Augustine's concerns about Catholic Christianity and the Bible.<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, Augustine had questions that none of the other Manichees in Carthage could to answer. They told him, however, that Faustus was the great teacher who would resolve all his problems: not only was he eloquent, but highly educated. When he came to Carthage, however, Augustine found him to be intellectually deficient, a charmer with a fine tongue, but no more than the result of a grammatical education.<sup>84</sup> If this basic grammatical education was enough to charm his audience into thinking he was greatly educated, it would seem that they would not for the most part have possessed even that much education. An equally educated audience might well be impressed with his charm and natural wit, but surely they would have discerned that he was no better educated than themselves, nor a match for the level of Augustine's questions. As with the Donatists, it is hard to imagine that the audiences of the Manichees and Catholics would be entirely different, considering the amount of polemical preaching against them. In one sermon, moreover, Augustine even addresses Manichees who might be in the midst of the congregation:

If by any chance there are some heretics here who still have the idea that

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<sup>81</sup> *Conf.* 3.3.5.

<sup>82</sup> *Conf.* 5.13.23.

<sup>83</sup> *Conf.* 3.6.10.

<sup>84</sup> *Conf.* 5.3.5-6.11.

Christ did show himself to the eyes of the disciples, without its being the real flesh of Christ, let them put it out of their minds, and allow themselves to be persuaded by the gospel. I now reprove them for entertaining such an idea; he himself will condemn them, if they persist in holding it. Who are you, anyway, who won't believe that a body laid in the tomb could rise again? Are you a Manichee by any chance?<sup>85</sup>

If Manichees were present at Augustine's sermons, we can at least say that the two religious options appealed to the same segment of the population. We know, at any rate, that Augustine long wavered between the two options. If it was only the educated that were drawn to both, we can hardly imagine that Augustine had a very large audience.

While no precise statistics can be reached, then, the evidence from Augustine's sermons, combined with more external evidence, suggests that Augustine's audience was not drawn exclusively (or almost exclusively) from the highly literate and educated classes. He addresses illiterate members of his congregation. His discussions of poverty and the poor, moreover, suggest that he was deeply concerned with the needs of the poorer members of his congregation: they were neither idealized nor trivialized, and both their physical and spiritual needs were important to the preacher. More compellingly, the social context of Hippo and the capacity of Augustine's basilica make it highly unlikely that grammatical education was prevalent among his audience, for even if all the elites of Hippo attended his sermons (an unlikely scenario indeed), the basilica would still be very empty. Evidence from his other writings, moreover, suggests that it was expected that poor and illiterate citizens would be found among the Christian congregation.

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<sup>85</sup> *Serm.* 116.4.

## Chapter 3 - Augustine's Educational Theory

We have seen so far that Augustine had received a traditional Roman education (and that most of his audience probably had not), whose features can be interpreted as an attempt to delineate the limits of a small, educated elite. He excelled and became a teacher of rhetoric. On conversion, however, he rejected his role as a teacher, and resigned his post. It is hard to imagine, however, that a man so steeped in educational values and experience should abandon it altogether, and cease entirely from educational activities. In fact he did not. His community at Cassiciacum was devoted to a new kind of learning. He and his companions devoted themselves to the study of philosophy, and Augustine's writing at the time is modeled on Socratic dialogues. He even wrote a treatise on educational theory, the *De Magistro*. This philosophical retreat did not last long, however, and Augustine was soon ordained, and faced a new task, teaching the congregation at Hippo. It is this period that is the focus of this study, and in the bishop's writing too there is theoretical material on education. Three major works are particularly productive in this respect, and it is on these that this chapter will focus: the *Confessions*, *De Doctrina Christiana*, and *De Catechizandis Rudibus*.

I limit myself to Augustine's educational thought as a bishop, for it only after his ordination that he had to face and respond to the social reality of the Christian audience. The trend in earlier scholarship has been the opposite, to synchronize Augustine's thought, and to glean information from his educational writings with little regard for chronological development or changing social context. George Howie, for instance,

arranges a source book on the subject by topic, regardless of chronological order.<sup>1</sup> His monograph on the subject takes same synchronic approach: the groundwork is laid by a study of Augustine's early dialogues, and later works are interpreted in the light of the former. The result is a depiction of a man whose thought about education changed very little: Augustine is portrayed as a philosophical educator in the tradition of Socrates, who insists on the value of the liberal arts, and looks down on conventional types of schooling (especially the use of compulsion and rote learning); his ideal education is learning pursued freely in an environment of dialogue and shared excitement, with the intellect developed through understanding and knowledge rather than belief and imitation.<sup>2</sup>

Howie may well be right in his evaluation of Augustine's thought at Cassiciacum. The continuity of Augustine's thought, however, is assumed, not demonstrated. One would expect, though, that the mere length of Augustine's writing career would lead to some development in thought, at least in terms of shifting emphases and perspectives. In the time of his career, moreover, a number of profound changes in circumstance took place. His earliest writings come from a converted teacher who has abandoned his career to devote his life to a Christian philosophical path, who has retired to a country retreat with friends to spend his time in leisurely studies. The later writings come from the pen of a bishop, still zealous for the faith, but burdened with the pastoral care of the Christians at Hippo. If the change is not as significant as his conversion, these are nonetheless very different circumstances.

The question of the social dimension of Augustine's thought opens a further

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<sup>1</sup> *St. Augustine: On Education*, trans. George Howie (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1969).

<sup>2</sup> George Howie, *Educational Theory and Practice in St. Augustine* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1969).

perspective on this change, for by the time he is bishop, his social context is drastically changed. No longer is he surrounded by a small group of studious individuals from the same cultural elite to which he too belongs. Instead, as a priest and even more as bishop, he is responsible for teaching a far broader audience, by catechism and preaching. There is evidence, in fact, that his initial contact with them came as a shock: he wrote to his bishop soon after ordination, complaining that his training so far did not fit him for the job he had begun. He needed time to study before he could fulfill his duties properly.<sup>3</sup> The implication of preaching to a crowd are further addressed elsewhere. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, he discusses the particular challenge of addressing a large group: since they (unlike partners in a dialogue) cannot ask questions, the preacher should strive all the more for clarity, and repeat himself until he realizes by their body language that his audience has grasped the point.<sup>4</sup> In *De Catechizandis Rudibus* he comments on the difficulty of expressing his thoughts in words.<sup>5</sup> With his earlier method of teaching, reflected in the dialogues, these problems would not have been as acute, for a subject could be investigated and explored until all involved apprehended the meaning. The dialogic method, however, is not followed or advocated in his later educational treatises. The context of teaching clearly would have made it impracticable. If Augustine changed his practical approach out of necessity, we should at least expect the possibility of change in his theoretical approach as well.

The burden of proof, it seems, is on the argument that Augustine's approach to education underwent little change. Eugene Kevane offers a two-fold argument in this

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<sup>3</sup> Ep. 26

<sup>4</sup> *DDC* 4.10.25.

<sup>5</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 2.3.

direction: firstly, the *De Doctrina Christiana* repeats his earlier recommendation of liberal arts, and secondly he reaffirms it once more in the *Retractationes*.<sup>6</sup> While it is important to point out that Augustine does not abandon his earlier thought entirely, his later reaffirmation of it is not as keen as Kevane leads us to suppose. The recommendation of the *De Doctrina Christiana*, as we shall see, is not made without reservations. As for the *Retractationes*, Augustine writes that he wrote the books, not that he still agrees with them wholeheartedly.<sup>7</sup> He certainly does not disapprove of them, but neither does recommend them with any fervor. Indeed, he shows no particular grief at the fact that they were never finished, nor at his loss of the work. He acknowledges his authorship, for someone else might still have a copy. The relationship between Augustine's earlier and mature thought certainly needs more consideration, but unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this study. There is no compelling evidence to suggest *a priori*, however, that Augustine thought stayed unchanged, and that his later thought can only be understood in the light of his earlier writings.

If we look at his later writing on education as a discreet unit, however, it certainly seems that he is reacting to his particular social context as bishop of Hippo. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to leave aside his earlier thought for the time being, to focus instead on the particular characteristics of his thought as bishop, leaving for further study

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<sup>6</sup> Kevane Eugene. *Augustine the Educator: A Study in the Fundamentals of Christian Formation*. Westminster, Maryland, 1964. 140-141.

<sup>7</sup> *Retractationes* 1.6.

Per idem tempus quo Mediolani fui, Baptismum percepturus, etiam Diciplinarum libros conatus sum scribere, interrogans eos qui mecum erant, atque ab huiusmodi studiis non abhorrebant; per corporalia cupiens ad incorporalia quibusdam passibus certis vel pervenire vel ducere. Sed earum solum de Grammatica librum absolvere potui, quem postea de armario nostri peridi: et de Musica sex volumina; quantum attinet ad eam partem quae rythmus vocatur. Sed eosdem sex libros iam baptizatus, jamque ex italia regressus in Africam scripsi; inchoaveram quippe tantummodo istam apud Mediolanum disciplinam. De aliis vero quinque disciplinis illic similiter inchoatis; De

the complex task of tracing the development from his earlier writing. At any rate, the evidence of the *Confessions*, *De Doctrina Christiana*, and *De Catechizandis Rudibus* suggests that Augustine as Bishop developed his Christian approach to education in response to the social reality of his audience, their differing class, wealth, intellectual training, potential and ability. Throughout these roughly contemporaneous works,<sup>8</sup> several recurrent preoccupations emerge, and they consistently appear to revolve around issues of class and elitism. He criticizes the way his secular education encouraged students to pursue wealth and honor, attained especially by the rhetoric taught to the wealthy at school (at great cost), with an emphasis on polished style. His proposal for Christian education reverses these values, with an emphasis on the centrality of the basic truths of Christianity to learning and the necessity of sharing Christian education broadly.

Augustine's response to his audience results in a flexible approach to education, as it attempts to purge it of elitist associations and broaden the possibilities of educational activities. It is easy to overlook the broadening effect of this social dimension of education, as Kevane (who rightly suggests that Augustine continues to preoccupied with educational concerns) does in setting the parameters of his research:

Our question, then, continues the investigation whether there was a substantial contact with education in these thirty-four busy years. There was, of course, the catechumenate; but a genuine "education" in the institutional sense of schools, cultural organs of civilization?<sup>9</sup>

The introduction of a distinction between institutional and other kinds of education is of

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Dialectica, de Rhetorica, de Geometrica, de Arithmetica, de Philosophia, sola principia remanserunt, quae tamen etiam ipsa perdidimus: sed haberi ab aliquibus existimo.

<sup>8</sup> The *DDC* was begun in 396, though it was completed only in 426; the *Confessions* were written in 397-401; and the *De Catechizandis Rudibus* in 400. (William Harmless, *Augustine's Works: Dates/Editions*, Website, Available: <http://www.library.villanova.edu/sermons/dates.htm>, 21/06 2003.)

<sup>9</sup> Eugene Kevane, *Augustine the Educator: A Study in the Fundamentals of Christian Formation* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1964) 28-31,124.

course useful. Kevane's perspective, however, not only limits Augustine's thought, but preconditions the interpretation of his proposed educational models: if only institutional forms qualify as "education," then Augustine's proposals for education are too easily interpreted according to institutional categories. I suggest that it is precisely his ability to see beyond the institutional models, to move from education through schools to education through preaching and other means, that allows Augustine's to respond with new possibilities to an audience that cannot be reached through the old educational model, to create a Christian culture for a Christian people.

### **The *Confessions***

The *Confessions* are a rich source for Augustine's views on education. An examination of his interior life could hardly avoid the subject, given Augustine's extensive involvement in education, first as a promising young student and subsequently as a teacher. Indeed, much of Augustine's account of his misspent youth and return to God is interwoven with the social identity and self-satisfaction he found through education, and abandoned upon conversion. The intimate nature of the narrative of the *Confessions* means that we get a far more personal view of his experience of education than any theoretical treatise on the subject would provide. His comments, moreover, are tantalizingly emotive. The viewpoint of the *Confessions* is of course the recollection of a mature bishop, and his memory of childhood is mediated by a lifetime of experience. This is an advantage for this enquiry, for it allows us to see the memory to which he reacts when suggesting a positive program for Christian education in *De Doctrina Christiana* and *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, for it especially taken together that these works suggest that one of the driving forces behind the development of Augustine's

educational theory after his ordination as presbyter and bishop was a desire to offer Christian education that was accessible to a non-elite and otherwise little educated audience. We must of course distinguish between Augustine's mature thoughts and his recollection of earlier thoughts. Indeed, I suggest that his apparently negative comments about elementary education are more a recollection of his earlier aversion to corporal punishment and rote learning. The evidence suggests that of all his education, the bishop most appreciated what he had gained at the elementary level. As one might expect, pagan stories were a problematic part of education for the bishop. His most trenchant remarks, however, are reserved for the aims of ancient education, the quest for wealth and status. Another major point of contention is the disordering of values, whereby style rather than moral quality is the student's measure of success. The nature and force of these views suggest an underlying criticism of the elitist nature of late Roman education, rather than a rejection of the whole curriculum and all its parts.

There is no doubt that the memory of corporal punishments haunts Augustine in adulthood. His account of his elementary education is intensely emotive.

Ah, God, my God, what wretchedness I suffered [...] I would be beaten whenever I was lazy about learning. This punishment was taken for granted by grown-up people and many a pupil had undergone it before we did, laying down those rough roadways along which we were now being driven, as we bore our part in the heavy labor and pain allotted to the sons of Adam. [...] So it came about that even then in boyhood I began to pray to you, my aid and refuge. By calling upon you I untied the knots of my tongue and begged you, in my little-boy way but with no little earnestness, not to let me be beaten at school. You did not hear my prayer, lest by hearing it you might have consigned me to a fool's fate; so my stripes were laughed at by my elders and even my parents, who would not have wished anything bad to happen to me. But bad it was, and very dreadful for me.<sup>10</sup>

The pain of the young boy is marked, and the prayer of the child is joined with that of the

present, in which Augustine sighs to God about his early memories. The following paragraph deliberates at length his parent's insensibility to his pain, comparing his own sufferings to those inflicted by instruments of torture.<sup>11</sup> He repeats the same sentiment more matter-of-factly later in the same book: "I was not fond of study, and hated being driven to it."<sup>12</sup> Again, when discussing his studies of Homer, he reiterates the point:

As a boy I found him distasteful. I expect Virgil is equally distasteful to Greek boys, when they are forced to study him as I was Homer. It was so difficult; and the difficulty of thoroughly mastering a foreign language seemed to sprinkle bitterness over those fabulous narratives for all their Greek sweetness, because I knew none of the words, and the threat of savage, terrifying punishments was used to make me learn them.<sup>13</sup>

Learning Greek was hard enough without corporal punishment, nor did the use of rote learning make school any more enjoyable, as is evident in Augustine's comment on arithmetic: "Already the jingle, "One and one make two, two and two make four," was hateful to me."<sup>14</sup>

It is tempting to conclude, especially from the first, very emotive, passage that I quoted, that Augustine rejected entirely the methods to which he was subjected, that is compulsion and rote learning. This view has indeed been taken by many scholars, often with the accompanying assumption that Augustine's experience is a linear ascent, from conventional Roman education to a philosophical education based on dialogical methods, or a self-education driven by the force of free will and a keen desire for knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.14.

<sup>11</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.15.

<sup>12</sup> *Conf.* 1.12.19

<sup>13</sup> *Conf.* 1.14.23.

<sup>14</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.22.

<sup>15</sup> Howie, 39. Howie portrays Augustine as rejecting and rising above the educational techniques that he had to endure:

"St. Augustine's self-education, as portrayed in his *Confessions* is a dynamic movement of the soul from bewilderment and doubt to understanding and faith. A study of the *Confessions* shows that education, liberally interpreted, is vastly more subtle, intimate

Augustine's comments on the natural learning process and incentives to learning lend some support to this conclusion.<sup>16</sup> These comments are made in a comparison between his education in literacy and the ease with which he learned to speak. Success with speech was enabled by natural abilities and the example of others, after some initial failure in communication:

It was not that older people taught me by offering me words by way of formal instruction, as was the case soon afterward with reading. No, I taught myself, using the mind you gave me, O my God, because I was

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and purposeful than schooling in the narrow formal sense - 'the hateful sing song of the schools,' as Augustine describes his own experience of school education."

Howie, 56. Howie suggests that Augustine is proposing an alternative theory of will, on which education should be based: "Augustine's theory leads to the conclusion [...] that learning cannot be coerced, but can only occur in an atmosphere of free choice." Note that he does not suggest that Augustine reaches that conclusion.

Howie, George, trans. *St. Augustine: On Education*. Chicago:Henry Regnery Co., 1969. 13. Here Howie reiterates even more emphatically Augustine's distaste for rote learning:

In particular he attacks rote learning, consisting in the unthinking, and therefore meaningless, repetition of words, the "hateful chanting" which in the *Confessions* he condemns as a distressing feature of his own elementary education.

Paul A. Olson, *The Journey to Wisdom. Self-Education in Patristic and Medieval Literature* (Nebraska: U Nebraska P, 1995) 60. Olson portrays Roman elementary education as entirely negative, echoing Augustine's comment: "These schools make even mathematics dwindle to a disgusting chanting of memorized numbers." Olson, 62. Here Olson makes explicit the interpretation of the development of Augustine's educational experience and theory as an ascent from his own negative experiences to a self-directed enlightenment.

Pushed by his own problems and without a human teacher, he ascends from misdirected or "ruined" verbal learning and action in the early books to study of the Logos and ethics (i.e. reading the Hortensius); he goes on to the study of dialectic, the mathematical disciplines (4.16), and a natural philosophy that leads to Wisdom or Christ-the-Logos in the middle books (5.3). Finally, he moves upward to theology and to the full enjoyment of God at Ostia and after.

Aside from an overstatement of the evils of Augustine's elementary education, the fact that self-education led Augustine into the error of Manicheism before truth is ignored in this description, as is the depiction in the *Confessions* of Ambrose as an important teacher who leads Augustine to recognize the truth and scripture.

J.R. Biddle, "'Will the Real Teacher Please Stand Up?'" Augustine on Human Goodness: Metaphysics, Ethics and Politics. 21st Annual Philosophy Colloquium, Dayton, April 7-9 1994. Dir. R. Herbenick and P.A. Johnson, " *University of Dayton Review* 22 (1994): 373. Biddle assumes the same view of rote learning, again based on Augustine's comments on rote learning:

Learning is intensive personal exploration and discovery, not soulless recitation. The act of teaching is never direct impartation, but a circuitous route through multiple experiences allowing the learner to gradually and laboriously struggle toward meaning and wisdom.

<sup>16</sup> Howie, 161.

By contrast [to the spontaneous learning of early childhood] he holds that the formal methods of the schools, in which theory is first expounded, and opportunities for practice are later provided is unsound.

unable to express the thoughts of my heart by cries and inarticulate sounds and gestures in such a way as to gain what I wanted or make my entire meaning clear to everyone as I wished; so I grasped at words with my memory; when people called an object by some name, and while saying the word pointed to that thing, I watched and remembered that they used that sound when they wanted to indicate that thing.<sup>17</sup>

This descriptive passage is complemented, from Augustine's discussion of Greek where the same themes are echoed, with a comment on the power of curiosity: "It is evident that the free play of curiosity is a more powerful spur to learning these things than is fear-ridden coercion."<sup>18</sup> There is no doubt, then, that Augustine disliked rote learning and corporal punishments, or that he thought spontaneous learning was easier. One must not omit, however, that the last passage continues

yet in accordance with your laws, O God, coercion checks the free play of curiosity. By your laws it constrains us, from the beatings meted out by our teachers to the ordeals of the martyrs, for in accord with those laws it prescribes for us bitter draughts of salutary discipline to recall us from the venomous pleasure which led us away from you.<sup>19</sup>

From his mature perspective, Augustine can see that harsh discipline had a divinely sanctioned purpose. The passage compares, moreover, the curiosity that drove him to love the Latin classics with the difficult task of mastering Greek, and it is this love that is described as a "venomous pleasure." The more positive view of corporal punishment is evidenced in a number of other passages, to which I shall now turn, and is balanced, as we shall see, by more manifestations of a very negative view of the literary education that he enjoyed so much.

Several times Augustine notes the providential nature of the punishments he underwent, in spite of the intent of their executors. Even in that first emotive passage,

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<sup>17</sup> *Conf.* 1.8.13.

<sup>18</sup> *Conf.* 1.14.23.

<sup>19</sup> *Conf.* 1.14.23.

Augustine recognizes the will of God in his chastisement:

You did not hear my prayer, lest by hearing it you might have consigned me to a fool's fate; so my stripes were laughed at by my elders and even my parents, who would not have wished anything bad to happen to me. But bad it was, and very dreadful for me.<sup>20</sup>

In the same breath, he complains about the bitter experience and recognizes the good of it. He recognizes too his fault in not studying hard enough: "All the same, we were blameworthy, because we were less assiduous in reading, writing and concentrating on our studies than was expected of us."<sup>21</sup> After more reflection, he repeats the same point:

And I did sin at that time, Lord my God, by disobeying the instructions of my parents and teachers, for I was later able to make good use of the lessons my relatives wanted me to learn, whatever may have been their intention in so directing me. I sinned because I disobeyed them not in order to choose something more worthwhile, but simply because I loved games.<sup>22</sup>

Augustine does not judge his experience without first engaging in a deep internal deliberation, and neither should the reader. He allows the full force of his childish displeasure come to the fore, as if to show that at the emotive level he is still repulsed by the idea of corporal punishments. His more sober judgment, however, recognizes the usefulness of chastisement for true development. For better or for worse, we must allow that to stand as the verdict of the mature bishop.

While he does not analyze his experience of rote learning with the same depth, we should not assume that his disapproval of it lasted into adulthood. We do not have direct evidence to the contrary, though a point of grammar should be noted: in all the comments I have cited, his negative attitude to elementary education is worded with the past tense. Another argument, moreover, mitigates his apparent condemnation of elementary

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<sup>20</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.14.

educational methods: the elementary skills of reading and writing were the most useful thing he learned at school. He could have put his education to good use, “though I, poor wretch, could see no point in them.”<sup>23</sup> At the time, he could not see the point, but he soon points out that he in fact “was later able to make good use of the lessons my relatives wanted me to learn.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, his fault lay in his failure to put them to good use: “I sinned because I disobeyed them not in order to choose something more worthwhile, but simply because I loved games.”<sup>25</sup> The possibility inherent in the knowledge becomes a prayer as Augustine addresses God: “See, Lord, you are my king and my God; let every useful thing I learned as a boy be devoted now to your service.”<sup>26</sup> Augustine’s elementary education could be, should be, and eventually was put to good use. The fact is expressed most emphatically as he compares literacy with literary studies, in the very passage in which he complains about the process of learning arithmetic:

Sin I did, then, in boyhood, by preferring those frivolous tales to much more useful attainments, or rather by loving the one and loathing the other. Already the jingle, “One and one make two, two and two make four,” was hateful to me, whereas a wooden horse full of armed men, Troy afire, and the shade of Creusa - these were a spectacle on which I delighted to gaze, and as empty as they were entertaining.<sup>27</sup>

The tone is quite different than the comment about rote learning suggested in isolation. His distaste is in fact identified as a sin. If there is no explicit correction of his earlier position on corporal punishments, it is nonetheless reprovved. Repeatedly, moreover, he

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<sup>21</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.15.

<sup>22</sup> *Conf.* 1.10.16.

<sup>23</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.14.

<sup>24</sup> *Conf.* 1.10.16.

<sup>25</sup> *Conf.* 1.10.16.

<sup>26</sup> *Conf.* 1.15.24.

<sup>27</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.22.

emphasizes that what he learned because of it (he had no will to learn the boring elements of literacy, after all) later served him more than anything else. One last quote from the *Confessions* neatly sums this up:

What other reason could there be for this than the sinful, inane pride in my life, flesh as I was, a passing breath that comes not again? Those early lessons in literacy were unquestionably more profitable because more dependable; by means of them I was gradually being given a power which became mine and still remains with me: the power to read any piece of writing I come across and to write anything I have a mind to myself. Far more useful, then, were those studies than others in which I was forced to memorize the wanderings of some fellow called Aeneas, while forgetting my own waywardness, and to weep over Dido, who killed herself for love, when all the while in my intense misery I put up with myself with never a tear, as I died away from you, O God, who are my life.<sup>28</sup>

Already, then, Augustine's *Confessions* have given the lie to the idea that Augustine perceived his education as a linear ascent from rote learning to philosophical enlightenment.<sup>29</sup>

The power of curiosity may well be effective, but in fact Augustine disapproves strongly of the later studies that were driven by it. There is no doubt that he thoroughly enjoyed reading literature under the grammarian: "Latin studies, on the contrary, I loved, not the elementary kind under my first teachers, but the lessons taught by masters of literature."<sup>30</sup> The recollection of enjoyment, however, does not amount to approval. The

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<sup>28</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.20.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Catherine M. Chin, "Christians and the Roman Classroom: Memory, Grammar and Rhetoric in *Confessions* X," *Augustinian Studies* 33 (2002): 169-70. Chin argues that Augustine implies the primacy of elementary grammar in the structure of his narrative: since Augustine is almost baptized after learning the rudiments of grammar, that learning is compatible with baptism, while the studies in literature that follow the deferral of baptism are part of the misdirected motivation that puts it off. Chin points, furthermore, to the fact that in the tenth book grammar is discussed as *res* in the memory, rather than an image of a *res*. Its study separated from other subjects which exist less truly in the mind, which allows Augustine to justify grammatical knowledge while criticizing much of the Roman curriculum and especially rhetoric. Chin's argument is coherent with the point I will note below, that Augustine emphasizes the primacy of *res* over *signa*: if grammar is a *res*, it makes sense that its study should be valued above rhetoric, which is concerned with *signa*.

<sup>30</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.20.

problem with this literature was not so much, as one might expect, their pagan content. This aspect is perhaps underemphasized in part because the *Confessions* are a personal narrative, and for Augustine Pagan religion was never a serious temptation. Even philosophy, unless at least ostensibly Christian, could not command his loyalty: “Only one consideration checked me in my ardent enthusiasm: that the name of Christ did not occur there.”<sup>31</sup> He is concerned with their falsehoods, not because students might believe the stories, but rather because despite everyone’s agreement that they are false, they are taught nonetheless.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, more than the intellectual deception, it was the emotional deception of Pagan literature that troubled Augustine as he recalled these lessons. While he should have been weeping over his own spiritual condition, he wept instead over the vicissitudes of a fictional character, over Aeneas’s wanderings and Dido’s death.<sup>33</sup> He is concerned too because they encourage immorality, sanctioning wicked acts by divine and human example: Jove is presented as an adulterer,<sup>34</sup> and Terence’s characters reinforce this example by their imitation of the same deeds.<sup>35</sup> The grammarian’s curriculum, in short, is a canon of falsehoods and immorality.

Augustine’s most disparaging comments, however, concern not the content of literature, but the goals of classical education, especially the attainment of wealth and glory through success in rhetoric. He introduces the topic of his education with this complaint:

The program for right living presented to me as a boy was that I must obey my mentors, so that I might get on in this world and excel in the skills of the tongue, skills which lead to high repute and deceitful riches. To this

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<sup>31</sup> *Conf.* 3.4.8.

<sup>32</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.22.

<sup>33</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.20-21.

<sup>34</sup> *Conf.* 1.16.25.

<sup>35</sup> *Conf.* 1.16.26.

end I was sent to school to learn my letters.<sup>36</sup>

This initial comment is emphatic: the riches gained are false, and in a clever reversal of the expected notion of liberal arts, Augustine calls them *famulantes* instead, or slavish. If the emphasis on secular honors is in itself a disordering of values, the resolution of the conflict between moral values and secular ambition in favor of the latter is particularly reprehensible: “The prestigious course of studies I was following looked as its goal to the law-courts, in which I was destined to excel and where I would earn a reputation all the higher in the measure that my performance was the more unscrupulous.”<sup>37</sup> Again Augustine is using the contrasts between words and concepts to drive home his point. The word *honesta* suggests not only the prestige of the school, but also honesty (*honestum*), which is given the lie by the lies that were taught. Lies led to more lies, until Augustine became a teacher of the same lies, though he taught them with honesty:

And without any trickery on my part I taught them the tricks of the trade, never such as would secure the condemnation of the innocent, though sometimes such as were calculated to get the guilty acquitted. [...] though I taught students who loved worthless things and sought falsehood, in which pursuits I bore them company, I did try to teach them honestly.<sup>38</sup>

Again there is the play on words and concepts associated with education, with the repetition of the *dolus*, translated above as trickery (*eos sine dolo docebam dolos*; note also the alliteration), and the contrast between innocent (*innocentis*) and guilty (*nocens*). Augustine uses the rhetorical forces at his disposal to try to push the point that his education was misdirected.

Aside from the forcefulness with which Augustine makes the point, the frequency

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<sup>36</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.14. *recte mihi vivere puero id proponeretur, obtemperare monentibus, ut in hoc saeculo florerem et excellerem linguis artibus ad honorem hominum et falsas divitias famulantibus. inde in scholam datus sum ut discerem litteras.*

<sup>37</sup> *Conf.* 3.3.6.

of the recurrence of the theme suggests its importance in Augustine's perspective on the education he received. It is the same motives, more than their actions, that Augustine faults in his educators. The passages on corporal punishments illustrate this well. As we have seen, in his mind at least (if not emotionally) Augustine comes to terms with the beatings he received, and is able to see the advantage gained from them. Those who administered them, however, do not receive like approval. Augustine complains that his punishments were motivated by worse impulses than ever he was ruled by:

But whereas the frivolous pursuits of grown-up people are called "business," children are punished for behaving in the same fashion, and no one is sorry for either the children or the adults; so are we to assume that any sound judge of the matter would think it right for me to be beaten because I played ball as a boy, and was hindered by my game from more rapid progress in studies which would only equip me to play an uglier game later? Moreover, was the master who flogged me any better himself? If he had been worsted by a fellow-scholar in some pedantic dispute, would he not have been racked by even more bitter jealousy than I was when my opponent in a game of ball got the better of me?<sup>39</sup>

His teachers beat him without having a proper end in mind: they merely wanted the boy to follow their own sinful paths rather than that to which he was naturally inclined. Their more specific motivation, moreover, is the same that we have already seen Augustine criticize, for we soon read that his beatings had the purpose of encouraging his pursuit of wealth and glory:

Driven I was, though, and that did me good, though my own attitude was far from good, because I learned only under compulsion, and no one is doing right who acts unwillingly, even if what he does is good in itself. The people who forced me on were not acting well either, but good accrued to me all the same from you, my God. They did not foresee to what use I would put the lessons they made me learn: they thought only of sating man's insatiable appetite for a poverty tricked out as wealth and a

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<sup>38</sup> *Conf.* 4.2.2.

<sup>39</sup> *Conf.* 1.9.15.

fame that is but infamy.<sup>40</sup>

Again we can see that the punishment itself is not condemned, but the motivation behind it (and behind the whole educational curriculum) is. The point receives added emphasis from the contrasts that Augustine again develops between words, in describing the futility of these goals: the desire to be satisfied (*satiandas cupiditates*) is insatiable (*insatiabiles*), wealth is impoverished (*copiosae inopiae*) and glory ignoble (*ignominiosae gloriae*).

These values are not discussed in the abstract, for Augustine claims that his parents sent him to school with these very goals in mind. Confessing his adolescent sexual sins, he comments on the single mindedness of his parents' purpose for him. They were unconcerned at his self-destruction through sexuality, so long as he was well educated: "none of my family made any attempt to avert my ruin by arranging a marriage for me; their only concern was that I should learn to excel in rhetoric and persuasive speech."<sup>41</sup> He reiterates his father's intentions, again using a play on word contrasts: as long as Augustine is educated (*disertus*) it matters little to his father that he has abandoned (*desertus*) God's care (*cultura*, with associations too with the wordly culture on account of which he is abandoning it). If Augustine can dismiss his father's concern for his soul as indifference, his mother was a Christian, and Augustine shows her experiencing some hesitation between the two value systems.

My natural mother had by this time fled from the center of Babylon, though she still lingered in its suburbs. [...] Both my parents were very keen on my making progress in study: my father, because he thought next to nothing about you and only vain things about me; and my mother, because she regarded the customary course of studies as no hindrance, and even a considerable help, toward my gaining you eventually. So, at least, do I interpret their respective attitudes, as I remember them now as best I

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<sup>40</sup> *Conf.* 1.12.19.

<sup>41</sup> *Conf.* 2.2.4.

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She tried to balance religious and secular hopes for the young Augustine, putting off his marriage for the sake of his secular career, thinking it would do no harm to his spiritual prospects. At least that is how he wanted to interpret her actions, though the facts proved her wrong: “throughout these experiences a dark fog cut me off from your bright truth, my God, and my sin grew sleek on my excesses.”<sup>43</sup>

As much as Augustine despised these values in retrospect, as a student he depicts himself appropriating them wholeheartedly. As he describes his rhetorical exercises, he portrays the motivation that led him to success, “an exercise was set for me which was fraught with worrying implications, for I hoped to win praise and honor if I succeeded,” nor are his own actions beyond reproach: “Was it not all smoke and wind?”<sup>44</sup> This success is only the first described, and when Augustine graduated to the school of rhetoric, self-satisfaction came with further success: “already I was the ablest student in the school of rhetoric. At this I was elated and vain and swollen with pride.”<sup>45</sup> Augustine’s increasing identification with the values held by his teachers and peers is described as the longing to succeed, to surpass all his peers in his ability to put them into practice.

Still young and immature, I began in the company of these people to study treatises on eloquence. This was a discipline in which I longed to excel, though my motive was the damnably proud desire to gratify my human vanity.<sup>46</sup>

His success of course led him to teach the same arts, the final demonstration of his

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<sup>42</sup> *Conf.* 2.3.8.

<sup>43</sup> *Conf.* 2.3.8.

<sup>44</sup> *Conf.* 1.17.27.

<sup>45</sup> *Conf.* 3.3.6.

<sup>46</sup> *Conf.* 3.4.7.

adoption of the values of education. No longer was he a passive receptor, but a actively engaged in shaping a new generation according to them.

I and others like me were seduced and seducers, deceived ourselves and deceivers of others amid a welter of desires: publicly through the arts reputed “liberal,” and secretly under the false name of religion. In the one we were arrogant, in the other superstitious, and in both futile; under the auspices of the former we pursued trumpery popular acclaim, theatrical plaudits, song-competitions and the contest for ephemeral wreaths, we watched trashy shows and indulged our intemperate lusts.<sup>47</sup>

As Augustine progresses in his narrative, he describes a number of encounters that encapsulate his intellectual and spiritual state at the time. One such encounter (though an indirect one) takes place while Augustine is a teacher of rhetoric. He wrote a book, and dedicated it to Hierius, whom he loved by reputation. This reputation was based on his expertise in both rhetoric and philosophy. Augustine scrutinizes at length his reason for dedicating the book to Hierius. He had not met him (nor does Augustine describe meeting him in the *Confessions*), but the honor in which he was held led Augustine to desire his approval, and more fervently, to desire to be like him.<sup>48</sup> Hierius, in short, represented what Augustine desired to be, honored and reputed for his learning and rhetorical abilities, once more demonstrating the hold of Roman educational values on him. His desire to leave Rome, finally, exhibits the continued effect of these motivations on him, even though they have become secondary: “I did not want to go to Rome because my friends promised me that there I would command higher fees and enjoy greater prestige—though these arguments were not without force for me.”<sup>49</sup>

These values - wealth, glory and honor - are inherently elitist, for they are

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<sup>47</sup> *Conf.* 4.1.1.

<sup>48</sup> *Conf.* 4.13.20-15.37.

<sup>49</sup> *Conf.* 5.8.14.

necessarily elite attainments, measured in relative terms: only a small group can attain to the highest wealth and honors, and if the threshold is lowered, so is their value. If education is key to their attainment, it becomes a delineator of that elite. With added effect, as we have seen with the Roman educational curriculum, it can make the reinforcement of these values a key part of its program. Not only does the student then receive the skills necessary for attaining these goals, but he is also constantly reminded that his education is key to that attainment. Like Augustine he gradually absorbs these values, adopts the goals offered to him, and becomes a valued member of the elite of society. Some, again like Augustine, can move from the margins of cultural society to its centre. As regards Augustine's educational theory, however, neither the fact that he perceives these values to have been focal in his education, nor that he appropriated them is the cardinal point. Rather it is his later emphatic rejection of them that gives particular significance to his recollections. In describing them he is constantly using negative language, playing with words and building contrasts to underscore their vanity and depravity. The constant recurrence of the theme, moreover, argues for the importance of this issue in Augustine's thought on education. Not only would his own educational scheme have to abandon these values, but it would have to abandon the overall elitist focus of Roman education.

A second major criticism only intensifies the impression that Augustine was reacting against the elitist focus of Roman education. This is his disapproval of his education's emphasis on style over content, again a feature of education that I have argued to be key in developing an elite sensibility (and, as we have already seen, a means to attain the honor and wealth prized by the educated elite). Again the contrast between

appropriate morals and the values of the educational system is highlighted in the following passage, worth quoting extensively:

Small wonder, then, that I was swept off helplessly after profitless things and borne away from you, my God. The models proposed to me for imitation were people who would have been caught out and covered with confusion if they had related any of their doings—deeds not wrong in themselves—in a barbaric accent or with grammatical blunders, whereas to relate licentious deeds in correct and well-turned phrases, in ample and elegant style, would have won them praise and honor. [...] Look upon all this, O Lord God and, as you look, patiently consider how carefully human beings observe those orthographic conventions and syllabic quantities which they have received from earlier orators, while neglecting the eternal rules directed to unending salvation which they have received from you. A speaker who wishes to maintain and teach those long-standing conventions will give greater offense to his fellow-men by pronouncing the word “human” without sounding the “h,” in defiance of grammatical discipline, than if he, human as he is, flouts your commands by hating a fellow-human. Does he suppose that another human being who is his enemy can do him more harm than does the very hatred with which he regards that other person, or that anyone can do more serious damage to another by hostile behavior than he does to his own soul by harboring hostile intent? Knowledge of letters lies less deep in us than the law written in our conscience.<sup>50</sup>

A number of things are worth noting in this passage. Firstly, as with the values we have already looked at, Augustine had as a student absorbed the disordered values of his education, he was “swept off” by his models. Secondly we may note how long a discussion, and how vividly illustrated passage is devoted to the question, which we might take as a sign of its significance to Augustine. Finally, we may note the reversal of this order of values as he writes, neatly summed up in the last sentence.

Augustine devotes much attention to this theme as he describes the course of his education. He depicts himself as having esteemed style as a child, fearing a stylistic mistake more than envy:

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<sup>50</sup> *Conf.* 1.18.28-29.

Such were the moral standards of the world at whose threshold I lay, a wretched boy; this was the arena in which I was to struggle. It made me more wary of committing some barbarism in speech than of being jealous of others who did not commit it when I did.<sup>51</sup>

We may note, once again, his reaction to his earlier values. This reaction did not come before the habit of these values had become deeply ingrained in him, however. When he set about to search for truth, his quest was much delayed because he could not accept that the truth might not be couched in the finest style, as his education had led him to expect. The scriptures seemed beneath his dignity, because they could not match Cicero's eloquence:

At that time, though, I was in no state to enter, nor prepared to bow my head and accommodate myself to its ways. My approach then was quite different from the one I am suggesting now: when I studied the Bible and compared it with Cicero's dignified prose, it seemed to me unworthy. My swollen pride recoiled from its style and my intelligence failed to penetrate to its inner meaning.<sup>52</sup>

Here Augustine makes explicit the gulf between his present position and that of the past. At the time, he could not accept language that did not conform to the standards of Classical rhetoric. He is clearly rejecting the perspective he had previously held, criticizing the values held in youth. If we interpret style as a key signifier of elite culture, then Augustine's rejection of the prioritization of style can be seen as yet another rejection of elitist values and culture.

The negative language used in describing these features of the education Augustine received leave us in no doubt that he disapproved of them. A more suggestive use of language associates these values with the elitist approach that I argue to be the focal point of Augustine's dissatisfaction. A number of times, his critical remarks are

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<sup>51</sup> *Conf.* 1.19.30.

combined with mercantile language hitting at the heart an elitist system of education which is essentially a commodity restricted to those with large amounts of surplus wealth: “Let not those buyers and sellers of literary studies shout me down, my God.”<sup>53</sup> He comments further on the fees paid by students as he decries the false mythology that is taught:

O hellish river, human children clutching their fees are still pitched into you to learn about these exploits, and general interest is aroused when education is publicly touted in the forum, in view of the law which decrees that a state salary be paid to teachers over and above the pupils' fees.<sup>54</sup>

He too sold his craft: “During these years I was teaching the art of rhetoric, selling talkative skills apt to sway others because greed swayed me.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed secular teaching is closely identified with the market: “I was trying to sell the art of speaking, insofar as it ever can be imparted by teaching.”<sup>56</sup> When he relates the final renunciation of his career as a teacher of rhetoric, the language again reflects its status as a commodity:

I believed it to be pleasing in your sight that I should withdraw the service of my tongue from the market of speechifying, so that young boys who were devoting their thoughts not to your law, not to your peace, but to lying follies and legal battles, should no longer buy from my mouth the weapons for their frenzy.<sup>57</sup>

He describes it a second time in the same kind of language: “The citizens of Milan would have to provide another word-peddler (*venditorem verborum*) for their students.”<sup>58</sup> The criticism of a wealth- and status-based education that can be deduced from his criticisms of its features and focus becomes acute with this use of mercantile language. In

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<sup>52</sup> *Conf.* 3.5.9.

<sup>53</sup> *Conf.* 1.13.22.

<sup>54</sup> *Conf.* 1.16.26.

<sup>55</sup> *Conf.* 4.2.2.

<sup>56</sup> *Conf.* 8.6.13.

<sup>57</sup> *Conf.* 9.2.2.

<sup>58</sup> *Conf.* 9.5.13.

aggregate, if not individually, these comments have a definite focus: Augustine's discontent with the elitist nature and values of Roman education.

An important qualification must be made, however: much of the strong language aims at reversing rather than obliterating the teaching of the schools. Those intent on worldly glory, for instance, miss the real source of glory, and find its opposite. Wealth is found to be poverty, desires insatiable, and education a lack of culture. Indeed, there is much beauty in the things of the world, even in worldly honor:

There is the same appeal in worldly rank, and the possibility it offers of commanding and dominating other people: this too holds its attraction, and often provides an opportunity for settling old scores. We may seek all these things, O Lord, but in seeking them we must not deviate from your law.<sup>59</sup>

We should be wary, therefore, in seeing in Augustine a prototype of the idealistic revolutionary, for he is not laboring under the same categories. He does not propose to abolish earthly order, nor is there evidence that he would abolish secular or elite education altogether. Indeed, as we shall see in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, not only can he conceive of a place for secular learning in Christian education, but he even proposes an educational model that is clearly out of the reach of most of the population. Abolition is not the only alternative to the traditional education. The key is that values and priorities must be ordered correctly, and this is the area in which the educational model Augustine experienced in his youth needs to be reformed. The positive note is that reformation is a possibility, that secular educational models need not be discarded in their entirety.

Moreover, as we have seen, Augustine values many of the skills he learned,

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<sup>59</sup> *Conf.* 2.5.10.

especially reading and writing. While this appreciation is directed primarily at the elementary level, just as the stages of education are not watertight compartments, neither should we imagine that Augustine only received useful knowledge at the elementary level. Indeed, if we consider the complexity of the process of acquiring literacy, as we did in the first chapter, it becomes clear that this process extended well into the grammatical level. Moreover, if we consider the contrast between elementary and higher education as one between the boring elementary tasks and exercises, on the one hand, and the enjoyment of literature and ease with which that is accomplished, on the other, we can see that the boundaries between the two elements of the contrast become less rigid. In the former we could include much of the grammatical material that would have had to be memorized at the higher level, and perhaps even some of the more mechanical rhetorical exercises. After all, if Augustine appreciates his skill in reading and writing, that skill was not imparted in the elementary school alone. The problem of finding ways of teaching language skills other than through the traditional canon is still an unresolved challenge, however:

Really? Could we not have learned those useful words elsewhere, words like “shower,” “golden,” “lap,” “trick,” “heavenly temples,” if Terence had not presented to us a young scoundrel who took Jupiter as a model for his own fornication?<sup>60</sup>

The usefulness of words and language is undeniable, but the challenge lies in adopting methods of education without creating a proud, elite and self-satisfied Christian culture.

A great part of the appeal of Augustine’s educational thought in the *Confessions* is its personal nature. It is developed in response to his own experience, and his dominant concerns are all illustrated by a wealth of striking examples. The narrative

reflects a struggle with the nature of his educational experience and the legacy it left to his personality. In the personal account, more importantly, the possibility of the conversion of pagan education is foreshadowed, for part of Augustine's own conversion is the loosening of the hold of the values had gripped him in youth. If Augustine the student and educator can be converted, we might expect that his educational model too might be converted. This conversion, like his earlier attitude to style, is most vividly illustrated by a number of encounters.

The first stirrings of a philosophical vocation began with just such an encounter, though it was with a book rather than a person (though a book of course mediates an indirect encounter with an author). Augustine was studying rhetoric, and in the course of the curriculum his teacher introduced them to Cicero's *Hortensius*, which they studied as an example of good rhetoric. Augustine, however, was drawn to something else, namely the content of the book:

The book changed my way of feeling [...] My interest in the book was not aroused by its usefulness in the honing of my verbal skills (which was supposed to be the object of the studies I was now pursuing, in my nineteenth year, at my mother's expense, since my father had died two years earlier); no, it was not merely as an instrument for sharpening my tongue that I used that book, for it had won me over not by its style but by what it had to say.<sup>61</sup>

This encounter was clearly a breakthrough. He had found an unexpected interest in philosophy, an interest that sought the truth, that sought to understand the content of books more than appreciate their style. His values were far from completely transformed, however, for while he now sought the truth, his next move, to read scripture, was

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<sup>60</sup> *Conf.* 1.16.26.

<sup>61</sup> *Conf.* 3.4.7.

frustrated, as we have seen, because he could not bear its lack of rhetorical value.<sup>62</sup>

Augustine's desire for truth increased, and shaped the outcome a second encounter, this time with Faustus. His quest for the truth had brought him into contact with the Manichees. He appreciated their emphasis on understanding over belief, but many of their arguments troubled him. His Manichee friends could not give him the answer he desired, but promised him that an impending visit by Faustus, reputedly of great learning and eloquence, would clear up all his troubles with their doctrines. When he describes his first impressions of Faustus, he stresses that although he admired his eloquence, it was the content of his argument that he was most keen on discovering:

Many people were ensnared by the persuasive sweetness of his eloquence, and I too was ready to admire it, but I was beginning to distinguish it from the truth I hungered to learn. What interested me was not the dainty verbal dish on which he served his offerings, this Faustus of such high renown, but how much knowledge he could provide for me to eat; for I had been told earlier how extremely well informed he was in all branches of reputable scholarship, and how particularly learned in the liberal arts.<sup>63</sup>

Upon meeting him, however, Augustine was disappointed in his level of education, and decided that he would not be the source of the answers he needed, since his skill lay in rhetoric more than knowledge.<sup>64</sup> This might seem like another manifestation of elitist snobbery over education, but the context of the remarks shows that it is already part of Augustine's conversion away from such attitudes. First of all, his recommendation as a great intellectual, rather than sheer prejudice, was the source of his disappointment.

Augustine sincerely hoped to find truth in his discussions with Faustus. His disappointment, moreover, lay in the lack of substance contained in his rhetoric: Faustus

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<sup>62</sup> *Conf.* 3.5.9.

<sup>63</sup> *Conf.* 5.3.3.

<sup>64</sup> *Conf.* 5.4.11-5.12.

was successfully trained in grammar; he had the requisite rhetorical polish not to be disdained on account of the standards of educated culture. What he lacked was true knowledge, the content that Augustine was seeking despite his education.

Indeed, as if to show that he was not merely engaging in a new philosophically based snobbery, Augustine analyzes his disappointment with Faustus closely. It is not, he argued, that a Christian without philosophical knowledge is hindered, as long as they are not led away from sound doctrine.<sup>65</sup> The problem is that the Manichees included their cosmological speculations among necessary doctrine, and that a reputedly learned teacher could not explain and defend them. This was Faustus's failure, though at least he was not too conceited to be aware of his limitations.<sup>66</sup> Augustine was disappointed because of the Manichees' pretense to knowledge turned out to be just that, no more than pretense. Interestingly, moreover, he chooses this point of the narrative to comment on the role of style, insisting that despite the opinion of some, neither good nor bad style is a guarantee of truth or falsehood, style being merely a vessel for the content.<sup>67</sup> This remark ably sums up his encounter with Faustus, for though Augustine appreciated the fine craftsmanship of the vessel, he was disappointed at that it was not full.

In many respects, Ambrose provides a kind of counterpoint to Faustus. Augustine explicitly contrasts the two: while Ambrose did not match Faustus in charm, his knowledge far surpassed Faustus's. The two encounters are developed in the narrative in almost a chiasmic structure, for Augustine's expectations and impressions of the two men are also contrasted:

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<sup>65</sup> *Conf.* 5.5.9.

<sup>66</sup> *Conf.* 5.7.12.

<sup>67</sup> *Conf.* 5.6.10.

I began to feel affection for him, not at first as a teacher of truth, for that I had given up hope of finding in your Church, but simply as a man who was kind to me. With professional interest I listened to him conducting disputes before the people, but my intention was not the right one: I was assessing his eloquence to see whether it matched its reputation. I wished to ascertain whether the readiness of speech with which rumor credited him was really there, or something more, or less.<sup>68</sup>

Augustine approached Faustus, hoping to find content in his discourse, but found no more than rhetoric. He approached Ambrose, on the other hand, expecting rhetoric, but as the narrative subsequently indicates, he found the truth,<sup>69</sup> for his eloquence was no empty vessel: “his energetic preaching provided your people with choicest wheat and the joy of oil and the sober intoxication of wine.”<sup>70</sup> This encounter shows clearly that while Cicero had influenced Augustine to search for truth more eagerly than rhetorical perfection, not only was biblical style a barrier for him, but he was willing to go hear a speaker merely for the sake of rhetoric. His conversion to new values, in short, was far from complete.

Ambrose, however, played a mediating role in Augustine’s renewed encounter with scripture, allowing, for the second time, a book to play a decisive role in the development of Augustine’s values. Listening to Ambrose preach, he gradually came to accept the veracity of the scriptures, especially the Old Testament that had troubled him most.

I heard some difficult passage of the Old Testament explained figuratively; such passages had been death to me because I was taking them literally. As I listened to many such scriptural texts being interpreted in a spiritual sense I confronted my own attitude

The first step was to accept Ambrose’s interpretation, which was made easier by his able

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<sup>68</sup> *Conf.* 5.13.23.

<sup>69</sup> *Conf.* 5.14.24.

<sup>70</sup> *Conf.* 5.13.23.

combination of content and rhetoric. His acceptance gradually became an active enthusiasm, however, and Augustine came to discern that even the language of scripture has a purpose, and is in fact a quality rather than a defect.

Having already heard many parts of the sacred books explained in a reasonable and acceptable way, I came to regard those passages which had previously struck me as absurd, and therefore repelled me, as holy and profound mysteries. The authority of the sacred writings seemed to me all the more deserving of reverence and divine faith in that scripture was easily accessible to every reader, while yet guarding a mysterious dignity in its deeper sense. In plain words and very humble modes of speech it offered itself to everyone, yet stretched the understanding of those who were not shallow-minded. It welcomed all comers to its hospitable embrace, yet through narrow openings attracted a few to you—a few, perhaps, but far more than it would have done had it not spoken with such noble authority and drawn the crowds to its embrace by its holy humility.<sup>71</sup>

Rhetorical quality is no longer the determining characteristic of good literature; accessibility now perceived to have the advantage. Nor is the criterion for understanding it education, but the state of the heart. As he came to accept the scriptures, Augustine decided to read more of the them, and Ambrose recommended Isaiah. It was a humbling experience for Augustine, for despite all his secular training, he realizes that he does not have what it takes to read scripture: “The first part I read of this book was incomprehensible to me, however, and, assuming that all the rest would be the same, I put it off, meaning to take it up again later, when I was more proficient in the word of the Lord.”<sup>72</sup> The encounter with Ambrose mediates Augustine’s early experience of scripture, through which he came to the realization that his previous criteria for well-written literature are not really tenable. The emphasis on style and rhetoric that he develops as he discusses his education should make us realize the magnitude of this shift.

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<sup>71</sup> *Conf.* 6.5.8.

<sup>72</sup> *Conf.* 9.5.13.

If the encounters with Faustus and Ambrose highlight Augustine's changing attitude to the value of form and content, a few further encounters, as his conversion draws closer, demonstrate a gradual realignment of his more general attitude to education. The earliest of these shows how much Augustine still conformed to societal values. As he was walking along, distraught over a panegyric he was to deliver, he met a drunk in the street. He envied his easy happiness, but judged himself superior nonetheless, especially on account of his education. He could not even imagine giving up his own place in society to experience easy happiness.<sup>73</sup>

His criteria changed however, and by a number of exemplary men he was spurred to abandon secular ambition. He was already feeling the weight of his ambitions:

Surveying the full assembly of the Church I observed that people's lifestyles varied. For my own part I was irked by the secular business I was conducting, for no longer was I fired by ambition, and prepared on that account to endure such heavy servitude in the hope of reputation and wealth, as had formerly been the case.<sup>74</sup>

In such a state he was clearly prepared to hear of better models for the Christian life. He heard about Victorinus, who gladly abandoned his teaching career when the emperor Julian forbade Christians from teaching liberal arts ("he preferred to abandon his school of talkativeness rather than forsake your word"). Augustine longed to follow his example: "I ached for a like chance myself, for it was no iron chain imposed by anyone else that fettered me, but the iron of my own will."<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, Augustine's desire to meet Simplicianus (who related this story to him) illustrates Augustine's changing values. Learning was still a factor in evaluating his

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<sup>73</sup> *Conf.* 6.6.9.

<sup>74</sup> *Conf.* 8.1.2.

<sup>75</sup> *Conf.* 8.5.10.

potential usefulness, but his holy life was given equal weight:

I regarded him as your good servant, a man from whom grace radiated. Moreover I had heard how from his youth he had lived for you in complete dedication, and since he was an old man by now I assumed that after following your way of life for long years and with such noble zeal he must be rich in experience and deeply learned.<sup>76</sup>

One should note that there is no discussion of his rhetorical abilities. If learning is valued, it is Christian learning, the knowledge that comes from living the Christian life. Indeed, to return to Victorinus and the story of his conversion told by Simplicianus, Augustine feels the need to justify why his conversion should bring the Church any more joy than that of more lowly converts, since the rich should not be preferred to the poor in the Church (“Forbid it, Lord, that rich personages should ever be more welcome in your tabernacle than the poor, or the nobility than lowly folk”).<sup>77</sup> It is because the eminent lead many after them that we rejoice especially at their conversion, not because they are somehow greater in the kingdom of God.<sup>78</sup> Victorinus, as a highly educated convert, is a good example for Augustine, and as Augustine hears his story, the incompatibility of conversion and his career becomes increasingly apparent.

A decisive point in Augustine’s progress in judging people by Christian rather than secular criteria is his encounter with the story of St. Anthony and his renunciation of the world. Augustine receives a visit from Ponticianus, who on seeing a copy of Paul’s epistles on Augustine’s table strikes up a conversation about Monasticism. He tells how two of his friends took up the monastic life after finding the life of St. Anthony in the house of some monastics.<sup>79</sup> They made their decision on the spot:

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<sup>76</sup> *Conf.* 8.1.1.

<sup>77</sup> *Conf.* 8.4.9.

<sup>78</sup> *Conf.* 8.2.5-4.9.

<sup>79</sup> *Conf.* 8.6.13-15.

“Tell me: where do we hope all our efforts are going to get us? What are we looking for? In whose cause are we striving? Does life at court promise us anything better than promotion to being Friends of the Emperor? And once we are, will that not be a precarious position, fraught with perils? Will it not mean negotiating many a hazard, only to end in greater danger still? And how long would it take us to get there? Whereas I can become a friend of God here and now if I want to.<sup>80</sup>

On hearing the story, Augustine too strove within himself, but his emotive exclamation expressed in particular the futility of secular education:

The untaught are rising up and taking heaven by storm, while we with all our dreary teachings are still groveling in this world of flesh and blood! Are we ashamed to follow, just because they have taken the lead, yet not ashamed of lacking the courage even to follow?<sup>81</sup>

He has finally come face to face with his competing values, and realizes the choice he needs to make. This crisis prompts Augustine to retreat into the garden where he finally converts, accepting the truth of catholic Christianity. Without much delay, moreover, his conversion led him to forsake teaching career, a rejection too of the values and ambitions acquired through education.

As we have seen, the narrative structure of the *Confessions* allows Augustine to develop the theme of education in a very personal way. His thought is not developed in the abstract, but in reaction to his own experiences. As he criticizes the education he received, he demonstrates how its problematic features hindered his own development as a Christian, causing him to find truth only after a long circuitous journey. Throughout his narrative, he makes it clear that the values he absorbed through his secular education were incompatible with the Christian faith, and his views can be reduced to a few basic principals. Many unpleasant methods were used to educate him, but with a good

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<sup>80</sup> *Conf.* 8.6.15.

<sup>81</sup> *Conf.* 8.8.19.

outcome. The elementary knowledge, especially literacy, that was most painful to acquire was also the most useful. The grammarian's lessons in literature, on the other hand, were enjoyable, but encouraged vanity and immorality. Worse yet were the aims of his education, the attainment of glory and wealth, and the related emphasis on stylistic perfection was a disordering of values. Both seem to derive from and perpetuate the value system of a closely guarded elite, which is the real target of Augustine's criticism. Intellectual and educational attainment is not vilified on its own account, however, and Augustine's intellectual conversion and eventual good use of his education open up a potential vision for Christian education, which, however, must be deduced from the *Confessions*, for no explicit program for Christian education is found in it.

### ***De Doctrina Christiana***

Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, on the other hand, does provide us with just that, a positive vision and program for Christian education, with its own aims and methods. The definition of the word *doctrina*, and hence the subject matter of the treatise, has admittedly occupied the mind of many recent scholars. Is it a hermeneutical or a preaching manual? Is it a plan for a Christian education, or more broadly a charter for Christian culture? Is it a mix of some or all of these? A related problem (the two questions are to a certain extent mutually dependent) is the question of its audience: is it a treatise for clergy, or all Christians? Again connected to the first question is the relationship between the Christian education (or learning, or culture) proposed by St. Augustine and the classical heritage.

The answers to these questions naturally determine the usefulness of the treatise

for the particular question of the social dimension of Christian education, for not only must we know what Augustine is proposing, but what place it has in the overall scheme of the Christian culture. The question of social context with which I approach the text, however, and to which partial answers have already been supplied by the *Confessions*, also opens up a new perspective on the question of the nature of the treatise. If the nature of education depends at least partly on its audience, then social context also forms part of this determinant. I will argue that the *De Doctrina Christiana* is not intended to replace the classical curriculum. It provides neither a curriculum for acquiring literacy (basic skills and grammatical techniques should be learned elsewhere), nor a rhetorical education for Christian orators. The treatise is a manual for an education that comprises reading and teaching the scriptures, with the allowance for a grammatical and rhetorical education acquired outside the Church, as an aid to exegesis. The reading component is limited to literate Christians, but its content is ultimately directed at those reached through preaching. It is, therefore, many things. It is a manual for reading scripture, and a program for higher education in the scriptures (which takes for granted the parallel existence of a secular education). It is also a manual for preaching, providing the principles (but not the skills) by which the gulf between those with the luxury of a higher education and those with little or none may be bridged. It overcomes, to a certain extent, the inevitable elitism of a culture based on literary education, thus creating a Christian culture that is responsive to its non-elite social context.

The immediate audience of the *De Doctrina Christiana* is clearly limited by literacy skills:

There are some rules for dealing with the scriptures, which I consider can be not inappropriately passed on to students, enabling them to make

progress not only by reading others who have opened up the hidden secrets of the divine literature, but also by themselves opening them up to yet others again. I have undertaken to pass these rules on to those who are both willing and well qualified to learn.<sup>82</sup>

The whole of the program introduced here implies a high level of education. It involves reading the scripture, reading interpretations of it, interpreting for oneself, and writing for others. Even reading, of course, implies a high level of literacy, access to books, and leisure to read them, already highly limiting. Here a high proficiency in reading is taken for granted; the first step of Augustine's program is to read all of the canonical books of scripture and to memorize as much as possible.<sup>83</sup> This would surely be an impossible task for all but the most educated. The ability to think for oneself, and write for others, not to mention the willingness and leisure to devote oneself to Christian reading and writing, narrows the audience yet further. We must assume that Augustine has in mind a small number of highly educated clergy, and perhaps some highly educated and devout laymen. As we shall see, however, the work is not irrelevant to the question of a more generalized education for both the principles it espouses and the preaching it describes involves a much broader community than the elite who can pursue its educational program in full.

The attempt to define the audience further has produced some hot debate about the purpose of its educational program: is it meant as training for the clergy, or a more general education targeted at laity as well? More specifically, is it a preaching manual, a Christian rhetorical treatise, a charter for Christian educational reform, or a general program for the creation of Christian intellectual culture? To sum these up in one simple

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<sup>82</sup> *DDC Praef.* 1.

Sunt praecepta quaedam tractandum scripturarum quae studiosis earum video non incommode posse tradi, ut non solum legendo alios qui divinarum litterarum opera aperuerunt sed etiam ipsi aperiendo proficient. Haec tradere institui volentibus et valentibus discere.

<sup>83</sup> *DDC* 2.8.12; 2.9.14.

question, what is Christian *doctrina*? Though he too enters a pre-existing debate,<sup>84</sup> Henri-Irénée Marrou launched much of modern scholarly debate on the question, with his argument that the Augustine is proposing a new Christian culture, manifest in his translation of the title: *une culture chrétienne*. This Christian culture is an intellectual alternative to classical culture. Of prime importance is its subservience to religious concerns; it rejects secular cultural as too pagan, decadently aesthetic, and focused on superfluities. The Christian intellectual should avoid the distraction of studies that do not have God as their end.<sup>85</sup> Marrou describes the content of Augustine's Christian culture as twofold. On the one hand, a very small minority of Christian intellectuals will follow a philosophical path. The majority, however, will follow the program outlined in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, a program based on reading and interpreting scripture, and developing a Christian rhetoric.<sup>86</sup> The work, in short, describes a Christian culture, intellectual in nature and opposed to secular learning, destined to be the dominant culture of all educated Christians.

Edmund Hill, on the other hand, argues that the treatise is not about general culture at all. Rather, it is a Christian education with a very specific purpose, it is a "manual for use in training the clergy to teach and preach," with interpretation as a stepping stone to the act of preaching (or teaching) described in book 4; the title is more properly translated "On Teaching Christianity." One of his main arguments is the fact that Augustine allows for the instructions of the two books on interpretation to be

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<sup>84</sup> Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la Culture Antique* (Paris: Boccard, 1949) 332. Note 1. Je prends ici nettement parti sur une question disputée: le *De Doctrina* est-il un simple manuel d'herméneutique et d'homilétique à l'usage des clercs, ou traite-t-il dans toute sa généralité le problème de la science, de la culture chrétienne? La suite de mon exposé justifiera l'opinion ici formulée.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 331-56.

dispensed with by the preacher who has too much difficulty: he can preach on the *res* of Book 1 instead.<sup>87</sup>

Eugene Kevane sticks more closely to Marrou's view, but his interpretation too is more specific: he sees it more specifically as an educational manual, a new vision for educating youth.

In general, then, Augustine's treatise is a guide for teaching, intended for the use of teachers. It contains guidelines for organizing the teaching, rules and precepts for carrying it out in actual classroom practice. *Praecepta* is a technical term for the rules and procedures that constitute and academic discipline or educational system. To whom then is the *De Doctrina Christiana* addressed? St. Augustine appears to be writing directly to teachers and to those, like Bishop Aurelius, who are responsible for the planning of teaching and the supervision of teachers. In this way, the *De Doctrina Christiana* becomes visibly a practical instrument for the education of youth. It might well have been consciously designed to reform the educational system of classical antiquity.<sup>88</sup>

In Kevane's view, Augustine takes the liberal arts and converts them, indeed purifies them, and turns them into a *propaideia*, a preparation for studying the Bible.<sup>89</sup> This interpretation of Augustine's comments on secular learning are for him the key to understanding the whole work, the hermeneutic that gives it structural unity.<sup>90</sup> It can be described as a rhetoric only if the word is understood as *paideia*, the full cycle of liberal studies, rather than as a manual of rhetoric. The notion of *doctrina* as general culture is tenable, as long as that is understood in a more public sense than the intellectual culture Marrou suggests: it should become a shared Christian culture.<sup>91</sup> The title, then, should be

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 357ff.

<sup>87</sup> Edmund Hill, "De Doctrina Christiana: A Suggestion," *Studia Patristica* 6 (Berlin: 1962) 443-46.

<sup>88</sup> Eugene Kevane, "Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana: A Treatise on Education," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 4 (1966): 102.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.: 115.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.: 117.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.: 119-22.

translated “On Christian Education.”<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere Kevane focuses on the *prooemium* as the hermeneutical key to the work. Augustine’s the third type of projected objector (who rejects the need for methods for interpreting scripture, relying instead on divine inspiration) should be identified as one who rejects secular learning and the tradition of *paideia*. Since the objection to the work is an objection to *paideia*, this must be what Augustine’s work is about.<sup>93</sup>

Gerald Press more effectively identifies the purpose of the book through its intrinsic features. He takes a closer look, in several articles, at the structure of the treatise, and Augustine’s own stated intentions.

In the first sentence of the work Augustine states its topic and purpose: its topic is ‘treating the scriptures’ and its purpose is to teach certain precepts or rules for doing so to those who are students of the scriptures.<sup>94</sup>

Augustine announces his work with the word *tractatio*, and this word should be given more weight than the *doctrina* of the title: “we now have a complete and consistent structure of the entire DDC as a work on “treatment of scripture” and we have Augustine’s repeated statements that this includes both discovery and exposition.”<sup>95</sup> *Tractatio* is also the link between the work and rhetorical theory, for the latter like the former makes use of the concept of *tractatio*. If Augustine’s treatise is to be described as rhetorical, however, this has to be understood in a much broader sense than a mere handbook for speaking well. It includes the whole art of discovering matter worth saying, the *inventio* of Classical rhetoric, with a whole new focus on the interpretation of

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.: 123.

<sup>93</sup> Eugene Kevane, "Paideia and Anti-Paideia: The Prooemium of St. Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana," *Augustinian Studies* 1 (1970): 162-65.

<sup>94</sup> Gerald Press, "The Subject and Structure of Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana," *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980): 112.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.: 117.

scripture, where *inventio* is exercised.<sup>96</sup> In another article, *Doctrina* is the focus, and the possibilities inherent in its ambiguity are explored:

I think that Augustine's use of *doctrina* in the DDC is a rhetorical coup. He took advantage of the variety of its meanings and the variations in how it could be understood from different cultural standpoints to argue simultaneously for his side, and speak to both sides of the dispute between Christianity and "pagan" culture.<sup>97</sup>

Thus while the primary subject of the treatise is *tractatio*, the title is meant to convey the other notions associated with *doctrina*, especially learning and a cultural ideal of learning. Implied in these associations is the possibility of an alternative to harmful classical learning.<sup>98</sup> The various interpretations of the title are thus to a certain extent harmonized.

Christoph Schäublin, finally, reiterates that the subject of the *De Doctrina Christiana* is *tractatio*, and he comments on the extremity of other interpretations, arguing that "the truth, if indeed it can be found, does not so much fall somewhere between these propositions, as lie hidden behind them."<sup>99</sup> No complete curriculum is proposed in the work, the liberal arts, after all, have a minimal role in its program, indeed with the necessary reference works they could be discarded altogether. As a preacher's manual, on the other hand, it is too theoretical to be useful.<sup>100</sup> He concludes that "the title of the work, in fact, promises a "program," yet one directed, not towards a Christian

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.: 117-20.

<sup>97</sup> Gerald Press, "Doctrina in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 17 (1984): 108.

<sup>98</sup> Press, Gerald. "Doctrina in Augustine's *de Doctrina Christiana*." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 17 (1984): 113.

<sup>99</sup> Christoph Schäublin, "De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture?," *De Doctrina Christiana: a classic of western culture*, eds. Duane W.H. Arnold and Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: U Notre Dame P, 1994) 48.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 53-54.

culture or education, but entirely and specifically towards the study of the Bible.”<sup>101</sup>

Press and Schäublin are right in emphasizing Augustine’s own statement of his intention, the treatment of scriptures. We must trust that Augustine was indeed offering the reader what he claimed to offer. The whole treatise does indeed fit into the structure of a treatise on Biblical interpretation, as Press demonstrates clearly enough. This narrow focus, however, does not answer the question of the place of this work in the Christian life and community. Who was to partake in it? Was it to be their principal education, or their life’s work? The other approaches attempt to answer precisely these questions, but suffer from some definite limitations. Kevane’s position, for instance, that it is a curriculum for a Christian *paideia*, relies too much on that word, a concept extrinsic to the work. Hill, on the other hand, overemphasizes the fourth book, in trying to make its subject the principal focus of the work. Despite these weaknesses, however, I think they all identify a piece of the puzzle.

Indeed, whichever way they look at the *De Doctrina Christiana* all these approaches seem to agree that the scriptural interpretation it describes has a prime place in Christian culture, and of course Marrou leads the way in this respect. The problem lies in understanding how Augustine envisions it finding that place, and among whom. Without a doubt, all the variously emphasized aspects of culture do have a place in the work:

One can construct a cultural or educational program out of the book, but that is just not what the book sets out to do. But this same objection applies as well to Hill’s own alternate view that the *DDC* is about education in Christianity, about how to teach Christianity. One can draw from it elements of such a scheme, but that is just not its topic. Its topic is *tratatio scripturarum*, how to understand and explain or expound the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 55.

scriptures.<sup>102</sup>

Indeed, but still the relationships between them is not clear. The question of the social context of Christian culture and education can offer something further to this debate, since it too focuses on the purposed audience of Christian *Doctrina*. I have already made the point that the actual educational program described can only have been accessible to a very small minority of Christians. If Marrou is right, then, that it is meant to be a general intellectual culture, a qualification must be added, namely that it is still the culture of a minority. As I shall argue, however, I think that in light of Augustine's dissatisfaction with elite culture, seen already in the *Confessions* but further developed in the present work, we must take a somewhat different approach to the place of Christian *doctrina* in culture. Once this concern is perceived, it becomes apparent that the categories of *paideia*, intellectual culture, and liberal education are not the only categories by which we can understand Augustine's approach to Christian culture and education, with the scriptures at its heart.

The subject of the treatise, then, is the *tractatio scripturarum*, which is, as Augustine reiterates at the start of the first book, a labor in two parts:

There are two things which all treatment of the scriptures is aiming at: a way to discover what needs to be understood, and a way to put across to others what has been understood. Let us first discuss the way of discovery, and after that the way of putting our discoveries across.<sup>103</sup>

Whatever else the treatise is, it is about handling scripture, and this is should be at the fore of any evaluation of its purpose. While the division of the art into discovery (Augustine uses the word *inveniendae*) and presentation (*proferendi*) is clearly

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<sup>102</sup> Gerald Press, "The Content and Argument of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Augustiana* 31 (1981): 181.

<sup>103</sup> *DDC* 1.1.1.

reminiscent of rhetorical theory, the focus is nonetheless quite different. What is novel in Augustine's thought (relative to rhetorical theory) is that textual interpretation is at the very heart of oratory.

The context of Christian oratory is also significant. In book four it is clear that Augustine is talking about preaching more than any other manner of presenting Christian knowledge. Thus while his program of Christian studies belongs to a highly educated elite, be it lay or clerical, the content of Christian education is ultimately destined for the whole Christian people. The private study of scripture and public teaching are closely bound together in the act of *tractatio*, which, if it is the subject of the treatise, is for Augustine the equivalent of *Doctrina*, the title he gave to the work.<sup>104</sup> The treatise is therefore indirectly concerned with the Christian education of the preacher's audience, for while the discussion of preaching indicates that the work is intended for the preacher in particular, it also implies that whatever the preacher learns will be passed on to his audience, as suggested in the opening lines. Scriptural interpretation, in other words, should not be an isolated, self-satisfying hobby engaged in by a small elite that defines itself by it, but a task undertaken with a view to sharing: one seeks first in order to give.

In contrast with secular learning that is bought and sold, Christian learning should be characterized by a spirit of generosity. Indeed, speaking of his own labor in writing,

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<sup>104</sup> *contra* Biddle: 368-69. who argues the opposite, that teaching is insignificant in comparison with learning:

Here, then, is the heart of Augustinian educational theory: the interplay between "ascertaining the meaning" and "making known the meaning" as revealed in the roles of the internal and external teacher. It is meaning that matters: ascertaining the reality/ meaning/ truth behind sounds, noises, words, signs, and images is the heart of knowing. After having learned from the Internal Teacher, the problem of making known to others remains secondary to the challenge of reflecting upon and revealing how that meaning is ascertained. Since meaning cannot be delivered by words, learning cannot be taught. Indeed, the best Augustine could hope for was that learning could be caught: when others did what he did, they might know what he knew.

Augustine clearly writes that learning and teaching are what make up the *tractatio scripturarum*.

Augustine addresses the unexpected relationship between possessing and sharing knowledge:

There need be no fear that he will refrain from giving me the rest, when I begin spending on others what I have already been given. Every kind of thing, you see, which does not decrease when it is given away, is not yet possessed as it ought to be, while it is held onto without also being given out to others.<sup>105</sup>

Although strictly speaking the passage applies only to “this ministry of mine” (that is his writing the treatise), the principle is clear: one should not hoard what one has learned, for it should rightfully be shared, and moreover is fully realized only when shared. In the light of the two parts of interpretation identified at the start, it can easily be extended to apply to the Christian teaching of the preacher as well, especially if Augustine is describing an inherent quality of Christian knowledge. Indeed, Augustine illustrates the principle with Christ’s multiplication of the loaves and the feeding of the thousands, suggesting a wider and broader audience sharing in Christian knowledge than the few readers of the *De Doctrina Christiana*. This vision of Christian knowledge is in sharp contrast with the depiction of secular knowledge in the *Confessions*, as an elitist commodity to be bought and sold. If we are to see scriptural interpretation as a reformed *paideia* or culture, then, it is reformed beyond what Marrou or subsequent scholars have imagined: it is no longer belongs to an educated elite, but to the whole Christian people. The nature of Augustine’s educational culture and its response to social context will become clearer as we progress, but even Augustine’s recognition of that context, and his intention to provide for it, indicates that Augustine is breaking with the very framework

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<sup>105</sup> *DDC* 1.1.1.

Nunc vero cum in illo sit spes peragendi huius operis a quo nobis in cogitatione multa de hac re iam tradita tenemus, non est metuendum ne dare desinat cetera, cum ea quae data sum coeperimus impendere. Omnis enim res quae dando non deficit, nondum habetur quomodo habenda est.

of the traditional cultural norms.

In terms of social context, we tend to assume two possible categories for education: an elitist approach, where only a small number of wealthy youth are educated, and the modern western model of mass literate education. Neither, however, describes Augustine's vision. If he criticizes the elitism of secular education, he makes it clear, nonetheless, that an education beyond the reach of many is good and necessary, as the following passage, comparing the act of interpretation to reading, highlights:

The person who reads some writing out loud to other listeners obviously knows what he is pronouncing, while the one who teaches people in literacy classes does this so that they too may know how to read. Each of them, all the same, is handing on what he has received. In the same sort of way those too who explain to an audience what they understand in the scriptures are, as it were, performing the office of reader and pronouncing letters they know, while those who lay down rules about how they are to be understood are like the person who teaches literacy, who gives out the rules, that is, on how to read.<sup>106</sup>

Two situations co-exist in Augustine's vision: some need the teacher to interpret for them, just as some need to be read to, while others, like those who can read themselves, can engage in independent interpretation. The ability to interpret frees those who acquire it, as does literacy, from a dependence on the help others (and clearly some must be independent and dependable, if many are to be dependent). The assumption remains, however, that one will have access to text, even if another must do the actual reading. Likewise, access to interpretation is also available second hand, through texts or sermons. Indeed, those receiving others' interpretations are not described here as readers (*legentes*) but hearers (*audientes*), which suggests that Augustine has preaching in mind. The substance of interpretation is available to all who can hear the preacher, and as with a text

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<sup>106</sup> *DDC Praef.* 9.

read out loud, the substance is the same whether one is given it by another, or has the skills to discover it for oneself. We can, therefore, distinguish between the substance of interpretation, or the content of education, and the skills by which one can reach this content oneself. Thus while the instructions in the *De Doctrina Christiana* concerning method are limited to its direct audience, the content of Christian education is destined to reach, through the skilled interpreter, the whole of the Christian people. As we shall see, moreover, just as in the *Confessions*, though here to a greater degree, Augustine's emphasis is on the content of learning, the substance of the faith that lies at the heart of *doctrina christiana* and the *tractatio scripturarum*. We should realize therefore, that the wider audience targeted by preaching is at the fore of his mind as he elaborates his program of Christian education.

Not only is it not necessary for all Christians to learn how to interpret for themselves, using skills acquired through many years of education, but Christian learning can even come without human mediation. Although Augustine discusses charismatic inspiration to emphasize the proper place of human mediation in education, he nonetheless allows a place for charismatic inspiration as well. While some (like St. Antony) have learned the scriptures by heart without being able to read, and one barbarian is reported to have learned to read through the direct inspiration of God, no one rejects formal education in literacy. Likewise, we should not reject the teaching of the art of interpretation, nor pride ourselves if God should give us the ability to interpret without such instruction.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, interpretation itself can become superfluous if a man has already reached its final goal, and is strong in faith, hope and charity. Such a man has no

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<sup>107</sup> *DDC Praef*, 4-8.

need of scripture, except to teach others.<sup>108</sup> While Augustine's emphasis is clearly on learning that is acquired through instruction, he acknowledges the parallel existence of direct inspiration. This should not surprise us too much, considering the influence of St. Antony on Augustine in the decisive moment in his difficult choice between a secular education and the Christian faith. The point he makes is that no group should use knowledge as an exclusive badge of belonging, a potential danger whether knowledge is inspired by God or acquired through prestigious education. Indeed, God's purpose in allowing human institutions is to build up love, "charity itself, which binds people together with the knot of unity."<sup>109</sup> Indeed, as we shall see, charity becomes the hermeneutical key for all of scripture. Thus the purpose of the ideal Christian education, even if all parts of it are not universally accessible, is not to separate and distinguish by the acquisition of knowledge, but to build up love among the faithful and unite them.

The education described in the *De Doctrina Christiana* responds to the perceived imbalance between style and content in secular education. Augustine's Christian education makes an emphatic distinction between *res* (matter, content or the signified) and *signa* (signs or signifiers), the two components of all knowledge, and stresses the greater value of the former.<sup>110</sup> This new priority is expressed in the very structure of the book, for the first three books on Christian learning concern the discovery of *res* (though *signa* have to be interpreted if one is to discover the *res*), while the fourth book discusses their expression in appropriate *signa*. The work opens with a book devoted entirely to *res*, especially the content of the faith that is the foundation of Christian learning and

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<sup>108</sup> *DDC* 1.39.43.

<sup>109</sup> *DDC Praef*, 6. *ipsa caritas, quae sibi invicem nodo unitatis astringit.*

<sup>110</sup> *DDC* 1.2.2.

beginning of all interpretation as well as the its end, which lays the foundation for the whole work.<sup>111</sup>

A *res* is defined as anything that is considered for its own sake, rather than its signification of something else.<sup>112</sup> Some *res* are to be enjoyed (*frui*) others used (*uti*).<sup>113</sup>

The one thing that is to be enjoyed is God:

The things therefore that are to be enjoyed are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in fact the Trinity, one supreme thing, and one which is shared in common by all who enjoy it; if, that is to say, it is a thing, and not the cause of all things; if indeed it is a cause.<sup>114</sup>

From the start, Augustine is setting his priorities. His priority is not *signa*, it is not even *res* in general, but the one *res* to be enjoyed, God the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The end of all enjoyment, then, is the God of Christian doctrine: God the origin of

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<sup>111</sup> I shall leave aside the philosophy of *signa* explored in Augustine's earlier writings. This is one area where the use of the early dialogues, especially the *De Magistro*, have distorted the interpretation of the *De Doctrina Christiana*, by attempting to place an undue emphasis on the philosophy of signs, which is not developed in the later treatise. Whether or not Augustine held to his earlier definition of signs is a separate question. What is clear that there is no thorough philosophical definition in the *De Doctrina Christiana*. Cf. Belford D. Jackson, "The theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 15 (1969): 9-49. Jackson's discussion of "The theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*." depends to a great degree on other writings on the subject, especially the early *De Dialectica* and *De Magistro*. Jackson introduces his discussion by stating that "although this theory was proposed for a definite use and not for its own sake, it is nevertheless intrinsically interesting." (10). I think its particular use in the *De Doctrina Christiana* is more helpful for understanding the text than its philosophical development elsewhere. Cf. Donald Arthur Gallagher, *Some Philosophers on Education: Papers Concerning the Doctrines of Augustine, Aristotle, Aquinas & Dewey* (Milwaukee: Marquette UP 1956) 57. Gallagher neatly sums up the general philosophical background of the *De Doctrina Christiana*:

Although there is a nexus between Augustine's philosophy of teaching and his program of Christian instruction, the latter does not formally depend on the philosophical principals of the former. This program, then, may be considered independently and on its own merits, and it is from this viewpoint that I wish to stress the paramount importance of the *De Doctrina Christiana*, in order to avoid any one-sided judgment upon Augustine's theory of education, as might happen if we overstressed his philosophy of teaching.

As we shall see, Augustine uses the distinction to justify his discussion of words and metaphors (types of *signa*) while emphasizing the primacy of substance, rather than to discuss the philosophy or psychology of language.

<sup>112</sup> DDC 1.2.2.

<sup>113</sup> DDC 1.3.3-4.4.

<sup>114</sup> DDC 1.5.5. *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 omnium causa, si tamen et causa.*

all being, one substance, but three, one eternal and unchangeable nature, one majesty, joined in one unity, equality and harmony.<sup>115</sup> Since this is his priority, he does not begin with a concrete methodology of Christian learning, but with an elaborated overview of the doctrine of God.

First of all God, though in fact ineffable,<sup>116</sup> is the one thing (by agreement of all who invoke any god) to which there is nothing greater and which is to be preferred above all things.<sup>117</sup> One can deduce from orders of preference - life being better than what lives through it, sentient life better than non-sentient, intelligent than non-intelligent, immutable than changeable - that that which is better than anything must be life itself and unchanging wisdom.<sup>118</sup>

These are the basic, logically deductible, facts about God, but they are not enough. To enjoy God, man needs purification. To this effect God, out of care for his creation, gave us an example, in human flesh, of living rightly: Wisdom, visible only the inner eye, became visible to fleshly eyes, the Word was made incarnate.<sup>119</sup> The incarnate Word, moreover, died for us, so that we might live.<sup>120</sup> He rose again and ascended, and will come from heaven as the judge of the living and the dead.<sup>121</sup>

He purges his Church with medicine, and takes as a wife the eternal Church.<sup>122</sup> He forgives the sins of all who are converted through his crucifixion, but he gave the

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<sup>115</sup> *DDC* 1.5.5.

<sup>116</sup> *DDC* 1.6.6.

<sup>117</sup> *DDC* 1.7.7.

<sup>118</sup> *DDC* 1.8.8.

<sup>119</sup> *DDC* 1.10.10-11.11.

<sup>120</sup> *DDC* 1.14.13.

<sup>121</sup> *DDC* 1.15.14.

<sup>122</sup> *DDC* 1.16.15.

keys of this forgiveness to the Church.<sup>123</sup> We may have hope, for after death our bodies will be resurrected to immortality, and those who have abandoned the life of sin will be raised to life eternal, but the wicked to eternal punishment.<sup>124</sup>

This summary of the faith is what Augustine later refers to as the rule of faith or *regula fidei*, to which all interpretations of scripture, especially more difficult passages, should conform. Its source is the easier passages of scripture, as well the authority of the Church:

So when, on paying closer attention, you still see that it is uncertain how something is to be phrased, or how to be pronounced, you should refer it to the rule of faith, which you have received from the plainer passages of scripture and from the authority of the Church, about which we dealt sufficiently when we were talking in the first book about things.<sup>125</sup>

This, then, is the rule for interpreting scripture; discovering it for oneself in scripture is the second task of the aspiring interpreter (following reading and memorization).<sup>126</sup>

The authority of the Church as a source for the rule of faith is of course a reference to the Church's authoritative summary of the faith, the creed, which Augustine follows, in an elaborated and sometimes abstracted manner, when outlining the faith in his first book.<sup>127</sup> The discussion of the Father departs the furthest from the credal

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<sup>123</sup> *DDC* 1.17.16-18.17.

<sup>124</sup> *DDC* 1.19.18-21.19.

<sup>125</sup> *DDC* 3.2.2.

Cum ergo adhibita intentio incertum esse perviderit quomodo distinguendum aut quomodo pronuntiandum sit, consulat regulam fidei, quam de scripturarum planioribus locis et ecclesiae auctoritate percepit; de qua satis egimus, cum de rebus in primo libro loqueremur.

<sup>126</sup> *DDC* 2.9.14.

<sup>127</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3 ed. (Burnt Mill: Longman, 1972) 172-76. The Creed used at Hippo was the following, according to Kelly's reconstruction, though the very similar Creed of Milan was also used by Augustine.

Credimus in deum patrem omnipotentem, universorum creatorem, regem saeculorum, immortalem et invisibilem;

Credimus et in filium eius Iesum Christum dominum nostrum, natum de Spiritu sancto ex virgine Maria, crucifixum sub Pontio Pilato, mortuum et sepultum, [qui] tertia die resurrexit a mortuis, ascendit ad caelos, sedet ad dexteram dei patris, inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos;

formula, since it is presented as the result of logical deductions from facts agreed on by all who think about God. Nevertheless the underlying conceptualization harmonizes the two formulations. The Father of the creed is almighty, the creator, and the ruler of the ages; the God of Augustine's summary is that than which there is no greater, the life through which all things living have life, and the God who cares for his creation. The creedal Father is immortal and invisible, Augustine's God immutable and ineffable (though the idea of visibility comes out in the discussion of Wisdom, visible only to inner eyes, becoming visible to the eyes of the flesh).

Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of the Son is in closer agreement with the creed, though the incarnation is expressed in the philosophical language of the gospel of St. John (the Word or Wisdom becoming flesh and laying down his life for us), rather than the more narrative language of the creed or the synoptic gospels (the son being born by the Holy Spirit and through the Virgin Mary, being crucified and buried). The substance is the same, however, and the resurrection, ascension, second coming and judgment of the dead and the living are all mentioned in both formulations.

The Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the course of the outline, but as the introductory paragraph included him in the Trinity as the proper object of enjoyment, and as the creed simply affirms his existence without further development, the omission at this stage is not highly significant: it is probably no more than the avoidance of undue repetition. The last statements of the creed are all found in Augustine's summary, moreover: the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body (*carnis*, or flesh, in the creed, *corpus*, or body, in Augustine), and eternal life through the Church (in Augustine

the Church has the keys to our forgiveness, which is the way to life everlasting). The creed is clearly the Church's authoritative summary of the *res* of the faith, and it is its truth that allows the interpreter to understand obscure passages of scripture.

The foundation of Christian learning then, is most emphatically substance, rather than the perfection of a skill, be that speaking well or reading and interpreting proficiently. This substance, the *res fidei*, is the content of the creed; it belongs to all Christians, regardless of educational background, for all Christians are required to memorize it before receiving the initiation of baptism.<sup>128</sup> Whether or not the less educated neophyte would have understood that he was acquiring the basis of Christian intellectual culture by learning the creed cannot be ascertained with certainty. Surely, however, we may suppose that the educated Christian reading the *De Doctrina Christiana* would have recognized the creed in Augustine's *regula fidei*, and realized that this foundation was shared by his less educated brethren. At any rate, the foundation is available to all, and whether a Christian has the skills to carry on interpreting on his own, or simply shares in the interpretation of scripture by listening to sermons, he shares the same basic assumptions of the faith. The preacher sharing his knowledge should be building on the common assumptions of his whole audience. The initial stages of learning do not set the Christian student apart from the body of Christians as a whole, but ensures that he and they share a common ground. The beginning of Christian education, at least, strives to create a common, rather than elite, Christian culture.

We have already touched upon the love that is the source of Christian unity, but theme is more fully developed in the discussion of the nature of the enjoyment of God

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per sanctam ecclesiam.

and proper use of one's neighbor, which are love. This discussion occupies the rest of the first book. If Augustine's Christian education is founded on the creeds, it is summed up in love, and has love as its final end:

So what all that has been said amounts to, while we have been dealing with things, is that the fulfillment and the end of the law and of all the divine scriptures is love; love of the thing which is to be enjoyed, and of the thing which is able to enjoy that thing together with us, because there is no need for a commandment that we should love ourselves.<sup>129</sup>

If your interpretation has not led you to an understanding of love, moreover, you can be sure that it is wrong. An interpretation based on love, on the other hand, is not harmful even if it does not represent the author's actual intention, though such interpretations should not be allowed to become a habit, lest they lead one away from true faith and eventually even from love.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, as the end of all studies is faith, hope and love, one who has these has no need of scripture except to teach others.<sup>131</sup> The attainment of end of Christian studies, then, like its beginning, is not limited by educational or social background. The proper method for interpretation is one way to reach the end, but if knowledge can come through divine inspiration, love finally has no need of knowledge. Indeed, interpretive methods offer no guarantee, and knowledge must pass the test of love.

Despite its limited audience, then, the Christian education that Augustine proposes is not intended to delineate an educated elite, but to build up the community. The prologue and first book make it plain that what some can acquire through labor

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<sup>128</sup> Cf. *Serm.* 212-215.

<sup>129</sup> *DDC* 1.35.39. *Omnium igitur quae dicta sunt ex quo de rebus tractamus haec summa est, ut intellegatur legis et omnium divinarum scripturarum plenitudo et finis est delectio rei qua fruendum est et rei quae nobiscum frui ea re frui potest, quia ut se quisque diligit praecepto non opus est.*

<sup>130</sup> *DDC* 1.36.40-41.

<sup>131</sup> *DDC* 1.39.43.

should be shared with others. Since the foundational content of Christian knowledge is the *regula fidei*, moreover, available to all in the creed, Augustine implicitly shows the educated that their Christian culture should be held in common with the whole Christian community, though their own labors might result in a better knowledge of the scriptures. The twofold commandment of love as hermeneutical key further emphasizes the unity that should be the result of Christian culture, and sets it up as the final goal of Christian education. Only after laying this foundation does Augustine go on to explain methods for interpreting scripture.

The second and third books are about the *signa* found in scripture, which need interpretation. Augustine makes a distinction between natural (*naturalia*) signs, which are not given with the intention of signifying, but with which we know, from previous experience, to associate some other thing (such as smoke signifying fire); and signs which are given intentionally (*data*), to signify a thought. Of the latter the most common among humans are words, spoken or written, by which men are able to communicate, by giving and recognizing conventional signs.<sup>132</sup> This discussion at first seems to be laboring the obvious, that humans communicate by words. It serves, however, to clarify the appropriate place of signs, in a position subservient to *res*. Because men use words, and because God communicates to us through words in the scriptures, we must study them.<sup>133</sup> *Signa* are studied, however, because of they signify *res*, not because of their inherent value, nor on account values associated with them, such as social status. Thus we can see Augustine reacting to his own education, which was in his view far too concerned with words and their associative values, while retaining justifying the

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<sup>132</sup> DDC 2.1.1-4.5.

necessary, and rightly ordered, study of words. As he intimated in the *Confessions*, Christian education must reorder educational values without abandoning all that secular education has to offer.

We have already seen that Augustine allows for an education beyond the means of all. This arises in part out of the nature of the scripture, which is fraught with interpretive difficulties, arising from obscure or ambiguous *signa*. This is of course a challenge to the notion of common culture. It is far from insurmountable however. We have already seen Augustine come to an answer to the problem in the *Confessions*: while scripture is accessible to all, the difficulties of scripture provide depths for the more advanced students to plummet. The *De Doctrina Christiana* elaborates on much the same theme. On the one hand the various languages of scripture reflect a historical reality, the scattering and separation of the nations of the earth on account of their pride in building the tower of Babel, but more importantly they result from God's response to this reality, his desire to reach the nations through his word rendered in many languages and translations.<sup>134</sup> God's evangelical response to the world at large makes the task of the individual more difficult, but then Augustine has already emphasized the charitable purpose of Christian learning, to build up the whole group in love, rather than individual pride. Difficulty itself can be an asset. Obscure passages, ambiguities and figures of speech humble the proud by causing them to work hard, and make the truth more pleasing by involving the imagination in the task of interpretation.<sup>135</sup> The labor involved is hard, beyond the resources of all but a select and highly literate audience, and all will

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<sup>133</sup> *DDC* 2.5.6.

<sup>134</sup> *DDC* 2.4.5-5.6.

<sup>135</sup> *DDC* 2.6.7.

not be able to undertake the difficult task of interpretation that Augustine outlines. The fruits of Christian study, however, are not restricted by the same constraints, for the substance is available to all. We have seen it already, but it is restated even more emphatically in the discussion of obscurities: “there is almost nothing, in fact, that can be extracted from their obscurities, which cannot be found very plainly said somewhere else.”<sup>136</sup> The plain passages, of course, amount to the *regula*, which is summarized in the creed. By extension, therefore, nothing can be found by all the labor of interpretation that is not also available through the creed. Thus scripture occupies the minds of the able, but does not assure them a place nearer the final goal. Knowledge (*scientia*), moreover, belongs in a the context of the many steps to wisdom: fear of the Lord (*timor*), piety (*pietas*), knowledge (*scientia*), fortitude (*fortitudo*), resolve of compassion (*consilium misericordiae*), purgation of the soul (*purgatio cordis*), and finally wisdom (*sapientia*).<sup>137</sup> Knowledge is indeed a step, but is not the end, nor does Augustine deny the validity of the simpler kind of knowledge that is acquired second hand, through the creed, catechism, and sermons.

The special task of the student is the interpretation of intentionally given signs. These are further categorized as literal (*propria*) or figurative (*figurate*). The problems arising from *signa* are also twofold: either the *signa* are unknown, or they are ambiguous.<sup>138</sup> Augustine’s Christian education aims to equip the student with the methods necessary for solving these difficulties. With literal signs, the difficulty is generally obscurity rather than ambiguity. Words in their literal sense can be unknown,

<sup>136</sup> DDC 2.7.8. Nihil enim fere de illis obscuritatibus eruitur quod non planissime dictum alibi reperitur.

<sup>137</sup> DDC 2.7.9-11.

<sup>138</sup> DDC 2.10.15.

especially in the Greek and Hebrew of scripture. The student of scripture should therefore endeavor to learn these languages, or at least ensure that he is using a number of reliable and well-corrected (*emendata*) translations (the reader equipped with language skills should himself undertake the work of *emendatio*). A minimum working knowledge of the languages will allow the student to at least compare originals where a faulty translation, two conflicting translations, or an ambiguous use of language makes the meaning unclear.<sup>139</sup> A good knowledge of Latin words should certainly be developed, and Augustine recommends that unknown words should be memorized, to be explained by qualified person when one is available. The meaning of unknown expressions in a foreign language should also be sought from an expert.<sup>140</sup>

To understand figurative signs, knowledge of both words and *res* is necessary.<sup>141</sup> This is where secular learning has a purpose, and Augustine discusses which of its branches are useful for interpreting scripture and should be acquired. First of all, he stresses a branch of knowledge should not be rejected on account of its associations with Paganism.<sup>142</sup> A more sophisticated judgment needs to be made, by making a distinction between knowledge that concerns things given by God, and those concerning institutions or conventions made by man.<sup>143</sup> To the first kind of knowledge is useful, for it contributes to the understanding of scripture. The natural sciences, mathematics and music can all find objects of study in scripture, and by explaining divinely given phenomena witnessed in scripture can clarify its meaning.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *DDC* 2.11.16-15.22.

<sup>140</sup> *DDC* 2.14.21.

<sup>141</sup> *DDC* 2.16.23.

<sup>142</sup> *DDC* 2.18.28.

<sup>143</sup> *DDC* 2.19.29.

<sup>144</sup> *DDC* 2.16:24-26.

The knowledge of human institutions is again further divided. Superstitious knowledge goes beyond human institutions, to make an agreement over the meaning of signs with demons, and should be shunned entirely. Auspices, astrology, and various superstitious practices that supposedly bring health or good luck all belong to this category. Unlike the natural sciences, their efficacy does not depend on the power observation of the nature of things, but a pact with demons. There is no advantage whatsoever in these branches of knowledge.<sup>145</sup>

Human institutions that are not superstitious, whether useful or superfluous, are merely conventions agreed upon by men. Their meaning resides in the agreement of men. Among the superfluities are pictures and statues (unless the circumstances of their creation are significant to scripture), as are fables and falsehoods. Among useful ones are the institutions that allow society to function in society, such as distinctions between the sexes and ranks, weights, measurements, the value and appearance of money, and many other such signs. These are societal conventions, and the Christian too must have knowledge of them if he is to function. Christians should embrace the study of these conventions (and above all seek a knowledge of language).<sup>146</sup>

According to these principles, Augustine lists those branches of knowledge he thinks useful for scriptural interpretation: History, Natural Sciences, Astronomy, crafts, dialectic, categorization, eloquence, Mathematics and law.<sup>147</sup> All these branches of secular knowledge are useful, but Augustine does not recommend them without a warning:

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<sup>145</sup> *DDC* 2.19.29-29.37.

<sup>146</sup> *DDC* 2.25.38-26.40.

<sup>147</sup> *DDC* 2.28.42-38.57.

On all these counts it seems to me that the most salutary advice I can give to eager and bright young people who fear God and are seeking the blessed life is that they should not impetuously and unconcernedly pursue any teachings that can be had outside the Church of Christ, as though these could ensure them a happy life; rather they should seriously and carefully distinguish between them.<sup>148</sup>

He should also be aware of the power of knowledge to inflate the student with pride:

“But when students of the divine scriptures, instructed in this manner, begin to approach the task of searching them, they should never stop reflecting on that maxim of the apostle's, ‘Knowledge puffs up, love builds up.’”<sup>149</sup> As useful as knowledge is, there is danger inherent in it, a danger that is never present in love. The danger is illustrated vividly as Augustine discusses dialectic and rhetoric: dialectic can lead to the mistaken belief that one knows the truth of propositions, when actually only their logical validity in relation to other propositions is known.<sup>150</sup> Rhetoric, on the other hand, is only as good as the use it is put to, and can be used to defend truth or falsehood. Inherently it has little value.<sup>151</sup> In short, even knowledge that is useful can be put to wrong use, and the student must ensure that it is being put to the service of the truth. Again it is love that must be kept in mind as the final test of learning.

Within the context of appropriately ordered values, then, a course of studies beyond the reach of most is acceptable. The Christian can even put secular studies to good use, as long as he is discerning, and subordinates them to the study of scripture.

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<sup>148</sup> DDC 2.39.58.

Quam ob rem videtur mihi studiosis et ingeniosis adulescentibus et timentibus deum beatamque vitam quaerentibus salubriter praecipere ut nullas doctrinas quae praeter Ecclesiam Christi exercentur tamquam ad beatam vitam capessendam secure sequi audeant sed eas sobrie diligenterque diiudicent.

<sup>149</sup> DDC 2.41.62. *Sed hoc modo instructus divinarum scripturarum studiosus, cum ad eas perscrutandas accedere coeperit, illud apostolicum cogitare non cesset: Scientia inflat, caritas aedificat.*

<sup>150</sup> DDC 2.31.48-34.52.

<sup>151</sup> DDC 2.36.54-37.55.

The sense of pride that can come with learning, however, is a danger that must be avoided at all costs, for it undermines Christian charity, which is the end of all studies.

Indeed, Augustine sums up the purpose of these studies as twofold:

So, dear reader, as soon as, furnished with this advice, you are no longer hindered by not knowing what signs mean—being gentle and humble of heart, submitting to Christ's easy yoke, and burdened with his light load, being founded and rooted and built up in love, and so not liable to be puffed up by knowledge—you must now approach the consideration and discussion of ambiguous signs in the scriptures.<sup>152</sup>

On the one hand, the study of the clearer passages creates humility, for the student learns the lessons of love, which can never lead to pride. This humility is the precondition for moving to further depths of scripture, to the ambiguities of figurative language. His reasoning here is no doubt that the ability to interpret complex passages would easily lead a gifted student to pride. The full understanding of the *res*, as we shall see, moreover, provides the key for understanding those ambiguities. The knowledge of the *res* gained from these studies is useful for subsequent progress, though the path to knowledge is fraught with danger. Indeed, if only there were suitable reference books, the students could would dispense with much of these studies, and devote his energies to applying their results to finding the *res*, “in order to save Christians a great deal of work in their research into just a few points.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> DDC 2.62.63.

Hac igitur instructione praeditum cum signa incognita lectorem non impedierent, mitem et humilem corde, subiugatum leniter Christo, et oneratum sarcina levi, fundatum et radicatum et aedificatum in caritate, quem scientia inflare non possit, accedat ad ambigua signa in scripturis consideranda et discutienda.

<sup>153</sup> DDC 2.39.59. *ut non sit necesse Christiano in multis propter pauca laborare*. While secular studies are allowed as auxiliaries to properly Christian studies, this passage argues against the interpretation of *doctrina Christiana* as a reformed course of liberal studies or *paideia*, at least if they are understood to be working in the same categories. Not only is the social context changed, but the whole notion of a rounded curriculum based on the acquisition of a broad, but common, canon of knowledge is abandoned. The usefulness of particular branches is indeed acknowledged, but only in subservience to scriptural interpretation. There is no intrinsic value in the study of the liberal arts. Cf. *Retractationes* 1.3.2.

The third book, on ambiguous passages of scripture, concerns itself more with figurative *signa*, and the interpretive skills normally learned in the school of the grammarian. Before interpreting a passage as figurative, however, the student must ensure that the ambiguity does not derive from a misreading of the literal sense, whether a mistaken punctuation or inflection (which are the reader's responsibility, given the lack of spaces and punctuation in manuscripts). This concern with correct *lectio*, though it employs the skills taught by the grammarian, has nothing to do with the stylistic emphasis of the grammatical school where it is learned, nor with the declamatory competitions of Augustine's youth (and the pride inherent in the quest for distinction), nor with the exclusiveness of proper pronunciation that we saw as a key feature of Augustine's secular education. Here the need to understand correctly the content of the expression drives the concern with pronunciation. Indeed, any doubt concerning correct *lectio* should be resolved by the rule of faith firstly, the surrounding context secondly, and finally, if the former are indifferent, by an educated guess. If any doubt remains about Augustine's motives, he adds that he prefers a barbarism in pronunciation to an ambiguity in meaning, in a clear reversal of the values he perceived in secular education.<sup>154</sup>

Once these literal ambiguities are resolved, the reader can proceed to ambiguous signs. First he must discern whether he is actually dealing with a figure.<sup>155</sup> Once again the reader is referred to the *res* of book one: if any passage relates to the true faith or Christian morals (the love of God and neighbour), it should be interpreted literally, if not,

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Augustine regrets his earlier overemphasis on the liberal arts, expressed in the *De Ordine*: *Veram et in his libris displicet mihi [...] et quod multum tribui liberalibus disciplinis, quas multi sancti multum nesciunt; quidam etiam, qui sciunt eas, sancti non sunt.*

then figuratively.<sup>156</sup> He goes on to address some of the difficulties affecting this discernment, such as the differing morals of other times, the use of the same signs for different meanings, and the possibility of several acceptable interpretations for the same passage.<sup>157</sup> A theoretical understanding of tropes, learned in the school of the grammarian, is naturally of assistance in interpreting the figures that frequently occur in scripture. Augustine insists, however, that his treatise is not the place to teach them, lest he be confused with a grammarian: they should be learned from the latter. At any rate, even the uneducated use and understand figures of speech without needing formal training.<sup>158</sup> Augustine concludes the book, and the discussion of interpreting scripture, with a discussion of the rules of Tychonius, as a help to understanding figurative language in scripture.<sup>159</sup> Like unknown signs, then, ambiguities, especially figurative language, can be interpreted with the assistance of skills acquired through secular education. Again, however, these skills are not absolutely essential, and the real key is that all scripture must be understood in the light of the *regula fidei* and the rule of love. If the literal sense supports these, it should be accepted. Only if there seems to be a contradiction between them and the passage should the interpreter look for a figurative way of resolving that tension. As Augustine has emphasized all along, nothing is found in the more difficult passages that is not said more plainly elsewhere.

Just as Augustine did not want to be called a *grammaticus*, so in his fourth book he refuses to teach the art of rhetoric, despite his treatment of the subject of Christian

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<sup>154</sup> *DDC* 3.2.2-3.7.

<sup>155</sup> *DDC* 3.5.9.

<sup>156</sup> *DDC* 3.10.14; *cf.* 3.16.24.

<sup>157</sup> *DDC* 3.18.26-18.39.

<sup>158</sup> *DDC* 3.29.40-41.

<sup>159</sup> *DDC* 3.30.42-37.55.

oratory. Rhetorical technique should be learned elsewhere. It is indeed a useful tool, for it can be a weapon for good as well as evil. Except by a quick-witted youth, however, it probably cannot be mastered, at least not at a rate that would make the result worth the effort. Those who are possessed of a quick wit, moreover, could learn it just as well by imitating good examples, and much more easily than by learning rules. Even the illiterate urban population, after all, has better style than do peasants (nor are they ignorant of the fact), learned simply by listening to others.<sup>160</sup> Once again Augustine is undermining the role of education as a definer of status through style, by asserting that one can attain good style simply by imitating, bypassing the rhetorical school altogether. We can deduce further from Augustine's logic that even the uneducated should be able to pick up on the Christian eloquence that Augustine later discusses, simply by listening to the scriptures and a good preacher like himself. That however, is a tangential deduction, for Augustine is not really concerned with the rhetorical potential of his audience.

The book on Christian rhetoric is particularly insistent, once again, on the correct ordering of content and style. The aim of the Christian speaker is to teach what is good, eradicate from his listeners' minds what is bad, and move his hearers to conversion.<sup>161</sup> A combination of good content and style is best, but failing that good content alone is better than good style alone.<sup>162</sup> Accordingly, Augustine prefers that the student learn eloquence from writers who combine the two elements of style and wisdom. To show that this is indeed possible, he draws examples of eloquence from scripture.<sup>163</sup> Even more emphatically, the teacher of the truth should strive for clarity in expression rather than

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<sup>160</sup> *DDC* 4.1.1-3.5.

<sup>161</sup> *DDC* 4.4.6.

<sup>162</sup> *DDC* 4.5.7.

eloquence, an especially pressing concern when addressing a group that cannot ask questions, but who will, if they are eager to learn, show through body language when they have understood.<sup>164</sup> Of the three aims of Christian rhetoric (teaching, pleasing, and moving), the first is most important. Its goal is to reveal knowledge that is hidden from the audience.<sup>165</sup> The treatment of the other two aims occupies most of the rest of the book, followed by a discussion of the appropriate style of diction for each aim.

Augustine concludes by reiterating the subservience of eloquence to truth, and his preference for wisdom over style.<sup>166</sup> The work closes with a final recommendation is that the Christian should pray to God that he might preach well.<sup>167</sup> Good Christian teaching, after all, comes as a divine gift, however useful education might be.

While Augustine's program for Christian education clearly responds to his experience of secular education, he does not provide a full alternative curriculum for acquiring the learning necessary for the Christian studies he describes. His program assumes that the student already has a proficient command of literacy, an ability to read and write with ease. He explicitly directs the student to acquire exegetical and rhetorical skills elsewhere, if he is not already in possession of them. The underlying assumption is not only that secular learning will continue to be offered, but also that some Christians will profit from it. He does not, moreover, abolish the idea that some will have an education that is beyond the reach of others. If in practice a higher level of education is reserved for an elite, however, Augustine's *doctrina Christiana* rejects the values associated with elitist education. One of his most emphatic points, developed at length in

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<sup>163</sup> *DDC* 4.5.8-8.22.

<sup>164</sup> *DDC* 4.10.24-25.

<sup>165</sup> *DDC* 4.11.26-12.27.

the first book and reiterated in the last, is the reordering of the relative value of *res* and *signa*. The *res* are in his scheme the first priority. The program of exegesis begins with a discovery of the *res* of the *regula fidei*, continues with a reconciliation with it of apparently contradictory passages, and finally with principles for teaching that *regula* and the interpretation that leads to it in the most productive way. Christian education should not, and the point is emphatic, develop a rhetoric by which educated Christians recognize themselves.

The close identification of the *res* with the *regula fidei*, moreover, whose content is summarized in the creed, resists the use of content as an identifier of elite culture. The *regula* belongs to all Christians, all must learn it by heart, and all the interpretive labor of the educated Christian brings him no further than the knowledge of the *regula*, though it involves all his faculties in a salutary pursuit. While intellectual culture is good, it should not separate the educated from the faithful. It should build them up in the love that is the end of all studies and the Christian life. Indeed, Christian knowledge is only truly possessed when it is shared, it cannot be hoarded as a precious, differentiating commodity.

In this light, the question of whether Augustine is proposing an education for clergy alone or for the creation of a culture for all educated Christians becomes less pressing. No longer was culture, literary and intellectual, destined only for those who could follow a demanding and costly education (for his program demanded a large sacrifice of time as well as a prior education in literacy). Rather Christian culture was destined, though it reached them indirectly, for the whole Christian people. Whether

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<sup>166</sup> *DDC* 4.29.62.

clerical or lay, the direct audience of the *De Doctrina Christiana* is a very small minority of Christians. Again however, be they clergy or laymen, those who acquire a Christian education must share it, and though the fourth book focuses principally on preaching as a means of that sharing, other means are not necessarily excluded. The culture it creates, at any rate, is neither clerical nor elitist, and we can conclude that the treatise addresses the education and culture of the whole Christian people.

### ***De Catechizandis Rudibus***

If Augustine's thought on education in the *Confessions* and *De Doctrina Christiana* implicitly targets the social reality of the audience of Christian education, the *De Catechizandis* explicitly addresses the educational background of the audience of catechesis, in setting out a model for teaching uneducated town-dwellers the rudiments of Christian knowledge.<sup>168</sup> The treatise is addressed to *Deogratias*, a deacon in Carthage. It is a treatise of advice for the catechist, on such subjects as avoiding boredom (that both catechist and audience are prone to) and overcoming challenges that distract the catechist, such as the limited capacity or apathy of the audience, the inadequacy of language, or the resentment that comes from having more pleasurable occupations interrupted. These are treated in answer to *Deogratias*'s request.<sup>169</sup> At the fore of Augustine's mind, however, is the catechumen rather than the catechist. Most of the treatise is devoted to the content and manner of the candidate's instruction, with the second half consisting of two model catechisms for different occasions, first a longer one, then a shorter.

As he sets the scene for the first model catechesis, Augustine explicitly describes

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<sup>167</sup> *DDC* 4.30.64.

<sup>168</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 16.24.

the expected social status of the candidate:

But still, let us suppose that someone has come to us who desires to be a Christian, and while of the uneducated class, yet not a man from the country but a townsman such as you must come across in great numbers at Carthage.<sup>170</sup>

Besides the uneducated townsman, clearly in Augustine's mind the most frequent candidate (since both model catecheses are directed at him), he imagines two other types of catechumen. There are those with a liberal education, approaching initiation, like Augustine himself had, with significant intellectual preparation: "But there is one thing that should not be passed over. I mean that if some one well-versed in liberal studies, who has already made up his mind to be a Christian, comes to you to be catechized."<sup>171</sup> Finally there is the man with a more common education, with a background in grammar and rhetoric: "There are also some who come from the ordinary schools of grammar and rhetoric, whom you would neither dare to class among the illiterate, nor yet among those learned men whose minds have been trained by the investigation of serious questions."<sup>172</sup> Augustine is not only aware of the presence of these differing levels of education in his audience, he is concerned enough about their differing needs to address the situation of each. The bulk of his advice, however, addresses the education of the illiterate, and clearly he is deeply concerned with adapting education to meet their need.

Simply in addressing the Christian education of the unlearned, and even more by

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<sup>169</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 1.1; 10.14-22.

<sup>170</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 16.24. *Sed tamen faciamus aliquem venisse ad nos, qui vult esse christianus, et de genere quidem idiotarum, non tamen rusticorum, sed urbanorum, quales apud Carthaginem plures experiri te necesse est.*

<sup>171</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 8.12. *Sed illud plane non praetereundum est, ut si quisquam ad te catechizandus venerit liberalibus doctrinis excultus, qui iam decreverit esse christianus.*

<sup>172</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 9.13. *Sunt item quidam de scholis usitatissimis grammaticorum oratorumque venientes, quos neque inter idiotas numerare audeas, neque inter illos doctissimos, quorum mens maganarum rerum est exercitata quaestionibus.*

making it his principal focus (the remarks about other audiences are brief asides, no more than instructions for adapting the content of catechesis), Augustine is departing from the elite-centered educational ideals that he disparages in the *Confessions*. He highlights his departure from accepted norms, as in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, with the metaphor of wealth redistribution. Thus in describing the ideal Christian catechesis, he answers his criticism (made in the *Confessions*) of the commodity value of secular education. This time, the metaphor is explicitly extended from Augustine's own act in writing to those who distribute education further through oral teaching:

For the more widely I desire the Lord's treasure to be distributed, the more I am bound when I perceive that the stewards, my fellow servants, find any difficulty in dispensing it, to do all that I can that they may be able to compass easily and readily what they diligently and earnestly desire.<sup>173</sup>

The Christian preacher not only teaches, he redistributes wealth, the spiritual wealth of Christian teaching, which is the content of the Gospel: "For if in the case of material wealth 'God loves a cheerful giver,' how much the more in that of spiritual?"<sup>174</sup>

The nature of the education imparted to catechumens is notably different from secular forms of education. If Augustine's own intellectual quest had sought knowledge and philosophical certainty despite his education in grammar and rhetoric, his instructions to Deogratias concern an education in belief, for it is not knowledge that makes a Christian, but belief: "For you tell me that [...] that you are almost always perplexed to discover how suitably to present that truth, the belief that makes us Christians."<sup>175</sup>

Belief, of course, does not come entirely without understanding, and Augustine does

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<sup>173</sup> De Cat. Rud. 1.2. *Quanto enim cupio latius erogari pecuniam dominicam, tanto magis me oportet, si quam dispensatores conservos meos difficultatem in erogando sentire cognosco, agere quantum in me est, ut facile atque expedite possint, quod impigre ac studiose volunt.*

<sup>174</sup> De Cat. Rud. 2.4. *Si enim in pecunia corporali, quanto magis in spiritali hilarem datorem diligit Deus?*

express some frustration at the inability to make his audience understand as he does: “for I desire my hearer to understand all that I understand.”<sup>176</sup> Augustine’s frustration is with his limited powers of language, but we may imagine that an uneducated audience would make the task of sharing his own understanding all the more difficult. Nevertheless, he not only offers Deogratias the assurance that if he is repeatedly asked to catechize he cannot be entirely ineffective, but also reminds him that until we are renewed in eternal life, none of us can really see the truth clearly.<sup>177</sup> If there is a difference between the capacities of the uneducated and educated audience, it pales before the comparison of the perfect understanding of the resurrected and that of the educated. The catechist should follow the example of Christ’s incarnation, for greater still is the difference between Christ’s equality with God and the form of a servant he took on than the difference between our thoughts and our expression of them in teaching.<sup>178</sup> Augustine can clearly put differences between levels of intellectual ability in a broader perspective: the ability to understand in the higher, philosophical, sense, which only a few are able to attain, is clearly not of the utmost importance if belief makes a Christian, and if, moreover, the knowledge of truth in the resurrected mind is hardly comparable to the learning of the educated.

This belief moreover, is not presented as abstract propositions and difficult theories. The catechesis is described as a *narratio*, and consists of the cardinal moments of religious history, from creation to the present: “The narration is complete when the beginner is first instructed from the text: ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and

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<sup>175</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 1.1. *Dixisti [...] te autem pene semper angustias pati, idipsum quod credendo christiani sumus, quo modo intimandum sit.*

<sup>176</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 2.3. *Totum enim quod intellego, volo ut qui me audit intelligat.*

the earth,' down to the present period of Church History."<sup>179</sup> Augustine has too much sense to be recommending the impossible, however, a thorough overview or paraphrase of all of scripture and more,

for which neither time serves nor any need calls. But we ought to present all the matter in a general and comprehensive summary, choosing some of the more remarkable facts that are heard with greater pleasure and constitute the cardinal points in history.<sup>180</sup>

It is clear from the start that the truth of Christianity can and should be presented to the uneducated in an accessible (even attractive and compelling) way.<sup>181</sup>

From the start, moreover, Augustine again places the emphasis on substance, now the basic facts of history that illustrate the truth of Christianity. Indeed, if the truth is taught, the quality of expression is of little account, except insofar as it facilitates the expression of the truth:

Provided only that our mind does not wander from the substantial truth, it is easy for the hearer, if anything in our words offend him, to learn from the occasion itself how little it matters, provided the subject has been understood, whether the phraseology which was used expressly to make the subject clear, may not have been quite complete or appropriate.<sup>182</sup>

The catechumen should know the basic outline of the scriptural narrative of salvation

<sup>177</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 2.4.

<sup>178</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 10.15.

<sup>179</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 3.5. *Narratio plena est, cum quisque primo catechizatur ab eo quod scriptum est: In principio fecit Deus caelum et terram, usque ad praesentia tempora Ecclesiae.*

<sup>180</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 3.5. [...] *quod nec tempus capit nec ulla necessitas postulat: sed cuncta summatim generatimque complecti, ita ut eligantur quaedam mirabiliora, quae suavius audiuntur atque in ipsis articulis constituta sunt.*

<sup>181</sup> Cf. William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995) 126-30. Harmless points out that Augustine is adapting the rhetorical conception of *narratio* found in Cicero. Narrative is not used simply for the sake of telling a story, but to relate the main points of evidence that will convince the audience. Like the catechist selectively narrating salvation history, the orator attempts to prove his point by recasting the most compelling events of the case. Even the criteria used for selection (the ability to give pleasure and attract notice) are the same.

<sup>182</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 11.16.

tantum a veritate rerum non aberret animus, facile est, si in verbis auditorem aliquid offenderit, ex ipsa occasione discat, quam sit re intellecta contemnendum, si minus integre, aut si minus proprie sonare potuit, quod ideo sonabat ut ut res intelligeretur

history. He does not need to hear it expressed in fine prose (let alone be able to express it rhetorically himself). He does not need to be able to read, or even hear read, the whole text of scripture. The necessary substance of Christian knowledge can be imparted through an easily apprehended narrative of the Christian faith.

While the uneducated catechumen does not need to face the daunting text of scripture, the substance of the faith is nonetheless presented to him in a form whose structure is derived from that of the Bible. The substance he receives, however, corresponds to the *res* of the *regula fidei*. He would not yet have encountered the creed, since the *De Catechizandis Rudibus* treats the candidate's first catechetical lecture, and it is only in the final stages of initiation (a week before baptism) that the creed is handed over to candidates. It is not surprising therefore, that the lecture should make no explicit reference to the creed, nor follow its structure. In the course of the narrative, nonetheless, the points of the *regula fidei* emerge, and the uneducated catechumen is given what the *De Doctrina Christiana* identifies as the foundation of Christian learning and the substance of Christian knowledge.

Augustine begins his model catechism with the creation of the world, and his words closely parallel the beginning of the creed.<sup>183</sup> The cardinal points of the Old Testament of course illustrate God's qualities more fully, and Augustine stresses especially from the beginning the immortality and rule of God discussed in the creed. From his narrative of the life of Christ likewise the points of the *regula* can be extracted, in words that again closely reflect the credal formula.<sup>184</sup> As in the summary of the *De*

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<sup>183</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 18.29. *deus omnipotens qui fecit omnia bona*. Cf. the *Credimus in deum patrem omnipotentem, universorum creatorem, regem saeculorum, immortalem et invisibilem*.

<sup>184</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 22.40-41.

*Doctrina Christiana*, the Holy Spirit is mentioned without great elaboration.<sup>185</sup> After narrating the early life of the Church, and how some were converted and found him to be the source of the forgiveness of sins stated in the creed,<sup>186</sup> he relates and defends, finally, the belief in the resurrection of the body, final judgment, and the everlasting life that awaits the faithful,<sup>187</sup> bringing to a close his narrative with the *res* of the closing articles of the creed.<sup>188</sup> What emerges, then, from Augustine's narrative, is not only a summary of the main points of scripture, but from it the substance of the *regula fidei*, which the more educated student of the *De Doctrina Christiana* discovers through his own reading of scripture. The foundation for the illiterate and literate, then, is the same, for what the capable student must discover through his own labor, is given second-hand to the catechumen who lacks the skills to penetrate the text of scripture for himself. All Christian learning, therefore, from the rudiments of the faith presented to the unlearned in catechesis, to the highly literate activity of scriptural interpretation, begins with the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, extracted from scripture and expounded with authority, and accessibly, in the creed.

If the doctrine of the creed is the foundation of Christian knowledge, the commandment of love is again presented as its heart.

In all things, indeed, it not only behoves us to keep in view the goal of the

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homo factus dominus Christus [...] natus enim de matre [...] virgo pariens, virgo concipiens, virgo moriens [...] crucifixus est [...] mortuus est [...] sed et resurrexit [...] eisdem spectantibus adscendit in caelum.

Cf. the Creed:

Credimus et in filium eius Iesum Christum dominum nostrum, natum de Spiritu sancto ex virgine Maria, crucifixum sub Pontio Pilato, mortuum et sepultum, [qui] tertia die resurrexit a mortuis, ascendit ad caelos, sedet ad dexteram dei patris, inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos.

<sup>185</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 22.40-41. *misit eis spiritum sanctum.*

<sup>186</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 23.42.

<sup>187</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 25.46.

<sup>188</sup> *Credimus et in Spiritum sanctum, remissionem peccatorum, resurrectionem carnis, vitam aeternam per sanctam ecclesiam.*

precept, which is ‘charity from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned heart’ –a standard to which we should make all that we say refer; but towards it we should also move and direct the attention of him for whose instruction we are speaking.<sup>189</sup>

The narration of the substance of the faith belongs in the context of a broader effort to build up faith, hope and love in the new Christian. Catechesis should begin with an exhortation to fear God and an effort to instill in him the hope of eternal life.<sup>190</sup> This fear has love as its end, for it leads to the love of God.<sup>191</sup> In the model catechesis, the account of the incarnation ends with Christ’s sending of the Spirit, who teaches the disciples that the whole law is reduced to the commandment to love God and neighbor.<sup>192</sup> The catechesis comes to a close on the same note, with an exhortation to hold fast to the good life, and associate with others who love God, lest companions should lead the new Christian astray.<sup>193</sup> At the centre of Christian knowledge is a reality (love) that can be grasped by all, from the illiterate man or woman coming to be catechized to the highly literate student setting out to interpret scripture for himself. This, as we have seen, the hermeneutical key to all of scripture, which Augustine is willing to give to all, regardless of means, background or intellectual abilities, for it is also complete in itself, as the end of all studies and the Christian life.

Augustine also provides the beginner with another important key to interpreting scripture: figurative readings. The catechumen learns how the spiritual sense of the text scripture is uncovered, how the prophetic nature of the Old Testament reinforces the

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<sup>189</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 3.6.

In omnibus sane non tantum oportet intueri praecepti finem, quod est caritas de corde puro et conscientia bona et fide non ficta, quo ea quae loquimur cuncta referamus: sed etiam illius quem loquendo instruimus, ad id movendus atque dirigendus aspectus est.

<sup>190</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 16.24-17-28.

<sup>191</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 4.8.

<sup>192</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 23.41.

centrality of Christ's incarnation in scripture, and how the twofold commandment of love is always the end of scriptural interpretation.<sup>194</sup> This interpretive method is not taught through theory, but demonstrated by example. The wooden ark that bore Noah in the flood, for instance, prefigures salvation through the wood of the cross,<sup>195</sup> as does Moses' striking the water with a staff, before leading his people through, which also prefigures baptism, while the Passover prefigures Christ's passion;<sup>196</sup> the patriarchs and prophets prefigure the Church;<sup>197</sup> the stone tablets of the law symbolize hardened hearts,<sup>198</sup> etc. At the very end of the catechism, moreover, the catechumen is exhorted to believe (even if he cannot understand it) that whatever he hears from the scripture that is apparently inconsistent with the commandment to love God and one's neighbor should be interpreted in a figurative sense,<sup>199</sup> by the very same rule given in the *De Doctrina Christiana*. Not only, then, is the centrality of love emphasized in the catechism, but the key to discovering the theme in all of scripture is also provided. We should not imagine that every student would be able to apply figurative readings to texts themselves. Indeed, the fact that the method is offered in demonstration rather than theory suggests otherwise. Nonetheless they are given practice in following the preacher's exegesis, and again the catechumen is led through the steps that the student of scripture must take for himself.

The foundation of Christian knowledge is the same for the illiterate *rudis* as for ideal Christian student depicted in the *De Doctrina Christiana*. Indeed, as Augustine discusses more educated catechumens in the *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, he adds nothing

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<sup>193</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 25.46.49.

<sup>194</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 3.6-4.8.

<sup>195</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 19.32.

<sup>196</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 20.34.

<sup>197</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 19.33.

<sup>198</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 20.35.

to the substance of their education. Rather, he gives some advice given to meet their particular needs. He assumes that those with a liberal education are keen to learn and approach the catechist with some preparation, having read scripture and other Christian writings. They should be exempted, therefore, from the extensive narration of salvation history. Nothing should be taken for granted, however, and the basics must be reviewed quickly (balancing the risk of boredom and the assurance that they are in fact well instructed). The catechist should simply rephrase his teaching so as not to sound like he is teaching:

so that, for example, we may say that we believe they are already familiar with such and such a point; and in this we pass rapidly in review all that has to be impressed upon the minds of the ignorant and unlearned; so that if there be any point that this educated man already knows, he may not have to listen to it as from a teacher, and if, on the other hand, there be anything of which he is still ignorant, he may learn it while we are going over the points with which we assume he already is familiar.<sup>200</sup>

While Augustine takes care not to offend the more learned, the content they are to know is exactly the same. With them too the same foundation must be laid, if more quickly, to take into account the knowledge they already have. The catechist may additionally discuss some of the catechumen's personal reading, confirming its orthodoxy or correcting any heretical teachings.

If the liberally educated comes to catechesis with a head start, however, those with the normal educated background of grammar and rhetoric do not seem, in Augustine's mind at least, to have any significant advantage over the unlearned. He does

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<sup>199</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 26.50.

<sup>200</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 8.12.

Ita ut dicamus nos credere, quod iam noverint illud atque illud; atque hoc modo cursim enumerare omnia quae rudibus indoctisque inculcanda sunt, ut etsi quid novit eruditus iste, non tamquam a doctore audiat, et si quid adhuc ignorat, dum ea commemoramus quae illum nosse iam credimus, discat.

not apparently expect them to have done any prior reading of the scriptures or Christian writers, nor does Augustine discuss any shortcuts in their catechesis. Instead, he recommends that they be warned against pride, especially in the matter of style, which might lead them to look down on the scriptures or its less learned teachers. It is interesting to note that Augustine does not even exhort them to read the Bible, but to hear its content with humility:

most of all, they should be taught to listen to the divine Scriptures, so that solid diction may not seem mean to them merely because it is not pretentious. [...] For it is most useful for these men to know that the meaning is to be regarded as superior to words, just as the spirit is to be preferred to the body."<sup>201</sup>

The catechesis of all Christians, then, though its delivery may vary, covers the same ground. The Christian must know the facts of the creed, and understand the centrality of love to Christian life and belief. These two elements, as we have seen, are the foundation too of all Christian learning. All catechumens, moreover, are given the key to figurative interpretation, and the uneducated participate second-hand in the activity that in the *De Doctrina Christiana* is the Christian education of the highly literate student.

If Augustine seems overly idealistic and optimistic about his proposed audience, it is worth keeping in mind not only that he had labored as a catechist himself, but also that in the *De Catechizandis Rudibus* he shows himself very realistic about the needs and situation of his audience in other respects. He is aware, first of all, that candidates may come to him with mixed (and undiscoverable) motives:

it is hidden from us when it is that one we now see in body does really come in spirit; [...] But if he come with a counterfeit motive, desirous

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<sup>201</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 9.13. *maxime isti docendi sunt Scripturas audire divinas, ne sordeat eis solidum eloquium, quia non est inflatum, neque arbitrentur [...] His maxime utile est nosse, ita esse praeponendas verbis sententias, ut praeponitur animus corpori.*

only of temporal advantages, or thinking to escape some loss, he will, of course, lie.<sup>202</sup>

Augustine is not naive, and his response is practical: praise their lie as if it were the truth, and perhaps they will be encouraged to conform themselves to their supposed motive, and make it true. He recommends too, when possible, some preparatory research on the individual to be taught; people who know him will be able to describe his spiritual state, and failing that the question should at least be put to the candidate himself.<sup>203</sup> Augustine is clearly aware that teaching needs to be tailored to meet individual needs. Their abilities differ, and Augustine counsels refuting objections to the resurrection of the body “with due regard for the capacity and powers of the audience.”<sup>204</sup> Augustine also counsels the catechist to be aware of the student’s response to teaching, whether it is expressed vocally or through body language. He should invite a response from those who are reluctant, whether they understand or perhaps even disagree, or if they’ve heard it before and are bored.<sup>205</sup> Finally, a candidate may tire of standing, and the catechist should be alert to his discomfort and offer him a seat. Augustine illustrates the point with the poignant story (from his own experience) of a peasant who left during instruction and never returned, because he was ashamed to say that he was too exhausted to remain standing.<sup>206</sup> If very practical pieces of advice were given in response personal experience, it seems fair to assume that Augustine had also learned to estimate correctly the intellectual level and capacities of his audience.

Augustine is aware, finally, of the effect of various situations on the nature of

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<sup>202</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 5.9.

<sup>203</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 5.9.

<sup>204</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 7.11. *pro capacitate ac viribus audientis.*

<sup>205</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 13.18.

<sup>206</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 13.19.

catechesis. Not only does he make the broad distinction between educational levels, but between written and spoken communication, private and public audiences (and within the latter between audiences where all are equally to be taught, and those in which some are merely there to judge the teacher), and between a lecture and conversation.

It likewise makes a great difference, whether there are few present or many, whether learned or unlearned, or a mixed audience made up of both classes; whether they are townfolk or countryfolk, or both together; or a gathering in which all sorts of men are represented. [...] But as we are now treating of instructing candidates, I can testify to you from my own experience that I am differently stirred according as he whom I see before me waiting for instruction is cultivated or a dullard, a fellow citizen or a stranger, a rich man or a poor man, a private citizen or a man honored by public office, a man having some official authority, a person of this or that family, or of this or that age or sex, coming to us from this or that school or philosophy, or from this or that popular error; and in keeping with my own varying feelings my discourse itself opens, proceeds, and closes.<sup>207</sup>

Fully aware of the multitude of these differences between students and situations, Augustine boldly proposes to deal with one segment of the population, the uneducated urban candidates for Christian initiation.<sup>208</sup> He clearly expects his proposed catechesis to work with that audience, and with all the attention he paid to the nature of his audience, not to mention his prior experience, it is hard to imagine that he was wrong.

To conclude, the three works studied in this chapter develop the theme of education from very different perspectives. The *Confessions* are an intense reflection on Augustine's youth, with an emphasis on his errancy and return to catholic faith. Since a

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<sup>207</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 15.23.

multumque interest, et cum ita dicimus, utrum pauci adsint an multi; docti an indocti an ex utroque genere mixti, urbani an rustici an hi et illi simul; an populus ex omni hominum genere temperatus sit [...] Sed quia de rudibus imbuendis nunc agimus, de me ipso testis sum, aliter atque aliter me moveri, cum ante me catechizandum video eruditum, inertem, civem, peregrinum, divitem, pauperem, privatum, honoratum, in potestate aliqua constitutum, illius aut illius gentis hominum, illius aut illius aetatis aut sexus, ex illa aut illa secta, ex illo aut illo vulgari errore venientem: ac pro diversitate motus mei sermo ipse procedit et progreditur et finitur.

<sup>208</sup> *De Cat. Rud.* 16.24.

great part of his youthful energies were devoted to his educational career, the treatise is rich in reflections on the education that formed him, as well as his later teaching. The *De Doctrina Christiana*, on the other hand, is a treatise devoted to a discussion of the ideal Christian education, centered on the interpretation of scripture, and assuming a high degree of literacy acquired through prior education. The *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, finally, is the response to a deacon who requested advice on the task of catechesis. In addition to the requested advice, Augustine provides a model catechesis, intended to meet the needs of the illiterate population of the city. Throughout the three works, however, the same preoccupations recur, from which a concern for the social dimension of secular and Christian education emerges.

Augustine's most explicit criticism of the elitist nature of the secular education he received as a young man are his derogatory comments, in the *Confessions*, about the mercantile approach to acquiring and distributing education. The accusation becomes all the more topical when one considers just how narrow the elite who could afford an education was, and how close Augustine himself came to abandoning his education on account of a lack of funds. In his proposals for Christian education, this concern is transformed into a metaphorical language that emphasizes the necessity of sharing Christian knowledge broadly. Christ's miraculous feeding of the thousands with the multiplied loaves and fishes is even used as a point of comparison, to emphasize that certain goods, like Christian knowledge, are only truly possessed when given away.

Less explicitly focused on social context is Augustine's criticism of the values imparted through secular education. The pursuit of wealth and honor receives particular censure. Even more than these, however, one of the most important means of acquiring

them is condemned, namely the rhetorical skills that were the focus of grammatical and rhetorical education. Augustine especially disapproves of what he perceives as a disordering of right priorities, the excessive esteem for rhetoric at the expense of moral content and truth. Wealth and honor are clearly elitist when held as dominant values, for inherent in them is the separation of the wealthier from less wealthy, and the more honored from the rest. Even within an elite, there must always be a hierarchy of eminence when wealth and honor are the determining characteristics of personal achievement and excellence.

Rhetorical style can also be interpreted as an elitist value, though the connection is not as obvious. Like style in clothing, food, or architecture, however, style can be used as an identifier of elite culture and wealth, especially when the education that imparts it is a prized commodity. Augustine's alternative to the emphasis on style, with his distinction between *res* and *signa*, and the emphatic prioritization of the former, further suggests that the social implications of education are a significant aspect of his preoccupation with the issue. The *res* that he proposes as the focus of Christian education are the content of the *regula fidei*, the basic doctrines of the faith summarized in the creed and memorized by Christians regardless of social class or means. They are taught to the uneducated in catechesis, and the educated must begin their Christian education with them. Indeed, nothing that the Christian learns in scripture adds anything crucial to them, for all of scripture points to them. All Christian education, moreover, has love as its end, and seeks to bind the whole Christian congregation in the love of God and one another. Both the *De Doctrina Christiana* and the *De Catechizandis Rudibus* stress this new approach to Christian education, and both envision all Christians sharing in the

same Christian culture based on Christian literature, the scriptures. Whether he can pursue the task of interpretation like the student envisioned by the former, or must rely on oral teaching like the audience of the latter, they not only share a common foundation, possess the same essentials, and can strive towards the same end, but furthermore, through catechesis and preaching, can share in the educational activity of the most educated Christians.

## Chapter 4 – The Grammarian’s Craft

It is clear, then, that Augustine’s theoretical development of a Christian education builds on the Roman education that he received as a child and young man. Without abandoning Roman traditions of education, he transforms their goals and values to create an educational program fit for the new social context of Christian teaching. Whatever he proposes for his positive model of Christian education answers his criticisms of his own secular education, especially its elitist rhetorical focus. The comparison between Roman education and Christian education at the theoretical level is pervasive and significant. It seems imperative, therefore, to look for the practical application of the same reorientation in Augustine’s teaching, particularly his preaching to a non-elite audience.

We have already seen that Christian teaching properly belongs to a wider public than the highly literate elite who follow the kind of program of studies described in the *De Doctrina Christiana*. That this ideal is to be realized through public speaking is an intent enshrined in the very structure of the work. The books on interpretation are completed by the fourth book on rhetoric, and the locus of this Christian rhetoric is clearly the sermon. In this fourth book, moreover, it is made clear that interpreter (*tractator*) is also teacher (*doctor*).<sup>1</sup> His activity is comparable to that of a secular teacher, like the *docui* by which Augustine describes his own former profession.<sup>2</sup> These interpreters, or expositors (*expositores*), of scripture, moreover, explain the scriptures in

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<sup>1</sup> DDC 4.4.6. *Debet igitur Scripturarum tractator et doctor [...]*

<sup>2</sup> DDC 4.1.2. *rhetorica [...] praecepta quae in scholis saecularibus et didici et docui.*

spoken discourses, or sermons (*sermonibus*).<sup>3</sup> The teacher, the Christian orator (*noster iste eloquens*), belongs to the Church, he is a *virum ecclesiasticum*, and is encouraged to pray before teaching.<sup>4</sup> If Christian teaching is, in Augustine's theory, fulfilled in preaching, and if preaching is directed, as I have argued, to a non-elite audience, it is the ideal place to look for the practical application of Augustine's non-elitist Christian teaching program.

The closest comparison to be made between the practice of the late Roman teacher and Christian teacher involves in particular the exegetical activities of the grammarian and preacher. This might strike the reader as counter-intuitive, since Augustine's secular career was as a teacher of rhetoric, and as preaching is an obviously rhetorical activity. Indeed, the *De Doctrina Christiana* interweaves the two disciplines to the point where scholars debate whether the work is a Christian rhetorical treatise or a program for Christian education, as we have already seen when looking at Augustine's educational theory. The matter of the treatise, however, is explicitly contrasted (and hence compared) with the teaching of both the grammarian and the *rhetor*. When discussing the interpretation of figures, Augustine makes the point that a fuller analysis of the different figures is the task of the grammarian, not his.<sup>5</sup> He likewise distances himself from the activity of the rhetorician, despite the affinity between his instructions for

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<sup>3</sup> DDC 4.8.22. *Non ergo expositores eorum ita loqui debent, tanquam se ipsi exponendos simili auctoritate proponant; sed in omnibus sermonibus suis primitus at maxime ut intelligantur elaborent.*

<sup>4</sup> DDC 4.15.32. *Agit itaque noster iste eloquens, [...] ut orando pro se, ac pro illis quos est allocuturus, sit orator antequam dicitur. [...] facultatem dicendi, ut decet virum ecclesiasticum, comparet.*

<sup>5</sup> DDC 3.29.40.

Quos tamen tropos qui noverunt, agnoscunt in Litteris sanctis, eorumque scientia ad eas intelligendas aliquantum adjuvantur. Sed his eos ignaris tradere non decet, ne artem grammaticam docere videamur. Extra sane ut discantur admoneo.

preaching and rhetorical teaching.<sup>6</sup> Augustine's treatise on education clearly involves both levels of the curriculum. The Christian education with roots in rhetoric, however, is destined for the preacher alone. What the audience of the sermon participates in is the interpretive education of the preacher, the exegetical reading of scripture, made available to them through rhetoric. However indebted to rhetorical devices and theories of rhetoric, preaching did not seek to teach its audience how to speak well, but to understand scripture; this is the Christian education contained in the sermon.

The connection between the two disciplines in Augustine's theory and practice, moreover, should be contextualized by their integration in the Roman curriculum. As we saw in the first chapter, these two facets of education were not entirely separate. Not only was Augustine trained in both disciplines, but even as a *rhetor* he would also have taught grammatical lessons. Rhetorical training began under the grammarian, and reading and interpretation, moreover, did not cease to be taught once the student progressed to the school of rhetoric. Augustine himself describes teaching interpretation as a *rhetor*.<sup>7</sup> These overlapping stages of education, moreover, were integrated to serve a common goal, and the manner of reading texts (with a focus on style) foreshadowed the training in composition that the student later received. Kathy Eden points to another aspect of this integration; she argues that the ancient hermeneutic itself owed much to rhetoric, not only in terms of the skills used when the process of *inventio* turns on a text, but also in the adversarial spirit of much of textual interpretation, exemplified, for

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<sup>6</sup> DDC 4.1.2.

Primo itaque expectationem legentium, qui forte me putant rhetorica daturum esse praecepta quae in scholis saecularibus et didici et docui, ista praelocutione cohibeo, atque ut a me non expectentur, admoneo; non quod nihil habeant utilitatis; sed quod, si quid habent, seorsum discendum est, si cui fortassis bono viro etiam haec vacat discere, non autem a me vel in hoc opere, vel in aliquo alio requirendum.

instance, in a debate over textual meaning in Plato's *Protagoras*.<sup>8</sup> At any rate it is clear that grammar and rhetoric do not, in practice, exist in isolation from one another, and there is no reason to doubt that Augustine should model his teaching activity on that of the grammarian.

While we cannot separate neatly the teaching material of the grammarian and rhetorician, we can nonetheless in theory separate the grammatical and rhetorical activities that are the focus of each stage of education: rhetoric is what pertains to speaking and writing, and grammar what pertains to reading. Thus while we can clearly distinguish that the preacher's material transforms grammatical material in particular, the integration (or confusion) of the two activities in the actual classroom helps to explain why a former rhetorician so easily engages in what is theoretically the activity of the grammarian. A closer examination of the grammarian's craft and the activity of the preacher will show just how comparable they are, allowing us to see Augustine's practical transformation of his secular educational model.

### **The Grammarian's Lesson**

I have already given a general outline of the grammarian's craft, drawing out for special consideration some of the features that influenced Augustine's theoretical development of Christian education. I commented especially on the difficulty of acquiring the literary habits that the grammarian taught, as well as the elitist values implied in his curriculum. We have also seen the general outline of a grammatical lesson, proceeding from *praelectio*, through *lectio*, to *enarratio*. If we are to see how

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<sup>7</sup> *Conf.* 5.7.13; 6.7.12.

Augustine reforms the grammatical model in practice, however, we must look more closely at the practice of grammatical teaching, to discover the affinity between the two; only then will be able to understand the differences, and see how Augustine's preaching applies his theoretical reorientation of secular education.

The lesson, of course, belongs in a context. As we have already looked at the general outline of the grammarian's lesson, the context that remains to be discussed is the physical setting. At the basic level, the classroom setting can be described as a place of some kind where a teacher is faced with a number of young students, not unlike most modern schools. Augustine himself describes this scene in the *Confessions*: he is seated to teach and his students are gathered around him.<sup>9</sup> The classroom itself might have taken any of a variety of shapes. Bonner suggests that there would have been spectrum ranging from the improvised classroom outside (especially at the elementary level) to an officially provided lecture hall, as in the case of Libanius's teaching.<sup>10</sup> Between these two extremes, we can imagine any suitable room being used for teaching: Augustine, for instance, describes teaching in a room of the house where he was staying after his arrival in Rome.<sup>11</sup> For the more general atmosphere of the classroom, we have Augustine's own witness: in Carthage at least the students were decidedly rowdy,<sup>12</sup> and in Rome they felt free to break the contracts they had made with their teachers.<sup>13</sup> There seems to be a degree of freedom of movement, moreover, as when Alypius enters the class, greets

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<sup>8</sup> Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition. Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and its Humanist Reception* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> *Conf.* 6.7.12.

<sup>10</sup> Bonner, 115-25.

<sup>11</sup> *Conf.* 5.12.22.

<sup>12</sup> *Conf.* 5.8.14.

<sup>13</sup> *Conf.* 5.12.22.

Augustine and takes a seat, apparently in the middle of a lesson.<sup>14</sup> As we shall see, this picture of the classroom is not incomparable with the setting of Augustine's Christian teaching.

## Servius

Turning to the teaching itself, we may take as a point of comparison with Augustine the fourth century grammarian Servius. He was born in the 360s or early 370s, only slightly later than Augustine himself, who was born in 354. By the last decade of the century, Servius was teaching at Rome. Among a number of grammatical treatises, he wrote a commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*, his most substantial extant work.<sup>15</sup> It is tempting to imagine that he and Augustine might have met when the latter taught at Rome in 383-384.<sup>16</sup> Regardless of any possible encounter, however, Servius's *In Vergilii Carmina Commentarii* certainly represent the grammatical culture that Augustine's contemporaries would have encountered, and by which he was formed. R.A. Kaster, moreover, regards Servius's commentary as truly representative of the atmosphere and activity of a real classroom:

It is also clear that Servius's commentary [...] is nonetheless the instrument of a teacher. The commentary remains at the level suitable for *pueri* as Servius makes his way word by word and line by line through the text, remarking on punctuation, meter, uncertain readings, myth or other *Realien*, and especially on language. The last category, in fact, dwarfs all the others, occasioning two notes out of every three. Only one note in seven, by contrast, is concerned with the broader mythical and literary background of the poetry, and of this small minority only another small proportion amounts to more than perfunctory references or glosses.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Conf.* 6.7.12.

<sup>15</sup> Kaster, 169.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Kaster, 170.

Servius's commentary, in Kaster's estimation, is exemplary of the general focus of grammatical teaching and the whole Roman curriculum on rhetorical training. The rest of his chapter on Servius expands on the same theme, answering his main question about the grammarian's place and role in society. He attempts to recreate the grammarian's impact on the students, especially as regards the stylistic development he endeavored to encourage in them, and how the authority of texts is mediated by his own authority, to create a normative language for the student. He isolates the kinds of strategies used by the grammarian to this end. A particularly trenchant example is the thin veiling of prescriptive grammar behind descriptive commentary; instead of simply describing the use of grammar in the text, Servius tells the students what it should say, or what they would write.<sup>18</sup>

Though I have already discussed this linguistic orientation of the grammarian's education, his mediatory role needs some further treatment. The need for linguistic mediation derives from a major problem that arises when Virgil is used as a source for correct language: his language is not the language current in the fourth century A.D. As Kaster puts it,

The commentary is often a scene of conflict, between the ancients and "ourselves," between different forms and sources of authority, between the deference owed to the author's prestige and the grammarian's domination of the text. Understanding the commentary means in large part understanding how the grammarian controls such conflicts, and understanding that control requires us to appreciate the sense of authority that the grammarian derives from his institutional niche.<sup>19</sup>

In short, bridging the gap between past and present is a major role of the grammarian, necessary when Virgil is used as a model for a language that no longer conforms to the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 169-97.

same rules. This explains in large part Servius's explanation of apparently deviant (from current grammatical norms) uses of language by Virgil through a number of recurring devices. The dominant strategies are the appeal to figures of speech, the invocation of the requirements of meter, the insertion of prescriptive comments ("this should read...") or the first person plural used to the same effect ("we say..."), and remarks on archaic usage.<sup>20</sup> These comments imply a distance between what Virgil says and what the student should say, but they allow the grammarian to use the ancient text (with reservations) as a source for present usage, as a present possession rather than an ancient relic. Thus Virgil stands as an example of great writing, with the caveat that not all of the language of archaic poetry is appropriate for contemporary prose. The grammarian's commentary, in short, becomes the meeting point between archaic text and present concern. He mediates between the competing authorities of literature and current usage.

Besides offering this insight into Servius's motivation (which will be a key point of comparison between Servius and Augustine), Kaster's summary of the material is useful for its overview of Servius's commentary and the elements that are found in it: mostly it consists of grammatical and lexical comments, but discussions of textual problems, as well as references to mythological and other material are also part of it.

Rather than simply allowing the comparison to stand between this summary and Augustine's sermons, however, I propose to take a sample passage of Servius's commentary (the introductory material and the commentary on lines 1-33 of the first book of the *Aeneid*) to see in more detail how Servius proposes to work and how he develops, in this sample passage, the concerns and issues that Kaster has already led us to

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 176.

expect in grammatical commentary. Remarkably, the commentary is indeed dominated almost entirely by the limited number of types of comment that Kaster identifies. Indeed, it is amazing how easily so a short passage can be analyzed in terms of commonly recurring types of comment: within a few lines the main focus of the commentary is apparent, and recurrences of the same elements in the passage merely allow us to get an idea of the relative importance of various types of comment. The survey of the passage, however, will reveal another focus of the grammarian that will allow us to understand Augustine's practice more clearly: the search for references made in words and expressions.

### **A Grammatical Commentary**

Servius's line-by-line commentary is contextualized by a brief summary of the content of literary studies; they should consider the life of the poet, the title of the work, its quality, the author's intention, and the number and order of books; and comment on the text.<sup>21</sup> This introduction suggests that the teaching of the grammarian has many facets. In fact, however, it is line-by-line commentary that dominates Servius's work. The other elements are treated briefly, but it is nonetheless worth noting their presence, as they too are paralleled in Augustine's preaching.

Servius begins by outlining the life of Virgil: his birthplace, parents, and other works are mentioned, and fuller descriptions are given of his education, the loss of his property after the civil war, his subsequent move to Rome, the patronage of Pollio and Maecenas, and the writing of the *Aeneid*. None of this material detains Servius for more

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 175-83.

than a few sentences. A brief discussion of the title follows: the work is called *Aeneis* derived from *nomen Aenea*. A brief discussion of analogous derivations introduces a device Servius uses frequently in his commentary, the use of analogy to demonstrate or justify a use of language in the text. He then asserts the quality of the work with a concise and uncritical remark, supported by a discussion of the meter of the poem<sup>22</sup>. The theme is elaborated somewhat with a discussion of the suitability of the meter to the content and the use of the grand style. The purpose of Virgil's work is stated even more summarily than some of the other matter, as imitation of Homer and praise of Augustus.<sup>23</sup> This concise declaration of the poet's intent is supplemented only by a discussion of Augustus lineage, which connects him to Aeneas. The number and order of the books are dismissed as too obvious to be worth discussing, except to say that the chronology of the events are no grounds to question the received order of the books.

Clearly these aspects of literary studies, though they open the work, are peripheral to the grammarian's work. The author, title, quality, intent and books of the work are addressed in just a few pages, or a few lines each. The focus is on the commentary, which follows and is the substantial part of the work.<sup>24</sup> It is in the commentaries of Servius and Augustine that we should look for the main points of comparison between their teaching-practices. As we shall see, however, even the elements of Servius's preface are found transformed in Augustine's preaching when they can serve his ends.

I will begin my examination of the commentary on Virgil's text by working through the first four lines, because as well as demonstrating the sequential development

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<sup>21</sup> Servius, *Praef. In exponendis auctoribus haec consideranda sunt: poetae vita, titulus operis, qualitas carminis, scribentis intentio, numerus librorum, ordo librorum, explanatio.*

<sup>22</sup> Servius, *Praef. qualitas carminis patet; nam est metrum heroicum et actus mixtus.*

of Servius's commentary, they allow us see how quickly and distinctly his main exegetical devices and focus can be discerned. I will then observe the recurrence of the same elements in lines 5-33, organizing my findings more categorically, in order to draw out the relative importance of the different kinds of comments, and hence the overall focus of the passage.

Servius's commentary begins with the identification of a trope, *metonomia*, which explains the use of *arma* for *bellum*. Already Servius invokes the authority of analogy: Cicero used *arma* for *bellum*, and *toga* for *pax*. He also offers an alternate explanation (*alii [...] accipiunt*) that suggests that the *arma* are actually Aeneas's divinely given armor. Already we see one distinct characteristic of the commentary: its interest in atomic particles of the text. Individual words (sometimes syllables or letters) are the focus of exegesis. Indeed, the following comment takes the reader only a word further, and the commentary on the first line alone occupies a third of the space given to all the prefatory material. The next word is explained with the first as a *figura*, since *Arma Virumque* introduces the ideas in the reverse order from their development in the poem. Again, the use of the figure is demonstrated from other authors. Its acceptability even in prose (implied in the earlier case by the citation of Cicero) is underlined.<sup>25</sup> Already Servius's focus on current usage is apparent. Just as Kaster suggests, he is using the text as an example for the students' own language, here using the prescriptive indicative that Kaster describes, mediating between the reading of poetry and prose composition. The figure, moreover, already appears as a dominant tool, having been appealed to already in

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<sup>23</sup> Servius, *Praef. intentio Vergilii haec est, Homerum imitari et Augustum laudare a parentibus*.

<sup>24</sup> Servius, *Praef. sola superest explanatio, quae in sequenti expositione probabitur*.

<sup>25</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.1. *hac autem figura etiam in prosa utimur*.

the commentary on two words. Indeed, in discussing an alternate reading, he identifies these two words as yet another figure, a *hyperbaton*. Already in the commentary on two words, then, Servius's focus and his limited and repetitive store of exegetical explanations begin to be apparent.

The next comment concerns the referent of *virum*: it is Aeneas. *Cano* occasions a semantic comment: it is a *polysemus sermo*, with a laudatory, prayerful or musical sense, the last being its meaning in the present passage. Servius continues with a historical and geographical comment, attempting to explain how Aeneas can be said to be the first to have reached the shores of Italy, when later in the poem Antenor is said to have founded an earlier settlement there. The answer lies in the fact that the part where Antenor landed was not at the time considered part of Italy. A grammatical point follows, explaining the absence (against the rules of grammar) of a preposition before *Italiam*, as well as the lengthened *i* (for metrical purposes) in the same. Poetic license is invoked for the former, and it too is named a figure. *Fato* occasions two comments: its double grammatical referent is noted, as is its emphasis on Aeneas's qualities, it being fate, not desert, that causes him to flee. Historical and literary examples help Servius to explain the meaning and implications of the words *profugus*. More geographical commentary explains why the word *Lavina* is used rather than *Lavinia*. Another lexical comment explains that *litera* can be used to designate the *terra* around it as well. The commentary continues by justifying the use of *ille* on account of metric necessity. *At et terris iactatus et alto*, its reference to the main narrative of the poem is explained. The *vi superum* is explained in terms of the mythology and narrative that it refers to, as well as its an implicit defense of the Trojans, in the same way that *fato* helped build the upright character of Aeneas.

Finally *saeva* is glossed as *magna*, and its use explained as an archaism: *saevam dicebant veteres magnam*.

This condensation of the first four lines shows how the commentary develops each line into a lengthy discussion. It is immediately striking how much commentary can be occasioned by a few words. As Servius progresses line by line, phrase by phrase and even word by word through the text, any unit of text, however small, can detain his attention, leading to a commentary that is strikingly disjunctive. Looking at these lines sequentially underlines the fact that there is no overarching theme or argument to bring unity to the commentary. Instead, it is an assembly of comments on particles of meaning, with little attention to the poem as a whole (except for a few references to other parts of the narrative). What does bring some cohesion to the commentary, however, is the limited number of exegetical devices are repeated already in this short passage, and will be again in the continuation of the passage. Already, moreover, the focus that Kaster describes is discernible, with language and linguistic concerns at the fore: what do words mean, what do they refer to, why are they used in a given form and with a given sense? The authority of classical authors is implicit in Servius's appeal to analogous cases of usage in other authors or works, as well as in his use of the text as a source for correct usage. The content of the comments can be summarized as concerning the use of language (in the remarks on tropes, figures, definitions, meter, and poetic license), or broader references, (whether geographical, historical, mythological, or to the main narrative of the poem).

The disjunctive quality of the commentary is patent, but analysis of the repeated types of explanation offered reveals the unity of purpose that lies beneath the surface. A

categorical examination of the rest of the passage shows just how much the focus on language and the mediation between literature and composition dominates the work of the grammarian. The presence of figures, for instance, is used again and again to explain a use of grammar that the student would not expect to read or employ in his own writing. *Latio* is explained as a figure, the dative used for an accusative with preposition (the expected phrasing is introduced by *hoc est*, or “that is,” clearly implying that the latter is the normative grammar).<sup>26</sup> When he goes to explain a similar case, *venturum excidio*, he similarly explains *ad excidium. nota figura*.<sup>27</sup> *Volvere casus* is explained as *figura hypallage*, standing for *casibus volvi*, and the figure itself is explained.<sup>28</sup> The missing *quam* or *hanc* in *Tyrii tenuere coloni* is explained as an *expegesin*.<sup>29</sup> The substitution of *illic* for *hic* is explained as a *figura creberrima*, and the use of *adverbium pro adverbio*.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, *tenditque fovetque* is said *figurate*, and the commentary explains that it was the plan for Carthage, and not its actual rule, that Juno nurtured.<sup>31</sup> *Ductum* is explained as standing in for *ductum ire*, and while it is not explicitly named a *figura*, it obviously falls in the same category as *illic pro hic, adverbium pro adverbio*.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, *late regem* is described as being used *nomen pro participio*, for *late reganturum*.<sup>33</sup> Another *figura*, *antonomasia*, is used to explain Saturnia (its alternate explanation as an *epitheton* is refuted), since it is used without the proper noun that would make it an *epitheton*.<sup>34</sup> The *figura* is clearly a convenient device for explaining any unexpected element in the text.

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<sup>26</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.6.

<sup>27</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.22.

<sup>28</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.9.

<sup>29</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.12.

<sup>30</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.16.

<sup>31</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.18.

<sup>32</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.19.

<sup>33</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.21.

Sometimes a specific label, such as *expegesin* or *antonomasia* is named, but for the most part a figure simply signals unexpected grammar. The explanation of *arma* as a trope, and the comment on the apparent inconsistency of Juno tending a nonexistent power are the exception, seeking the meaning beyond the literal expression. By far the most common type of figure cited is grammatical, explaining missing prepositions, unusual noun cases, substituted parts of speech, etc. Notably there is nowhere any comment that would help the student appreciate or understand the impulse that led the poet to chose a particular phrasing, something one would expect if the focus were on literary criticism. Instead Servius always presents an alternate phrasing, the expected or correct form of the word or phrase. Considered in aggregate, the comments present a cohesive message, the same one which Kaster suggested: they make a unmistakable distinction between the poetic diction and normative language for the student.

The mediation between ancient and modern is perhaps most explicit in the comments on archaisms, which signal elements of Virgil's grammar (once again the emphasis is on linguistic usage) that are no longer acceptable. We have already seen *saeva* explained as having the meaning of *magna* in archaic use, and the type of comment is repeated a number of times in our passage. At *unde genus*, for instance, Servius notes that older authors would use *unde* to refer to people.<sup>35</sup> The *expegesin* in *tyrii tenuere coloni*, is further explained as a typically archaic use of the figure.<sup>36</sup> Finally, *dives opum* is also tagged an archaism.<sup>37</sup> The remarks on archaic usage are not quite as frequent in our passage as those on figures, but their recurrence is significant, and they serve the

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<sup>34</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.23.

<sup>35</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.6. *sed veteres 'unde' etiam ad personam applicabant.*

same end even more explicitly; they clearly identify the separation between the text and the language used by student. Again too they witness to the linguistic preoccupations of the grammarian, and make his mediating role apparent.

If the comments on archaisms highlight the distance between old and current, those on figures sought also to bridge the gap between poetry and prose. The latter is made overt in the grammarian's recourse to metric necessity and poetic license, of which we saw examples in the opening passage. Again they work to distinguish between the language that is allowed in the poetry that is read and that expected in the student's prose composition, for it is metric necessity (absent in the student's writing) that drives (and excuses) the poet's use of incorrect grammar. The type of comment is frequent. Virgil's use of double conjunction in *Multa quoque et bello passus* is contrary to normative language, but excusable in poetry.<sup>38</sup> Poetic license does not apply to grammar alone, however, and lexical allowances can also be made, as when *prima* is explained as meaning *princeps*.<sup>39</sup> Servius explicitly calls this example a *licentia*. As we saw with *Italiam*, moreover, occasionally the poet is allowed to lengthen a syllable for the sake of meter. Likewise, a *syncope* is allowed in the case of the shortening of *repostum*,<sup>40</sup> and *reliquias* is noted to have doubled the *l*.<sup>41</sup> Once again we see an explicit emphasis on what should be found in prose. A final comment of the type notes that *Achilli* has lost its final *s* for the sake of poetic euphony. Once again, then, we see a focus on language,

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<sup>36</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.12. *amant namque antiqui per expegesin dicere quod nos interposito pronomine exprimimus.*

<sup>37</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.14. *modo tantum dives dicimus, antiqui adiungebant cuius rei.*

<sup>38</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.5. *sane duas coniunctiones separatas naturaliter nemo coniungit. sed hoc plerumque a poetis causa metri fit.*

<sup>39</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.24. *nam poeta plerumque significationem nominum dat participiis, vel contra.*

<sup>40</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.26.

<sup>41</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.30. *nam in prosa reliquias dicimus.*

apparently directed at developing the student's rhetorical skills.

The focus of the commentary is clearly on grammar. Indeed, though I have not exhausted the comments on the subject, its primacy among the grammarian's concerns is obvious. We have seen an occasional note that points to something beyond the signifier to the meaning of words, however, or even meaning beyond the text. There are more comments of the sort in the passage, and they contribute to a slightly more nuanced impression of the grammarian's craft. One of these kinds, lexical analysis, still involves linguistic concerns, but is connected with a broader interest in the references of the text, whether mythological, historical, or narrative, that does become apparent in some of the comments in the passage.

The work of defining words certainly stands out in the commentary, whether it entails extended discussion of definitions (as we saw with *cano* and *saeva*), etymologies, or merely glosses of words. Glosses are a frequent and simple version of the lexical comment: Servius simply defines a word through a synonym of its sense in the passage. Thus *longe* is glossed as *valde*,<sup>42</sup> *fertur* as *dicitur*,<sup>43</sup> *olim* as *quandoque*,<sup>44</sup> *Libyae* as *Carthaginis*,<sup>45</sup> *alta* as *secreta* or *recondita*,<sup>46</sup> *rapti* as *stuprati*,<sup>47</sup> *arcebat* as *prohibebat*,<sup>48</sup> and *molis* as *difficultas*.<sup>49</sup> Related to these are a few more elaborate discussions of a word's etymology, at *urbs*,<sup>50</sup> *Tyrias arces*,<sup>51</sup> and *Libya*.<sup>52</sup> More extensive discussions of

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<sup>42</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.13.

<sup>43</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.15.

<sup>44</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.20.

<sup>45</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.22.

<sup>46</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.26.

<sup>47</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.28.

<sup>48</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.31.

<sup>49</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.33.

<sup>50</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.12. *urbs dicta ab orbe, quod antiquae civitates in orbem fiebant; vel ab urvo, parte aratri, quo muri designabantur.*

definitions are the least frequent type of lexical comment, though we have seen it already in the beginning of the commentary, and encounter it again with the discussion of *dum*, its three possible meanings, and the implication of each for understanding the reference in *dum conderet urbem* to the rest of the narrative.<sup>51</sup> Lexical analysis belongs somewhere between Servius's grammatical concerns and a broader interest in literature. The glosses seem aimed at helping the reader understand the text more than the other comments we have seen so far. One can imagine that students might have real difficulties with some of Virgil's vocabulary. Still, they do not involve much beyond linguistic concerns, since there is little to encourage the student to go beyond the form of the text to understand its fuller meaning or significance. The interest of the grammarian remains at the level of the basic referent of the text. The discussion of *dum* goes a little further into the meaning of the work as a whole, since a correct identification of the narrative referent of the phrase depends on the meaning of *dum*. The word is at least understood in relation to the rest of the text. Etymology also causes the reader to consider some knowledge beyond grammatical expression. They have little to do with the text, however, and what is considered is hardly more than disjointed curiosities, whose relevance to the text lies only in the use of the word. It is hard to imagine, moreover, that these comments would be of assistance to the reader, since the words are so common. The text seems no more than an

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<sup>51</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.20. '*arces*' autem ab eo quod est arceo dictae, quia inde hostes arcentur; et arcus, genus teli, quod huius ministerio sagittae arceant hostem. sane per confusionem verbi et nimis dictum est; nam '*arces*' est verbum, arceo arces, cum non sit nomen.

<sup>52</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.22. dicta autem Libya vel quod inde libs flat, hoc est africanus, vel ut Varro ait, quasi ΛΙΒΥΙΑ, id est egens pluviae.

<sup>53</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.5. DUM CONDERET URBEM tres hic sunt significations. Aut enim Troiam dicit, quam ut primum Italiam venit, fecit Aeneas, de qua ait castrorum in morum pinnis atque aggere cingit et alio loco Mercurius nec te Troia capit – Troiam autem dici quam primum fecit Aeneas, et Livius in primo et Cato in originibus testantur – dum enim haec fieret, ad agrestibus propter vulneratum cervum regium mota sunt bella: aut Laurolavinium, et significant '*dum*' donec; tam diu ad tempus faciendae civitatis veniret, id est donec Turnus occumberet: aut Romam, et est sensus dummodo conderet urbem.

excuse for the grammarian's demonstration of his lexical knowledge, the interest of etymology being inherent in the linguistic history. The discussion of *arces*, finally, brings us back to the question of grammar, for Servius points out that it derives from the confusion of the verb *arceo* and the noun *arcus*. Servius's lexical commentary, in short, while demonstrating some interest beyond grammar and correct usage, hardly advances the student's understanding and appreciation of any deeper significance in the literature that he is reading.

One more type of commentary is common. It contextualizes the text within the broader context of its narrative, and even more broadly in the geographical, historical and mythological framework that is the cultural context of the particular poem. The geographical and historical precisions (the two are here treated together, for they intersect when Servius discusses historical geography) can mostly be described as clarifications of the referent behind the text. At *Latium*, for instance, Servius argues that the poet writes *veteresque Latini* (in fact a misremembering of the text) to specify that Virgil arrived in the older of two parts of Latium.<sup>54</sup> At *Albanique Patres* he discusses the uncertainty about the identity of Ascanius's (the founder of Alba) father, the reason for the plural.<sup>55</sup> At *Italiam contra* Servius again explains how the words of the poet bring precision to his statement: since Italy has three sides, the poet specifies where Aeneas landed by adding *contra Tiberina ostia*.<sup>56</sup> At *progenium* he notes that there is some ambiguity: the historical referent might be the Romans generally, or more specifically Scipio.<sup>57</sup> At *Tyrias Arces*, he discusses the foundation of Carthage by the Tyrii, in order to explain

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<sup>54</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.6.

<sup>55</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.7.

<sup>56</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.13.

how the name refers to Carthage.<sup>58</sup> The common interest in these comments is the meaning of the text, beyond the meaning of individual words, and the poet's indirect way of expressing it. Servius provides the reader with the geographical and historical knowledge necessary for deciphering the poet's meaning. The grammarian moves beyond his concern with grammar, but as with his lexical analysis there is little interest in the poem as a whole or its deeper meaning and significance. It is the meaning of individual expressions that concerns the commentator, whether that is elucidated through lexical analysis or a contextualization within a larger body of knowledge.

Mythical references are given a similar treatment. Sometimes the comments are tangential, as when Virgil's mention of the Muses occasions a discussion of their number, with alternate suggestions offered.<sup>59</sup> Often, however, they clarify what Virgil is referring to, for instance when Servius argues that a possible interpretation of *quo numine* is that she has several *numina*, recognized in her other mythological representations. At *currus* Servius comments on possible identifications of the chariot as one used in battle (with Homer as an authority for her use of one), or a chariot used in ritual.<sup>60</sup> At *audierat* he discusses the author of the divination that Juno heard: it was either Jove or the Fates, since they alone have that power.<sup>61</sup> Even these comments, however, though they complement the information given by Virgil, offer little assistance with reading the text. The clarification they offer is hardly crucial for understanding the text, for the text is not making allusion to the facts that Servius informs us about. The comments, then, seem more or less tangential. Where Virgil does make a potentially confusing allusion,

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<sup>57</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.18.

<sup>58</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.20.

<sup>59</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.8.

however, the mythological context is more usefully provided by the grammarian. At *caris argis*, for instance, Servius expands on the text, discussing Juno's love for them, which is *omnibus notum*.<sup>62</sup> At *iudicium paridis*, he quickly relates the mythological tale of that judgment.<sup>63</sup> He also discusses the reference to mythology in *et genus invisum* and *Ganymedes honores*.<sup>64</sup> Like the historical and geographical comments, then, those on mythology help decipher the meaning of Virgil's text, though this particular set of comments included a number that were more or less tangential. At any rate, they can be seen to form a larger type that seeks to clarify the references made in the text, and again there is no attempt to underline the unity of the text.

We may note, finally, a set of similar comments, on references to historical or mythological material found in other parts of the text, rather than outside it. We saw some already in the first lines of the commentary. Again at *multa quoque et bello passus* Servius identifies this war as that against Turnus, which we find described later in the *Aeneid*.<sup>65</sup> I have already noted how the discussion of *dum* explores its possible relationship to other parts of the poem, depending on the sense in which it is taken. Servius also supports the characterization of Aeneas as *insignem pietate virum* with a reference to his piety in carrying out his father and *penates* when escaping Troy, also found in the subsequent narrative.<sup>66</sup> At *causae irarum* he explicitly comments on preceding narrative.<sup>67</sup> These comments do not differ much from the types we have

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<sup>60</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.17.

<sup>61</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.20.

<sup>62</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.24,

<sup>63</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.27.

<sup>64</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.28.

<sup>65</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.5.

<sup>66</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.10.

<sup>67</sup> Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.25. *nunc de praeteritis loquitur.*

already seen. The focus is once more on identifying the correct referent of the text. Perhaps here, more than in the others, there is some recognition of the unity of the poem. The comments at least suggest that the lines commented on belong in a larger whole. Still, there is no discussion of the progress of the poem, nor does the place of the passage in the poem seem any more significant than its place in the context of shared cultural knowledge. The individual lines and phrases are merely shown to allude to other parts of the whole, and the comments fail to draw out the narrative structure that makes the poem a whole.

This overview of Servius's commentary on the first 33 lines of Virgil's *Aeneid* has given us a good sense of the characteristics and focus of the grammarian's craft. For economy of words, I have passed over a number of grammatical points of various sorts, since the type is amply represented in the comments we have observed. There are also more comments on references of various sorts, and some comments really fall into several categories, though I have focused only on their dominant aspect. Nonetheless, the nature of Servius's commentary is quite clear. The most striking feature of Servius's discussion of the *Aeneid* is his overwhelming focus on small segments of text, with little regard for the poem as a whole, as he proceeds through it line by line. This is most blatant in the comments on grammar or semantics, where he focuses on individual words, letters, and even syllables. Even the comments on context, however, are decidedly disjunctive, with little concern for the development of the poem or the flow of the texts. There is no discussion of the nature or quality of the poem beside the opening remark that its quality is patent. Underlying this disjunctive approach, however, are the unifying forces that allow it to be summarized as the manifestation of a few basic concerns.

Servius works with a finite store of interpretive strategies that can be seen to derive from two major underlying principles: the mediation between literature that is read and the student's composition, and the attempt to access the meaning of the text. The first drives his concern with language, especially grammar, as the grammarian works through the text, using a number of strategies to explain and excuse the poet's language when it does not conform to correct current usage, tacitly reinforcing the student's perception of what that correct grammar is. Thus Servius explains the poet's grammar and language by identifying it as a *figura*, an archaism, or simply poetic license (especially when necessitated by meter). Another strategy that I noted at the beginning is the appeal to analogous cases as an authority for Virgil's phrasing. Indeed, this occurs again and again in the commentary, and I only omitted further mention of it because it is so pervasive that it occurs with nearly every other type of comment. When found with a grammatical comment, it bolsters the authority of literature as a source for correct usage, for when mediated by Servius, the *Aeneid* joins the corpus of canonical literature as an authority for correct usage. In these respects, the impression of Servius's work given by Kaster is confirmed.

Another key motivation driving Servius, however, is the search for meaning, which takes him beyond the interest in the form of language and the mediation between reading and writing. The most common manifestation of this aspect of Servius is the gloss, which also shows the level at which this quest operates. As he defines words, he is interested in the basic meaning of the texts, especially its individual words. The relationship between the signifier and signified, in other words, is more or less straightforward, though occasionally some poetic diction needs explaining. With

etymology, moreover, the focus is occasionally even more clearly on the word itself, when the comment offers little to an understanding of the text. The search for meaning embraces a broader scope with the explanation of references in the text, but the basic interest is still the same: the search for the basic meaning of individual (and unconnected) segments of text. Thus lexical analysis and the commentary on geographical, historical and mythological references can be seen to fall into the same basic category of comments whose purpose is to bring out the meaning of the text. Like the comments on grammar, the search for meaning brings some unity to the apparently disjunctive commentary. This unity derives from the constant preoccupation of the grammarian, however, not his perception of unity in the text.

As we shall see, Augustine takes the same approaches to text, but his exegesis introduces a drastic change to these strategies, in line with his educational theory. He moves away from the focus on language, to a focus on the *res* instead of the *signa*. The apparent disjunction of his exegesis, moreover, is resolved in the unity of the *res* signified in the scripture. Thus his unifying preoccupation is also a perceived unifying force of the text. Since the *res* is the substance of the *regula fidei*, his mediation of the text, by which he presents these *res* to his audience, becomes the point of contact between his non-elite audience and Christian literary culture, transforming another key strategy of the grammarian to suit his Christian teaching.

## Chapter 5 – Augustine’s Teaching in the Sermons

We may turn, finally, to Augustine’s preaching, to see how his sermons adapt in practice the grammatical model, and how they reflect his theoretical approach to education. I will begin by sketching in outline the context and general character of Augustine’s preaching, to show how the audience might have recognized the kinship between the two activities (Augustine’s own association of the two activities, as we have seen, is manifest in the *De Doctrina Christiana*). A closer examination of a few sermons will illustrate more clearly the similarity between the two activities. It will also allow us to see, however, the differences between grammatical culture and Augustine’s preaching, and how thoroughly Augustine applies his emphasis on content (especially the *regula fidei*) to his preaching, making his preaching a more accessible version of the grammatical lecture.

### The Context of the Sermon

The similarities between grammatical teaching and Augustine’s preaching begin with their respective contexts, both the physical setting and the framework of activities within which the sermon is found. The physical setting of the sermon is of course the Church, in Augustine’s case the *Basilica Pacis*, most probably the same basilica that has been excavated in Hippo. We have already had occasion to note its size in the attempt to determine the size and social composition of Augustine’s audience. It was certainly much grander than one imagines a classroom, at least than the room Augustine describes teaching in when first in Italy, though its likeness to the classroom of an imperially

appointed teacher was no doubt closer. Its nave (the *quadratum populi*) was a rectangle measuring about 40 meters by 18.5 meters, divided into a central nave that was 9 meters wide, with sections measuring 4.75 meters on either side. These sections were separated by rows of columns. Several much smaller rooms opened from the side of the basilica, including the baptistery. These, however, do not belong to the story of the sermon, but to other aspects of the liturgy. At the center of the narrow end of the basilica (which was directed almost due eastward), however, was an apse, 8.5 meters wide and 7 meters deep.<sup>1</sup> In this apse was the Cathedra (the Episcopal chair) from which Augustine preached. It was raised up a few steps from the amphitheatre-like benches that lined the curve of the apse, upon which the other clergy sat. Sometimes Augustine stood on the top step to make himself heard to a large audience, who stood (no seats were provided) in the main *quadratum* of the Church, males apparently separated from females.<sup>2</sup> Despite the difference in dimensions, there is a parallel with the classroom setting. The teacher or preacher stands or sits at the front of a room, while the students sit or stand in a group in front of him. There is also evidence that the atmosphere was no more controlled than in the grammatical classroom; for Augustine and other preachers of his time, noise was apparently a recurring problem.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, the similarities between the two physical contexts are not overwhelming, indeed the grandeur of the basilica might remind one more of the baths or a theatre, and occasions for public speaking naturally lend themselves to a similar set up of speaker and audience. Combined with the more

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<sup>1</sup> Gui, 346-49, Erwan Marec, *Monuments chrétiens d'Hippone: ville épiscopale de saint Augustin* (Paris: Arts et Matiers Graphiques, 1958) 23-31.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre-Thomas Camelot, "Saint Augustin prédicateur," *La Vie Spirituelle* 140 (1986): 73, Roy Joseph. Deferrari, "Saint Augustine's Method of Composing and Delivering Sermons," *American Journal of Philology* 43 (1922): 198, Van der Meer, 21-23.

extensive similarities between the two activities (as well as the activities that surround them), however, the physical setting itself can at least become suggestive of a classroom, and if a classroom, a very magnificent one indeed, in itself a significant experience for a largely uneducated audience.

More compelling, however, is the likeness between classroom activities and the liturgical setting of the sermon. The sermon belonged to the first part of the service, which began with a scriptural reading by a young lector. A psalm followed, sung either by a soloist (with the congregation joining in a refrain), or antiphonally, with the congregation divided into parts that sang alternate verses of the psalm. A deacon then read the Gospel, after which a sermon was preached. The first part of the service was open to all. After the sermon, however, only the baptized were allowed to remain. The catechumens were given sacramental bread and salt and dismissed. The baptized remained, turned their attention to the altar that stood in a square enclosure (the *cancelli*) in the nave. From there the priest led prayers, leading up to the Eucharist. Between prayers an offering was taken up (including provisions of wine and bread for communion). The congregation's part in the service included acclamations sung in response to the celebrant and the recital of the Lord's Prayer before partaking of the mysteries. Psalms and hymns were also sung at various points in the service. After communion, all were dismissed and left the Church.<sup>4</sup>

It is not hard to imagine that a preacher (or a member of his audience) should see a likeness between the first part of the service and a grammatical lesson. In both, the

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<sup>3</sup> N. Adkin, "A Problem in the Early Church. Noise during Sermon and Lesson," *Mnemosyne* 38 (1985): 161-63.

<sup>4</sup> Van der Meer, 389-402.

basic outline is the same: a text is read aloud and an interpretive lecture given.<sup>5</sup> Of course there are notable differences. In the church, the *lector* alone reads the appointed text, since the aim of the exercise is not to teach the congregation how to read. Since they are not expected to participate in the *lectio* expect aurally, moreover, the preliminaries to reading (the *praelectio*) can also be dispensed with.<sup>6</sup> Only the reader had to prepare for the liturgy by sorting out any textual problems; deciphering sentences, correct pronunciation, inflection, and the length of syllables; and inserting of punctuation, as outlined for the independent reader in the *De Doctrina Christiana*.<sup>7</sup> The work of deciphering script, which demands the experience gained through years of study (and at great expense) was done for the congregation, and without even basic literacy they could participate in the reading of literature. The sermon, moreover, provided them with the opportunity to participate in an exegetical activity that reflects the *enarratio* of the classroom, providing a direct (and costless) route to as full an experience of literature as possible. The similarities between the basic structures of a grammatical education and the liturgical act (despite the differences) are similar enough to suggest that both preacher and congregation might associate the two activities, and see the sermon (and preceding readings) as a new kind of grammatical lesson, available without requiring previous education, which was too costly for most. That Augustine made the connection is clear,

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Alexandre Olivar, "Quelques remarques historiques sur la prédication comme action liturgique dans l'Église ancienne," *Mélanges liturgiques offerts à B. Botte* (Louvain: 1972) 430-32. Olivar notes the close association of these elements (reading scripture and preaching) in the liturgical acts of the early Church. At occasions other than the celebration of the Eucharist the same pattern was followed closely.

<sup>6</sup> Cf., however, Joseph T. Lienhard, "Reading the Bible and Learning to Read: The Influence of Education on St. Augustine's Exegesis," *Augustinian Studies* 27 (1996): 13-14. If the tasks involved in *praelectio* and *lectio* were not explicitly part of the liturgical act, they nonetheless shape the preachers approach to the text, as Lienhard points out in discussing the textual analysis in Augustine's sermons.

<sup>7</sup> *DDC* 3.2.2-4.8.

as we have already seen, in the *De Doctrina Christiana*.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, to fully realize Augustine's appropriation and transformation of the grammatical lecture, we must look at the content of his sermons, and see how exactly they compare with and differ from the kind of commentary outlined in the previous chapter on Servius.

### **Types of Sermons and the Genre of Preaching**

If the similarity between contexts is compelling, the internal structure of the sermons suggests even more strongly a generic comparison between preaching and grammatical teaching. It is important to note, however, that preaching (like teaching) was an entirely oral genre. Augustine did not write out his sermons. He prepared by reflecting on the passage, and then preached extempore. Occasionally, he was denied even that preparation, for instance when the lector read the wrong passage (and Augustine preached on it instead of the prepared passage) or when he had a change of mind. The written versions that are extant were taken down by stenographers and published without revisions.<sup>9</sup> Servius's commentary, on the other hand, while reflective of the grammarian's classroom activity, was a written commentary. There are respects, therefore, in which the two are quite different. Servius, for instance, is more regular in his approach to the text, and progresses through at a relatively even (if slow) pace

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<sup>8</sup> The comparison has not gone unheeded in modern scholarship. See *e.g.* Van der Meer, 338, Pontet, 196-98, Marrou, 428-29, G. Wright Doyle, "Augustine's Sermonic Method," *Westminster Theological Journal* 39 (1976-77): 234, Lienhard: 7-22. Lienhard in particular draws the influence of grammatical practices on Augustine's preaching, such as the concentration on individual words, the concerns that arise out of reading ancient manuscripts aloud (especially the textual problems that need to be resolved before the text is read), and the use of other texts to explain the one commented on. Much as I will argue in this chapter, he sees the sermon as a transformation of *enarratio*. As he discusses *iudicium* (the critical evaluation of texts that was also part of grammatical reading), he suggests that the grammarian's focus on aesthetic qualities has turned into a pastoral or theological concern. Lienhard does not address my main point however, that the change in social context is a decisive transformation in the preacher's approach to and use of grammatical culture.

<sup>9</sup> Deferrari: 97-123, 93-220.

through the text. Augustine's progress, on the other hand, often focuses more closely on especially striking passages, or digresses on salient themes. Partly, as I will argue, this reflects his deliberate attitude to interpretation, but no doubt it is also occasioned by the more spontaneous nature of his preaching.

Besides the difference between written and oral commentary, the large body of sermons and the generic variations within Augustine's preaching add to the difficulty of comparing grammatical commentary and preaching. The number of extant sermons can be reckoned as high as 900, depending how one counts. Among these are several running commentaries on scripture. The *Tractatus in Iohannem* contain 124 commentaries, though there is debate whether all represent actual sermons: the first 53 certainly are sermons.<sup>10</sup> Another series of ten sermons forms a running commentary on the first Epistle of St. John. Finally there are the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 200 commentaries on the psalms, some full sermons, others briefer notes on a psalm. These, like the other running commentaries, were compiled by Augustine himself, and the sermons were edited for publication.<sup>11</sup> While they do not, therefore, represent Augustine's actual preaching as closely as the sermons taken down by stenographers, they nonetheless show how one type of sermon reflected (at least in Augustine's mind) the grammatical classroom. In collecting and publishing these sermons, Augustine chose to represent his own teaching as a continuous commentary on a literary work, much like the work of the grammarian. The larger body of sermons was left unedited by Augustine, and falls into

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<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Doyle: 215-18, Coleen Hoffman Gowans, *The Identity of the True Believer in the Sermons of Augustine of Hippo: a Dimension of his Christian Anthropology* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1998) 5, Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church 2, The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) 348.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Fiedrowicz, "General Introduction," *Exposition of the Psalms*, ed. John E. Rotelle, vol. 15 (New York: New City Press, 2000) 14-15.

four major groups. There are more exegetical sermons (*De Scripturis*, on the Old and New Testaments), as well as sermons on liturgical seasons (*De Tempore*), on saints (*De Sanctis*) and on various subjects (*De Diversis*). The exegetical sermons are the largest group, by far if the running commentaries are included.<sup>12</sup> Their likeness to grammatical exegesis is also the closest. As we shall see however, not only are the scriptures constantly referred to in all of Augustine's sermons, but others besides the ostensibly exegetical sermons are also heavily influenced by the form of grammatical commentary.

The distinctions between the types of sermon (preached on different types of occasion) help to explain the range of generic models found in the sermons, and their oral composition and delivery further explains their irregular character. Certainly as a rule the exegetical sermons are more indebted in their structure to the grammatical model. If Augustine's publication of sermons in running commentaries shows most clearly his deliberate association of the grammar and preaching, however, the spontaneity of his composition allows another dimension of the connection to come to the fore. Even as Augustine works within a different kind of sermon (for instance the discussion of a set theme), his preaching often resolves into line-by-line commentary, as if this were the normative method of preaching to which he conforms even subconsciously. The close association of the two genres becomes all the more telling for the spontaneity with which structural similarities are developed in individual sermons.

A sampling of sermons shows how this impulse to teach like a grammarian guides Augustine's preaching. Sermon 116 on a passage from the Gospel of St. Luke is a good

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<sup>12</sup> George Lawless, "Augustine of Hippo as Preacher," *Saint Augustine the Bishop. A Book of Essays*, eds. Fannie Lemoine and Christopher Kleinhenz (New York & London: Garland, 1994) 13-15, Alexandre Olivar, "L'objet de l'homilétique patristique," *La Maison-Dieu* 177 (1989): 23-30.

example of the deliberate structuring of the sermon as a line-by-line commentary in the grammatical tradition. Two sermons on themes (223J on the Easter Vigil and 350B on Almsgiving), on the other hand, show the use of an alternative model, almost entirely divorced from that tradition. Three sermons on saints (280, 275 and 299D), finally, demonstrate the use of the grammatical model in three quite different ways, within three sermons on a very similar theme, which are not ostensibly exegetical sermons.

### **An Exegetical Sermon on the Gospel**

The subject of Sermon 116 is the Gospel story recounting Christ's appearance to the apostles after his resurrection, from Luke 24:36-47. It is a very good example of how Augustine adopts and adapts the grammatical tradition of commentary. I will focus on the transformation of its model later in the chapter, for the present I wish only to show how closely its structure reflects grammatical commentary.

Servius's commentary, as we have seen, begins (after the prefatory material) with the beginning of the *Aeneid*, and continues through it, commenting on every phrase and even individual words. Likewise, Augustine begins with the first line of the passage that had just been read, which he paraphrases, dwelling for special comment on Christ's opening greeting to his disciples, and the significance of the word *salutavit*. He paraphrases the words that lead to Christ's next words, reproaching their fear at his appearance. Again a word (*ascendunt*) is given special attention, and it is explained with a discussion of another passage of scripture (Col. 3:1-4), which leads back to the words in Luke, which are repeated without much comment, except for short interpretive paraphrases and a rhetorical question:

*Why are you troubled, and thoughts rising up into your hearts? See my*

*hands and my feet, where I was fastened with the nails. Feel with your hands and see. But you are seeing and not seeing. Feel with your hands and see. What? That a ghost does not have bones and flesh, as you can see that I have. Saying this (that's what was read) he showed them his hands and feet.*<sup>13</sup>

Augustine then quotes the next line (on the wonder of the disciples), discusses briefly the incredibility of the resurrection, quotes a few more words, again with a short commentary, and proceeds to a discussion of a related topic, the Manichees' disbelief of Christ's incarnation and bodily resurrection. A few sentences recap the passage so far, now focusing on the significance of Christ showing himself to them, and on the word "himself" (*se*, this time not a word from the text). Again Christ's words are quoted, and again a few sentences discuss them, with particular attention to the word "with you" (*vobiscum*). The sermon continues in much the same manner, with each line quoted (or paraphrased) and commented on at varying length, either with discussions of individual words, the sense of a phrase or sentences, or short remarks, interjections and rhetorical questions between the quoted words.

When Augustine reaches the last line, he comments briefly on the meaning of the whole of the last sentence. The sermon concludes, however, with two themes deriving from the passage, the knowledge and belief of his contemporary Church, and the growth of the early Church. This last section is clearly a departure from the commentary structure, though occasioned by the text, for the situation of contemporary Church is developed as a reversal of that of the disciples; they saw the risen Christ but had to believe that the Church would grow, while his congregation can see that the Church

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<sup>13</sup> *Serm.* 116.2.

*Quid turbati estis, et cogitationes ascendunt in cor vestrum? Videte manus meas et pedes meos, ubi clavis confixus fui. Palpate et videte. Sed videtis, et non videtis. Palpate et videte. Quid?*

grew, but must believe in the resurrection. The final theme merely expands on one element of this equation, the growth of the Church.

The sermon follows, in short, with a few exceptions, the structure of a line-by-line commentary. It is a rather straightforward adaptation of the grammatical commentary typified by Servius. Some transformations can already be seen at the structural level, however. Like Servius, Augustine is attentive to every word of the text, and every word becomes part of his sermon, in quotes, paraphrases, or commentary. Unlike Servius, however, Augustine does not seem to feel compelled to comment extensively on each word or phrase. He does indeed focus on individual words, but only if they have some special significance. Whole phrases, even, are allowed to speak for themselves, with only a few words of commentary to attract attention to them. The attention paid to each segment of the text, moreover, tends to be less. Generally a few sentences suffice to bring out the meaning of the text, and the whole sermon (on 11 verses of Luke) is only a few pages long, unlike the 25 or so pages of commentary on 35 lines of Virgil. About a third of the sermon, moreover, is given not to commentary but to the concluding themes, and Augustine also interrupts the commentary to discuss Manichaeism.

Nonetheless, the debt of Augustine's structural approach to grammatical commentary is manifest. As I have pointed out, moreover, scriptural commentaries constitute the largest proportion of Augustine's extant sermons. While they do not all follow a commentary structure as closely as Sermon 116 (in many there are far more digressions and discussions induced by but not directly commenting on it), the commentary structure nonetheless prevails in this type of preaching, and it is the text that

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*Quia Spiritus ossa et carnem non habet, sicut me videtis habere. Haec dicens (sic recitatum est)*

guides the development of the sermon. In a great number of his sermons, then, Augustine follows the grammatical model, but not slavishly. His preaching belongs to the same kind of teaching, but is clearly transformed. This is already apparent at the structural level, but, as we shall see, the transformation is all the more marked in the content of Augustine's exegesis (from which, moreover, the structural transformations derive).

### **Thematic Preaching**

In a number of sermons with a thematic (rather than exegetical) focus, on the other hand, the commentary structure is abandoned altogether. Two sermons illustrate this very well; one is preached on the Easter Vigil (223J), the other is a sermon on almsgiving (350B). The former belongs to the collection of sermons for liturgical seasons. Like all of Augustine's sermons for the Easter Vigil, it is short, and in the longest of them (somewhat ironically) we learn the reason why: the congregation had already heard many readings, and lacked the strength to listen to a sermon to match them in length.<sup>14</sup> The vigil lasted through the night, with its many readings and baptismal ceremonies, and in Sermon 223J, it is the vigil itself that is the subject of the sermon; instead of following a scriptural passage, Augustine focuses on the theme of wakefulness. He begins by comparing a prayerful vigil to the wakefulness of those eager for worldly fulfillments: the seducer, evildoer, drunk, etc. He contrasts their vigil with their slumbering souls, the cause of their bodily wakefulness. Finally, he exhorts his congregation to pray for the wakefulness of both: of the flesh for the night, and the soul in perpetuity. The sermon is structured around these three lines of thought. Augustine

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*ostendit eis manus et pedes.*

<sup>14</sup> *Serm.* 223A.1.

does quote passages of scripture, but they serve as comment on his themes, rather than as starting points for his commentary.

If the liturgical occasion is clearly the reason for abandoning the line-by-line commentary in his Easter Vigil Sermon, at other times it is a particular pastoral concern that causes him to structure his sermon around a theme. Sermon 350B, another short one, begins with a line from Proverbs (“The rich man and the poor man have met each other on the road; but the creator of them both is the Lord,”<sup>15</sup>), but the scriptural passage is merely a launching pad for a discussion of almsgiving. The road is interpreted as life, and the rich man is exhorted to give to the poor. The image of the road allows Augustine to use the image of a traveler unburdening himself to describe the giving of alms. The image is not sustained however, and Augustine next builds a contrast between the poor man’s needs and the spiritual needs of the wealthy: if God is to give to the rich man, he must give to the poor. He then quotes another relevant passage from scripture, this time an admonition to generosity. Again it is not commented on; instead Augustine contrasts the rich man’s present wealth with his inability to take goods with him after death. He returns to the rich man’s hope of receiving from God, this time developing the image of the almsgiver as a money-lender; whatever is given to the poor will be returned (with interest) in heavenly currency (the bliss of eternal life). Again the scriptures are used, but not as the structural foundation of the sermon. Clearly the grammatical lesson was not the only possible model for a sermon.

### **Three sermons on martyrs**

If Augustine did, when the occasion demanded it, willingly depart from the

grammatical model, the dominant pattern in his sermons is to treat scripture with a line-by-line commentary. In certain sermons, moreover, preaching becomes commentary in spite of a primary focus on a theme. As an example of this trend, we may look at three sermons (275, 280, and 299D) all preached on the festival of a martyr. The primary focus of the feast is not a text from scripture, but the celebration of a martyr. Acts of the Martyrs were read in the liturgy, but these clearly do not have the same status as scripture, nor do they elicit exegesis from Augustine as consistently as scripture. Indeed, Augustine is faced with a decision regarding composition, and the same theme receives a quite different approach in our three sermons. In one, he structures his sermon around the theme of martyrdom, in another he comments on the Acts of the Martyr, and in the third he comments (in the midst of other material) on a relevant text of scripture. In spite of the different types of sermon, it becomes apparent that Augustine's most common approach to preaching is to comment on a text, and even when this is not obviously demanded by the occasion or pastoral need, it nonetheless often comes to influence Augustine's composition of a sermon.

Sermon 280 is preached on the feast of the martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas.

Augustine alludes to the reading of the account of their martyrdom, near the beginning of the sermon.

We heard of the encouragement they received in divine revelations, and of their triumph in their sufferings, as it was all being read; and all those things, recounted in such glowing words, we perceived with our ears, and actually saw with our minds; we honored them with our devotion, and praised them with love.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 22.2. *Dives inquit, et pauper occurrerunt sibi in via; utriusque autem creator dominus est.*

<sup>16</sup> *Serm.* 280.1.

It is the theme of martyrdom, however, which is the main subject of the sermon. The discussion, moreover, is relatively generic; there are a few references to Perpetua and Felicitas, but most of the sermon could be preached on any martyr's festival.

Augustine begins with the significance of the festival: with a play on words, he remarks that it is the day on which Perpetua and Felicitas “burst into bloom in perpetual felicity.”<sup>17</sup> He then praises the two martyrs, and God, from whom their merit derives. In doing so, he alludes to a vision seen by Perpetua, related in the Acts that had been read. It is not quoted or discussed, however, merely alluded to. He then praises their martyrdom in more general terms, dwelling on the image of the amphitheatre to heighten the aspect of the people's cruelty (he quotes a psalm to describe the scene). He contrasts, moreover, the noise of the crowd and the exultant noise now made at the martyrs' feast. The contrast allows him to expand on the differing motivation and actions of the participants in each scene.

The theme of martyrdom is further developed with another contrast, between mortal and immortal life. The choice between the delights of each is the struggle in which the martyrs were victorious, since they were willing to lose temporal life in order to gain eternity. Several more references to Perpetua's vision and martyrdom are made, but again the sermon returns to its main theme. Again Augustine compares the riches of eternal life to the lesser goods of the present, and in this context alludes to the eternal torments of the rich man in the gospel story of the rich man and Lazarus. His sermon closes with an exhortation to celebrate the feast with devotion, sober cheer, faithfulness

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Exhortationes earum in divinis revelationibus, triumphos passionum, cum legerentur, audivimus; eaque omnia verborum digesta et illustrata luminibus, aure percepimus, mente spectavimus, religione honoravimus, charitate laudavimus.

and confidence, and to join with the martyrs in a common intent, for they belong to the same church, the body of Christ. Despite several references to the Acts and scripture, then, commentary does not underlie the structure of the sermon. Instead it progresses through a number of themes: the struggle, triumph and glory of the martyrs, and the church's participation in their victory. The themes treated, moreover, are for the most part generic to martyrs, and not to Perpetua and Felicitas in particular. The text provides material to illustrate the themes, but the sermon is not built as a commentary on the text.

Sermon 275, on the martyr Vincent, on the other hand, resembles a commentary (on the Acts of his martyrdom) more closely. It begins, like the last sermon, with a discussion of the festival: here Augustine contrasts the reading of the Acts with frivolous entertainments, and the pleasures obtained from the two. He goes on, however, to describe the progress of the narrative: "As the reading proceeded it made clear what words he heard, what words he replied with, what torments he overcame, and practically placed before our very eyes everything that took place."<sup>18</sup> He refers to his torture and interrogation. To explain his steadfastness in the face of pain, he cites several passages of scripture attributing power to God, and elaborates on the Lord's ability to intervene. He then emphasizes that it is the cause of suffering that makes one a martyr, for many suffer for their wickedness and are not considered martyrs. He also contrasts the fleshly defeat of the martyr with his spiritual victory, and refers to the extremity of the tortures applied to Vincent, as well as the disturbed appearance of his torturer. He then discusses

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<sup>17</sup> *Serm. 280.1. quo sanctae famulae Dei Perpetua et Felicitas coronis martyrii decoratae, perpetua felicitate floruerunt.*

<sup>18</sup> *Serm. 275.1. Quas voces audierit, quas reddiderit, quae tormenta devicerit, decursa lectio declaravit.*

the miracle of the reappearance of Vincent's body.<sup>19</sup>

This sermon on Vincent has much in common with the sermon on Perpetua and Felicitas. The same themes are treated: the contrast of the present life with the resurrection, the contrast between the participants at the martyr's trial and his feast, and God as the source of the martyrs' strength. In both, moreover, scripture is cited or alluded to without elaboration. In the sermon on St. Vincent, however, the Acts of his martyrdom are more at the fore. While Augustine does not quote them like scripture or focus on individual phrases, he allows the progress of the narrative to guide his discussion. The sermon might best be described as a commentary on the narrative rather than the text. The nature of the text (it is not canonical scripture) clearly does not warrant as close a treatment as scripture, but nonetheless we can see how influential the grammatical commentary is to Augustine's composition.

In a third sermon (299D, preached on the feast of the Scillitan martyrs), finally, Augustine takes yet another approach. Among its treatment of other material, the sermon digresses into a commentary on the parable of the Good Samaritan. Once again Augustine is contrasting mortal life with the immortality of the life to come. He concedes that health and friendship are necessities in this life, but points to a third necessity, wisdom, which leads to a discussion of the twofold commandment. His mind is led forward in the gospel account of their institution, to the parable of the Good Samaritan. He works through the text, quoting, paraphrasing, and commenting (much like he treated the text in sermon 116, though more briefly and with more paraphrase), until he reaches the end, and recognizes that he has digressed: "let's get back to the matter

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<sup>19</sup> See note 9 to *Serm. 275* in the New City Press translation.

in hand.”<sup>20</sup> He then continues his discussion of the necessities of life and martyrdom. The commentary is a digression (and relatively short, only about a tenth of the sermon), but it clearly demonstrates Augustine’s identification of preaching with commentary. There is no compelling reason to comment on the story at such length (rather than simply referring to it) for it is not the main subject of the sermon. Indeed, in this particular case it seems as if Augustine falls into this structure almost despite himself, because he is so accustomed to preaching as commentary, and has to recall himself to his main theme.

This sampling of sermons has shown Augustine using a variety of structural approaches. The sermon on the scriptural account of Christ’s resurrection appearance most closely reflects the grammatical model of line-by-line commentary on a text, with its focus on individual elements of the text. This approach was clearly the dominant model for Augustine’s preaching, since most his scriptural sermons (which are the largest group of sermons by far) are composed following this structure. Admittedly it was not invariable, however, and there are sermons that are hardly comparable to the grammatical lesson at all. As occasion demands, Augustine treats a theme rather than a text, be it a liturgical celebration, a moral issue, or the celebration of a martyr. Even then, however, as we saw with two of the sermons on martyrs, Augustine easily incorporates the kind of commentary he experienced as a student and taught as a teacher of rhetoric. Despite the freedom with which he adopts the model (and we saw transformations already at the structural level) the sermon is in practice (as it is his theory) a new kind of grammatical commentary. It is hard to imagine that his audience would not have seen the connection, especially since, as I have argued, the context (both physical and liturgical) combines

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<sup>20</sup> *Serm. 299D.3. Redeamus ad causam.*

with the internal structure of the sermon to present so close a likeness to the grammatical classroom.

### **The Transformation of Grammatical Exegesis**

The likeness between the grammatical lecture and sermon is clear, but while we have already recognized some differences in the structural approach, we must look for a far greater transformation if we are to believe that Augustine put his theoretical reformation of Roman educational culture into practice. In fact, if we approach the sermons with his theoretical development of Christian education in mind, it is striking how far his preoccupations are applied in practice. Since scriptural sermons (where the line-by-line structure prevails) form the greater part of Augustine's preaching, it is in these that we may look for his transformation of grammatical culture. Again a case study of the type of sermon will draw out the pertinent characteristics of Augustine's preaching. We shall see that as preacher he uses the same kinds of strategies as the grammarian, and has a similar mediating role, but his approach is quite different. As it was in his theory, the emphasis is on the content (especially the truths of the *regula fidei*) and the significance of the text for the life of the believer.

We have already looked at Sermon 116 as an example of the structure of Augustine's scriptural sermons, and its debt in this respect to grammatical culture. In the content, too, there are manifest reflections of the same culture, especially in the lexical grammatical treatment of words. The focus, however, is entirely different: it is not the words themselves, but the meaning that is significant to the preacher. The attention paid to the signifier is directed at reaching the signified. This becomes abundantly clear at the very start of the sermon. Augustine begins, as we have seen, with a discussion of the

words spoken by the resurrected Christ to his disciples. Very much like a grammarian, Augustine focuses from the start on a single word, *salutavit*. Because the comment relies so much on words, it is difficult to translate. In trying to render it in an English equivalent, Edmund Hill translates it as an etymological discussion:

The Lord appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, as you have heard, and greeted them with the words, *Peace be with you*. This is peace indeed, and a salutary salutation, or a bidding “Fare well.” “Fare well.” The greeting “Fare well,” you see, comes from “welfare.” But what could be better than that Welfare itself should bid one fare well? Christ, after all, is our welfare or salvation.<sup>21</sup>

The Latin is in fact more a play on words than an explicit etymological comment (much like his manipulation of the meaning of the names Perpetua and Felicitas that we saw in another sermon). Nonetheless there is a clear echo of the grammarian’s lexical concern. The comment shows, however, just how different is the preacher’s underlying motivation. The significance of the cognate words lies not in the niceties of language, but in the way the words point to the salvation that is to be found in Christ. Not only does this introduce the Christo-centric focus of the sermon, it also provides a door to a discussion of the basic content of the faith, the content of the *regula fidei* or creed. The passage is of course about the resurrection, but Christ as salvation allows Augustine to discuss too the events leading up to it, the crucifixion and burial affirmed in the creed. The sermon opens with the *regula*, but it also closes with it, for Augustine concludes the sermon with a discussion of the Church, and at the very end of its fulfillment in the resurrected life of the faithful.<sup>22</sup> The lexical analysis that on the surface has much in

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<sup>21</sup> *Serm.* 116.1.

Apparuit Dominus post resurrectionem discipulis suis, sicut audistis, et salutavit eos, dicens, *Pax Vobis*. Haec est pax, et salutatio salutis: nam et ipsa salutatio a salute nomen accepit. Sed quid melius, quam ut ipsa salutet hominem? Salus enim nostra Christus est.

<sup>22</sup> *Serm.* 116.6-7.

common with the grammarian's approach to text in fact highlights the wholly new focus (on the basic truths of Christianity) that opens and concludes Augustine's sermon.

A number of other words are given special attention, and again the motivation reflects the focus on content developed in Augustine's theoretical approach to education. The scars on Christ's hands and feet, for instance, are used to underscore the reality of the resurrection. While the focus here is not actually on the word itself, but the fact of the scars, it is a particular word of the text that draws Augustine's attention to that fact, and leads him to the discussion of the reality that it points to (indeed the scars themselves are treated as a signifier, like the natural signs discussed in the *De Doctrina Christiana*).<sup>23</sup> As he proceeds through the text, a number of other words catch his attention. In the rebuke of the disciples (for their fear and lack of faith), Augustine highlights the use of the words "rising" (*ascendunt*). Again the end of the comment is something other than the word itself: Augustine is emphasizing the appropriateness of lifting the heart to heaven, compared with the earth-bound thoughts that tempt the Christian. Another strategy typical of grammatical commentary is used to drive home the point; Augustine cites an analogous passage where thoughts are encouraged to rise up and share in Christ's resurrection. The link between the two passages is a word, and another word, from the passage cited ("glory," *gloria*), leads to yet another passage. Just as the grammarian cites passages to show that the author studied conforms to the normative language of the literary canon, so Augustine shows through other passages that his interpretation of the meaning of Christ's words conforms to the content of the canon of scripture. As with lexical analysis, the grammarian's strategy is transformed to meet the particular needs of

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<sup>23</sup> *Serm.* 116.1.

the preacher.

Later on a word (and its surrounding phrase) receives a lexical (and implicitly grammatical) discussion. Augustine is concerned with the possibility of confusion over Christ's words "while I was with you."

What's this, *while I was still with you*? With you as a mortal, which I am no longer. I was with you when I was going to die. [...] One destined to die with those destined to die. But now I am with you no longer, because I am with those who are going to die, while I myself am never going to die again.<sup>24</sup>

There are two linguistic problems with the scriptural passage: the meaning of *vobiscum* and the use of the past tense. The past tense requires that the *vobiscum* be interpreted somehow other than in its literal sense. This is not of course as explicitly a discussion of grammar as much of Servius is, but it does try to solve similar problems as the grammatical commentary: the incongruity of the text with facts and an unexpected use of grammar. Again, however, the point is not to justify the grammar (or lexical choice) of the text, but to point to a more important signification than the surface meaning, the nature of the incarnation and resurrection.

A final treatment of a word perhaps best illustrates Augustine's transformation of commentary on individual words: "So what he showed to his disciples was himself. What's meant by 'himself'? The head of his Church."<sup>25</sup> Augustine is now commenting on a fact of the text rather than a word, for *se* is not actually cited from the text, but from Augustine's own summary of the story so far. Nonetheless, the impulse to comment on a word is the same, and even as he goes beyond the words of the text, he finds a textual

<sup>24</sup> *Serm.* 116.5. *Quid est, vobiscum? Cum morituris moriturus. Modo jam non vobiscum: quia cum morituris nunquam ulterius moriturus.*

<sup>25</sup> *Serm.* 116.5. *Ostendit ergo discipulis se. Quid est se? Caput Ecclesiae suae.*

fragment to comment on, and applies a lexical question to it. The result, however, as much as the starting point, has been transformed: Augustine goes on to outline the relationship to Christ, as head, to the Church, his body, to conclude his sermon with the point of the *regula* that I have already described. Not only is one of the main characteristics of the grammarian's commentary found less frequently, as we have already noted, it is thoroughly reformed: as preacher Augustine still discusses individual words, even using the same strategies as the grammarian, but his focus is on content, especially the content of the creed, rather than on language itself. The less frequent attention to individual words is entirely consonant with this change, for it is only when a word points to the content in a particularly significant way that Augustine comments on it.

We saw in the previous chapter that one of the grammarian's main functions was to mediate between the language of the text and that of his students. If Augustine abandons the concern with language (while giving linguistic comment a new object), he nonetheless plays a kind of mediating role, for he faces the same problem of dealing with literature that is not contemporary. He mediates, however, between present concerns or experience and those of past literature, rather than between two kinds of language. As with the linguistic comments, this transformation is clear from the start of the sermon. As Augustine is discussing Christ as salvation he emphasizes that "Christ, after all, is our welfare or salvation. He indeed is our salvation, the very one that was wounded for our sakes."<sup>26</sup> Again, too, the sermon ends with the "us" of his congregation, and their hope for life everlasting: "When we too have risen again, so as never to die anymore, that is

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<sup>26</sup> *Serm.* 116.1 *Salus enim nostra Christus est. Ipse est enim salutatio nostra, qui vulneratus est pro nobis.*

when we too will be dedicated.”<sup>27</sup>

Twice in the sermon Augustine elaborates on the relationship between the text and his audience: “They thought he was a ghost, and they were looking at his flesh, and they couldn't believe their own eyes. And we believe them when they proclaim him to us without exhibiting him to us!”<sup>28</sup> There is a contrast set up between the two situations, which might be described as a chiasmic structure: they saw but did not believe, we do not see, but believe. At any rate, the comment makes the text a present concern: the belief demanded of Christ's first disciples should be our belief too. The same chiasmic structure is used later in the sermon, again connecting the disciples with Augustine's congregation. This time, the disciples' witness to the resurrection and belief in the Church is contrasted with his audience's perception of the Church and their belief in the resurrection.<sup>29</sup> A rhetorical structure becomes in Augustine's preaching a way of linking the text with the present, at a far deeper level than linguistic usage.

Another way of mediating the text, if less personal, is nonetheless quite powerful. The resurrection is doctrine as well as experience, and doctrine becomes a particular concern when it is challenged by heresy. As Augustine comments on the text, he allows it speak to the present debate with heresy. Speaking of disbelief in the resurrection, he writes: “I'm telling you, people who have got stuck in that wound have made a pernicious heresy of it.”<sup>30</sup> The connection is elaborated further in the sermon, and Augustine makes explicit the possibility of heretics in his own congregation. As he does so, the discussion of heresy explicitly makes the text the matter of not only present debate, but the direct

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<sup>27</sup> *Serm.* 116.7. *Quando et nos surrexerimus, ut nunquam moriamur, tunc dedicabimur.*

<sup>28</sup> *Serm.* 116.2. *Spiritum eum putabant, et carnem videbant, nec ipsis oculis suis fidem habebant. Et credimus eis nos annuntiantibus et non ostendentibus.*

concern of his own audience: “Who are you, anyway, who won’t believe that a body laid in the tomb could rise again? Are you a Manichee by any chance?”<sup>31</sup> The preacher invites the audience to participate in the text, by comparing their experience with that of its characters (reversing Augustine’s complaint about reading the *Aeneid* at school, with no concern for the state of his own soul), and by making it a participant in a debate about highly significant substance (in contrast to the vanity of rhetorical perfection divorced from the substance of truth). Sermon 116 puts into practice Augustine’s theoretical approach to education, in this respect and in its focus on truths of the faith, especially the basic and accessible doctrines formulated with authority in the creed. Whether he adopts the strategies of the grammarian or his role as mediator, his preaching aims at the substance and experience of Christianity.

It is perhaps a little too obvious, however, that a sermon on the resurrection should be full of the teaching of the creed, and that doctrine as central as the resurrection should be made directly relevant to the audience. Perhaps, but Augustine does the same thing in sermons on other texts, at first glance much further removed from the central doctrines of Christianity. For another example, we may turn to *Exposition 2 of Psalm 18*, part of his running commentary of the psalms. Like sermon 116, it follows closely the progress of the text, commenting on it line-by-line. The psalm itself is not overtly Christo-centric, but again Augustine reads from it the basic doctrines of the creed, and plays the role of mediator, making the text a literature of the present.

Indeed, Augustine opens his interpretation (after some prefatory material, to

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<sup>29</sup> *Serm.* 116.6.

<sup>30</sup> *Serm.* 116.1. *Denique haeresim fecerunt, qui in isto vulnere remanserunt.*

which I shall return) by affirming explicitly the Christo-centrism of the psalm: “The psalm is sung about Christ, as is abundantly clear from a line in it: He is like a bridegroom coming forth from his tent.”<sup>32</sup> In discussing Christ as bridegroom, moreover, Augustine has occasion to discuss also his conception by a virgin. From the start, then, there is an emphasis on the truths of the creed. Many of the sources for creedal doctrine in this sermon are more surprising than the ones we saw in sermon 116. At “the heavens proclaim,” for instance, Augustine reads a reference to “saints, who are raised high above the earth and carry the Lord.”<sup>33</sup> The saints, of course, are the Church and the bodies to be resurrected in the creed. An alternate interpretation again points to the creed, by explaining that the heavens refer to the star that announced Christ birth. Either way, the analysis of an individual words points once again to the *regula fidei*, though Augustine prefers the former interpretation. He elaborates on the explanation, finding support for it in another phrase, in the words (of the heavens) that have traveled to the ends of the world. Again focusing on a word, he explains that “glory” (*Gloria*) refers to the grace that assures us the forgiveness of sins. This word too catches his attention, and he plays with its derivation: “It is because it is free that it is called grace, for it would not be grace were it not given gratis.”<sup>34</sup> Again we see in his preaching not only the centrality of the *regula fidei* but the use of the grammarian’s strategies (here etymology, once again) to reach it. Again, too, analogous passages are used to support his interpretation, for

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<sup>31</sup> *Serm.* 116.4. *Tu quis es, qui non credis corpus in sepulchro positum resurgere potuisse? Si Manichaeus es?*

<sup>32</sup> *Ennarr.* ii. in *Ps.* 18.2. *Cantatur enim de Christo; quod evidenter ibi apparet, quia illic scriptum est: ipse tanquam sponsus procedens de thalamo suo.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ennarr.* ii. in *Ps.* 18.2. *coeli, sancti sunt; elevati a terra, portantes Dominum*

<sup>34</sup> *Ennarr.* ii. in *Ps.* 18.2. *Quia gratis, ideo gratia; non est enim gratia, si non gratuita.*

instance when Augustine points to the creedal doctrine of the creation in the psalm.<sup>35</sup> The creed is clearly at the heart of Augustine's interpretation of the psalm. Indeed, this sermon brings to the fore even more of it. We have already seen in it the creation, the virgin birth, the resurrected saints and the forgiveness of sins, and there are further discussions of the Church,<sup>36</sup> and the Holy Spirit.<sup>37</sup> Not much would need to be added for the content of the whole creed to be present in this sermon.

It might surprise the reader that I have said little about typology and allegory in discussing Augustine's commentary. With sermon 116 especially, I focused on Augustine's attention to individual words and the meaning found in them. That sermon was fairly direct about its references to the Creed, so there was little need to enter into the manner Augustine found the creed expressed in the text. In this passage, however, much of the meaning is expressed in *figura*, and needs the kind of interpretation described in the *De Doctrina Christiana*. We have already seen the heavens referring to the apostles. In a similar way, Augustine discussed the passage "day speaks the message to succeeding day, and night imparts knowledge to night."<sup>38</sup> In another move typical of the grammarian, he offers several interpretations of the passage. All are directed at finding the content, however, and range from interpreting a plain meaning (that the passage refers to succeeding ages), to more figurative senses (that the day refers to the apostles, or that days refer to spiritual people and nights to carnal). The description of God's laws as sweeter than honey also occasion a figurative interpretation: the commandments are sweet to those who are healthy, but to the unhealthy (in spirit) they are as bitter as honey

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<sup>35</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps.* 18.3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps.* 18.5-6, 7-9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps.* 18.5.

to a fevered man.<sup>39</sup> With all of Augustine's interpretation (including the figurative), I have focused on the emphasis on substance, especially of the *regula fidei*, and its relevance to the life and belief of the believer. Whether this meaning is reached directly or by allegory or typology is less directly relevant to this thesis than the significant transformation of values in Augustine's use of them.

Frances Young's challenge of some of the long held assumptions about typological and allegorical exegesis, however, does shed some light on the relationship between Augustine's preaching and his grammatical precedents. She downplays the importance of allegory and typology as labels for method; at the heart of early Christian exegesis was the search for the referent of text, the meaning signified by the text. The complexities involved in communication (especially through literature) were recognized, but nonetheless a direct connection between signifier and signified was perceived. The consistent goal of the Christian exegetes was to search for the meaning embodied in language, whether it was signified plainly or through figures. As method should be described the reading strategies used: moral reading, oracular exegesis, lexical analysis, explanatory comment, deductive expansion and mimetic reading. Allegory and typology, on the other hand, are better used to describe the relationship of the text to its referent. Any literary communication, moreover, lies on a spectrum between literal signification and allegory. This possible variety and the potential methods combine to make interpretation a complex task. Nonetheless, early Christian exegesis always derives for

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<sup>38</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps.* 18.6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps.* 18.11-12.

the same goal, to find the referent (or signified meaning) of the text.<sup>40</sup>

As I suggested, this analysis allows us to see a bit more clearly Augustine's transformation of grammatical exegesis. If we see his comments as a consistent search for a meaningful referent (mostly this referent is the content of the *regula fidei*), the roots of his method in grammatical commentary are more apparent. Though many of the grammarian's comments were concerned with the signifier more than the signified, in the lexical comments at least there was a greater emphasis on identifying the signified. The comments on mythology, geography, history and other parts of the narrative, moreover, all seek to identify the relatively obscure referent of the text. If we can categorize these comments generically as comments on the referent of the text, far more of Augustine's commentary can be seen to derive from grammatical concerns, though the nature of the referent sought has undergone a radical transformation. As his theory suggested, the aim of interpretation is to find the truths of the faith in all of scripture,

The end of Christian learning, however, is love, and education is supposed to impact the life of the believer. As we saw in Sermon 116, Augustine at least tries to make the text a present concern, through a number of means. The doctrinal aspect of his mediation, through a discussion of heresy, is seen again in his preaching on the Psalm.<sup>41</sup> The psalms however, are a different kind of text, and allow Augustine to draw his audience into a spiritual experience of the text, into the end of loving God. The psalms, as we saw in the brief outline of the context of Augustine's preaching, have a rather different role in the liturgy than other readings, as they were sung, and the congregation

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<sup>40</sup> Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: U Cambridge P, 1997) 119-29, 86-213.

<sup>41</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps.* 18.7-9, 10-11.

joined in part or all of the psalm. Even more than the rest of scripture, then, they were the common possession of the Christian congregation. It should not surprise us, therefore, in the light of what we have seen of Augustine's approach to scripture and education so far, that he capitalizes on the fact in the sermon on Psalm 18. Because the Psalms are prayers, moreover, the voice of the psalmist and the heart of the Christian merge, and the distance between literature and reading community becomes almost imperceptible, as the heart of the Christian is bidden to turn to God with the words of the psalm. More even than in the last sermon examined, then, the grammarian's strategy of making the literature of the past a literature of the present is converted to Christian use.

The sermon begins with a description of the refrain of the psalm as a prayer: "we have just been imploring the Lord to cleanse us from our secret sins and to preserve his servants from the sins of others." The status of this refrain as a prayer is reinforced:

Each of us has begged a grace from the Lord in the words of this psalm; we have said to God, Cleanse me from my secret sins, Lord, and spare your servant from the faults of others. If they do not get the better of me, I shall be spotless, and I shall be cleansed from the great transgression.<sup>42</sup>

From the start, Augustine is emphasizing the relationship between the text and audience: it is to be their personal and collective prayer; it belongs to the community, and each is to adopt it as their own.

In this opening section, moreover, the role of education in this appropriation becomes clear, as Augustine develops the place of understanding in prayer, especially through the use of two illustrations, one from the animal realm, the other from popular

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<sup>42</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps. 18.1.*

Deprecati Dominum, ut ab occultis nostris mundet nos, et ab alienis parcat servis suis [...] Rogavit enim Dominum unusquisque nostrum in hoc cantico, et dixit Deo: *Ab occultis meis munda me, Domine, et ab alienis parce servo tuo. Si mei non fuerint dominata, tunc immaculis ero, et mundabor a delicto magno.*

culture. On the one hand, comprehension separates human song from that of the animals:

We ought to try to find out what this means, because we want to use our human reason as we sing, not merely to sing like parrots. Blackbirds and parrots and crows and magpies and other species are sometimes taught by people to give voice to words they do not understand; but God has willed to grant human beings the ability to sing with understanding.<sup>43</sup>

Once again Augustine is emphasizing as well the primacy of content in Christian education: his congregation should not join in the singing of the psalm without understanding its content. The emphasis is on meaning once more, and while the nature that meaning is not immediately made clear, the illustration chosen already suggests that it will not be esoteric and inaccessible.

If understanding makes distinguishes humans from the animal realm, we should expect that knowledge to be something accessible to all humans. Another image further suggests the mind's natural (and quite common) propensity to reach this type of understanding, though it is often put to wrong use.

And just think how many prima donnas there are who do sing in this way: what they sing is all of a piece with their minds and hearts. Well we know it, and doesn't it make us wince! They are all the worse for it in that they cannot possibly be ignorant of what they are singing. They know that their ditty is about disgraceful actions, and yet the filthier the theme, the more they enjoy singing about it, because the more squalid they are, the luckier they consider themselves. But we who have learned to sing the words of God in church ought to bend our efforts to be like those of whom scripture says, *Blessed the people that understands the reason for its joy*. In the same way, my very dear friends, we ought to know and perceive with clear hearts what we have sung together with harmonious voices.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps. 18.1.*

Quid hoc sit intellegere debemus, ut humana ratione, non quasi avium voce cantemus. Nam et meruli et psittaci et corvi et picae et huiusmodi volucres, saepe ab hominibus docentur sonare quod nesciunt.

<sup>44</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps. 18.1.*

The illustration is taken from the realm of popular culture, and Christian understanding is set in contrast to it. The contrast of course highlights the difference between the two, but the similarity is striking: that the understanding of bawdy lyrics can even be compared to Christian understanding suggests that they are in the same class in at least some respect. We find the parallel at the level of the type and level of understanding that is appropriate for Christians. The understanding required of the faithful is not abstract reasoning (nor rhetorical or grammatical learning), but a kind of moral knowledge, a knowledge of the end of Christianity and the emotions of Christian prayer. His purpose in preaching on the psalm is to impart precisely this knowledge: “So let us briefly run through the psalm in order to understand what this verse means and what are its implications.”<sup>45</sup>

As we have seen, the content of his teaching once again conforms to his theoretical injunctions to seek and teach the *regula fidei*. But the psalm also points to what Augustine identified in his theory as the end of Christian education, love, for true appropriation of the psalm takes place when the Christian conforms to the commandments it praises:

The fear of the Lord is not something servile, but pure. It loves freely and fears not punishment from the one at whom it trembles, but separation from the one it loves. Pure fear is not driven out by love made perfect.<sup>46</sup>

Fear of the Lord and obedience to the commandments have love as their end, and loving God is the commandment that is sweeter than honey, a sweetness only experienced in

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Et quam multi mali et luxuriosi sic cantant digna auribus suis et cordibus, novimus et dolemus. Eo enim pejores sunt, quo non possunt ignorare quod cantant. Sciunt enim se cantare flagitia, et tamen cantant tanto libentius, quanto immundius: quoniam tanto se putant laetiores, quanto fuerint turpiores. Nos autem qui in Ecclesia divina eloquia cantare didicimus, simul etiam instare dememus esse quod scriptum est, Beatus populus qui intelligit jubilationem.

<sup>45</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps. 18.1. Quod ut bene sciamus quid sit, et quale hoc sit, ipsius psalmi textum, quantum donat Dominus, breviter percurramus.*

loving obedience.<sup>47</sup> The understanding that Augustine teaches resolves into action: it is not an abstract theoretical knowledge, but closer to the sense of knowing someone.

Indeed, as he concludes the sermon, he returns to the refrain sung by the congregation, the understanding becomes knowledge of self as well:

This is what we sang, and here we are at last, our sermon has caught up with this verse. Let us say it, and sing it intelligently, and pray as we sing it, and may our prayer be heard: Cleanse me from my secret sins, Lord. For which of us understands our transgressions?<sup>48</sup>

Christian knowledge is the love of God, and the understanding of the refrain of the psalm is the recognition of one's own sin. Aside from the doctrines of the *regula*, then, the knowledge of the Christian is summed up in this last portion of the sermon, as Augustine investigates the nature of the sin that stands between the believer and the love of God.<sup>49</sup> To be cleansed from this sin should be his intention as he cries out in the words of the psalm, as he calls out to God his redeemer, the love and end of his living: "helper in the performance of good works, redeemer from all that is bad; helper so that I may live in your love, redeemer that you may free me from my iniquity."<sup>50</sup>

Augustine's preaching clearly embodies the values he sets out in his theoretical discussions of education. As in theory, he does not in practice abandon every aspect of the Roman educational tradition. His preaching belongs in a liturgical and physical context that would have reminded his audience of a grammatical classroom. His own preaching follows the structure of a grammatical commentary very closely. Again like

<sup>46</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps. 18.10. Timor Domini: non servilis, sed castus; gratis amans, non puniri timens ab eo quem tremat, sed separari ab eo quem diligit.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps. 18.11-12.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps. 18.13. Dicamus, et cum intellectu cantemus, et cantando oremus, et orando impetremus: dicamus, Ab occultis meis munda me Domine. Quis enim delicta intellegit?*

<sup>49</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps. 18.13-16.*

his theory, however, his practice does not adopt its model unchallenged and unchanged. His teaching belongs in a new social context, and no longer attempts to define an elite, but to build up his congregation in the unifying force of love, love of God and love of neighbor. He abandons the grammarian's focus on language, and when he approaches the text of scripture with his attention to detail and grammatical strategies, his comments receive a new focus. Instead of concentrating on the use of language, Augustine the preacher points to a deeper truth, the truth of the faith and especially the *regula fidei* that belongs to all believers. When he adopts the grammarian's role as mediator, his function is changed: again the linguistic concern is gone. Augustine makes the text a present concern, by making it part of present doctrinal debates, the present experience of the faithful, and their personal and collective prayer. The text is no longer a source for rhetoric, but a source for life lived in faith, a lesson in the love that binds the Christian community together, regardless of social or cultural status. If this is the essence of Christian culture, as suggested in his theoretical works, then Augustine is fulfilling his suggestion that culture should no longer be an elite commodity, but shared freely among the faithful. Indeed, we find this suggested in the opening or closing of many sermons, where Augustine describes as a debt his promise to continue preaching on a subject in his next sermon.<sup>51</sup>

The focus on this chapter has been on exegetical commentary, but as a kind of coda we may note that, as I suggested in the previous chapter, Servius's prefatory material is also paralleled in Augustine's preaching. In particular, we may note the

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<sup>50</sup> *Ennarr. ii. in Ps. 18.16. adjutor in bonis, redemptor a malis; adjutor ut habitem in charitate tua, redemptor ut liberet me ab iniquitate mea.*

<sup>51</sup> See e.g. *Serm. 4.1, 1.1, 359.9, 361.19. 48.8.*

frequent discussions of titles in the *Expositions on the Psalms*.<sup>52</sup> Augustine's discussion of the author of the fourth gospel, finally, in the first tractate on St. John, neatly encapsulates Augustine's transformation of the grammatical genre. The beginning of the sermon is indeed given over to a discussion of St. John. It is not biographical facts that interest Augustine, however, but the way the author points to the truth of the faith. He uses a string of scriptural images to compare St. John to a mountain, which he interprets as a lofty soul, who received righteousness from God, and wrote his gospel inspired by the Wisdom of God. The divine inspiration of his writing is emphasized throughout this discussion, and Augustine makes the particular point that by listening to the gospel, his congregation may hear the voice of God. This treatment of the author of the work is used to point beyond the author (just as his commentary pointed beyond words), to God and the truths of the faith, for the first words of John's gospel (with which the sermon proceeds) are of course about Christ's incarnation, a central point of the *regula fidei* once again.<sup>53</sup> Here as in the commentary, Augustine takes the grammarian's approach to literature and gives it a new purpose, guided by the ideal of a Christian education for a Christian people.

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Pontet, 272-76.

<sup>53</sup> *Tract. in Joh.* 1.1-7.

## Conclusion

Augustine developed a theoretical and practical approach to education that transformed the traditional Roman education that he had received, in response to the particular social reality of his Christian audience. The prevalent model of secular education (by which he had been formed), grammatical and rhetorical training, was a long and costly process that only the wealthiest members of society could afford. Augustine himself nearly abandoned it in mid-course on account of a lack of funds. Like other elite Roman boys, however, he progressed through its long course, and learned especially how to read and write. He began by learning letters, syllables, and words, and soon progressed to reading sentences, short sayings, and fables. He practiced writing too, first by copying out the passages he was reading. Eventually, he progressed to longer texts, and was encouraged to make them a part of his cultural identity. He read them aloud, infusing his reading with the emotions of the characters and text, and began to imitate their style and diction in his own writing. He learned to use the texts of the literary canon as a source for his own literary language. He finished his schooling with formal training in rhetoric, and became a teacher of the same.

This education was limited to, and tailored for, an elite audience. The content of the texts used stressed the importance of wealth, the social values of the elite, and the centrality of elite education in creating cultural identity. It taught an approach to reading that could only be mastered by following the full course of education; partial education would not have equipped the student with the necessary techniques for deciphering and interpreting long passages in the continuous script of ancient manuscripts. Grammatical education, moreover, equipped the student with the cultural knowledge and a canon of

texts and interpretations by which the cultural elite was defined. Likewise, the student was trained in a consistent rhetorical language that derived from this canon, and by which the educated elite could recognize itself. The constant use of the canon and the emphasis on literary language maintained a definition of cultural knowledge and language that was limited by the norms of educational culture. Grammatical education in particular was self-consciously a threshold to the normative elite experience of text and culture. In his youth, Augustine had appropriated these elite values whole-heartedly. He had excelled in his studies, longed for honor and wealth, reached success with his rhetorical skills, and secured an imperial teaching post in Milan, before abandoning it and converting to Christianity.

After he was ordained a priest and bishop, however, he found himself in a remarkably different educational environment. He was no longer a teacher of rhetoric, training elite youths in the arts of the tongue. Instead he was a preacher, teaching a crowd in the basilica at Hippo. It is unlikely that his audience was mostly drawn from the same educated elite as his former students. At least on occasion he refers to poor members of his congregation, and he does not have in mind merely those who are poor in relative terms; he suggests that some who are listening to his sermons might not even be able to give a few coins to beggars poorer than themselves. These surely belonged outside the small group who had even basic literacy skills. Further suggestions about the prevalence of grammatical education in particular (which was likely the definitive experience of literary culture for most) may be made on the basis of more circumstantial evidence. A rough calculation comparing the territory of Hippo and the land requirement for the curial class (which on the basis of Augustine's near exclusion from a full

education can be considered a probable limit on the reach of grammatical education) suggests that there were probably fewer than a hundred adult male decurions in Hippo. If they were all educated, and another hundred or so other citizens were also, still the number of fully educated citizens at Hippo would only reach a couple of hundred. If the basilica could fit a capacity crowd of at least a thousand, therefore, and if even than half of the educated citizens of Hippo were present at his sermons, the Church would be cavernously empty if there was not a more broadly representative attendance as well. In short, it is most likely that Augustine's audience was largely composed of Christians without grammatical education at least, if not from lower segments of the population. Indeed, since the consensus about the composition of the Church of the first three centuries leans towards an assembly of middle and lower class citizens, it seems justifiable to suggest that this reality had not been completely reversed by the fourth century. At any rate, Augustine's own writings suggest a prevalently uneducated Christian audience, and the presence of illiterates among his audience is also explicitly mentioned in his preaching.

The secular educational model seems remarkably unsuited for teaching this crowd. Indeed, it does not seem to cross Augustine's mind to attempt to train them in basic literacy and reading skills. The task would of course be Herculean. Nonetheless, he does not abandon Roman educational traditions altogether. He certainly reacts strongly to the elitist nature of the education he received. The *Confessions* especially disparage the pursuit of wealth and honor that were encouraged by his education and drove him to success in worldly terms. The target of his comments is less explicit when he discusses the false prioritization of style over content, but nonetheless elitism may be

interpreted as the underlying motivation of his reaction to it. Indeed, Augustine's harshest criticisms are leveled against the mercantile approach to education, including the commodity value of good style. Augustine clearly does not think that culture should be bought and sold.

The *De Doctrina Christiana* and *De Catechizandis Rudibus* respond to these criticisms. The language of buying and selling is replaced with the image of an education that must be shared to be fully realized. Augustine abandons the focus on style, and the use of grammatical and rhetorical techniques (they are not discarded altogether) is subordinated to the discovery and expression of Christian content. Signs (*signa*) become secondary, as pointers to matter (*res*). The content of Christian content, moreover, is reducible to a few very basic doctrines, the content of the *regula fidei*, which is articulated with authority in the creed. Whatever progress more educated Christians make in knowledge, they discover no more than the content of the creed; their intellect is merely given salutary exercise, and they may teach others what they have discovered. Since the creed is possessed by all Christians, moreover, they all have, in essence, the same culture. The end of this culture is love, of God and neighbor, a good that cannot be made into a commodity; Augustine's Christian culture is necessarily a common culture.

Augustine's teaching in the sermons puts this same transformation into practice. In their educational approach, they are most comparable to the grammarian's exegetical commentary. Both proceed line-by-line through the text (after it has been read aloud), commenting on individual phrases, words, and even syllables. The grammarian's commentary focuses on the grammatical and lexical analysis of almost every word, though a number of his comments look for broader references in the text, to historical,

geographical and mythological facts within and without the poem. As he analyzes fragments of the text, noting figures, archaisms, poetic license and the constraints of meter, he is constantly mediating between the language of the poem and the student's own prose composition. A second major preoccupation is his attempt to reach the basic meaning of the text, through comments on the meaning of words and the references made in the text.

Augustine's commentary, like his theory, forsakes the linguistic focus. Individual words and phrases are considered instead for the meaning and significance that lies beyond them. For the most part, this meaning corresponds, once again, to the content of the *regula fidei* or creed. All of scripture points to its doctrine, and all his teaching leads to it. His mediation of the text, moreover, stresses the Christian's appropriation of Christian content, rather than the creation of a Christian rhetoric. In doctrinal matter, the text becomes part of his present intellectual equipment, but the text also becomes part of his experience of Christian life and prayer, guiding him to the love of God and neighbor, the end of all Christian education, in theory as well as practice.

An important question remains to be answered. If Augustine attempted to make Christian education less elitist and more accessible than his secular model, how did his audience perceive his attempt? To a large extent the question of course remains unanswerable. The only direct evidence we have about the educational encounter that takes place in the basilica at Hippo comes from one party: Augustine, the preacher and teacher. Occasionally Augustine does mention the audience's reaction to his sermon,

whether they applaud, cheer, or apparently have, or have not, understood his point.<sup>1</sup> This is hardly evidence enough to judge their experience of his sermons, however, especially its educational dimension. If the effect of Augustine's teaching remains a matter for conjecture, the evidence used to delineate Augustine's approach can at least make it educated conjecture.

First of all, it seems fair to suggest that the mere opportunity of being present before a Christian teacher of the stature of Augustine, a former *rhetor*, successful to the point of securing an imperial appointment in Milan, would in itself be a significant experience for an audience otherwise excluded from the educational experience of the elite. No doubt this was the motivation behind the fervor with which the congregation compelled his priestly ordination.<sup>2</sup> One can easily imagine the satisfaction that possessing such a presbyter and bishop would bring to an audience who might otherwise possess little in the way of status. If we imagine, furthermore, that the audience recognized that Augustine was imparting a grammatical education of sorts, including them in an activity in which they had not participated in secular society, the significance of the situation only heightens.

Even if Augustine himself made such an impact, however, the question of the effect of his preaching still remains. How much of the sermon would his audience really have been able to grasp? How much did Augustine's reorientation of teaching towards the simple facts of the faith matter? Regardless of how far they could follow his

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<sup>1</sup> Deferrari: 207-08, Pellegrino, 88-91. Defferari and Pellegrino have both collected numerous examples of Augustine's acknowledgement of the audiences reaction. Examples of his remarks on their comprehension (shown through applause or other means) may be found at *Serm.* 52.20, 151.8, 332.4; on their failure to understand or misunderstanding at 67.1, 101.9, 131.9; and of their acclamation of his sermon at 61.3, 311.4, 339.1.

<sup>2</sup> *Serm.* 355.2.

reasoning or method of exegesis, or understand how the scriptures pointed to the *regula fidei* (the extent of understanding must have varied considerably in the audience, according to educational levels as well as natural intelligence, attention span, devotion to his teaching, etc), it seems fair to suggest that most would at least have understood that the scripture that was preached on was reducible to the basic truths of the *regula fidei*. They would have recognized the truths they had learned in the creed and catechism before baptism. Indeed, in several sermons given on the occasion of the handing over of the creed (before baptism and after a period in the catechumenate), Augustine explicitly states that the creed is a crystallization of the truths of scripture, an easier way for the audience to retain those truths in their memory, the summary of content they had already heard preached in the sermons.<sup>3</sup> The catechumen is led to expect (and the seasoned Christian who is also present reminded) that everything that he hears in the scriptures is also found in the creed (just like the educated reader of the *De Doctrina Christiana* was instructed). In another sermon the link between the creed and the liturgical experience of text is made explicit:

After all, everything you are going to hear in the Symbol is already contained in the divine documents of the holy scriptures, from which you regularly hear extracts as the need arises. [...] So this is the Symbol which has already been imparted to you as catechumens through the scriptures and sermons in church, but which has to be confessed and practiced and made progress in by you as baptized believers.<sup>4</sup>

From the moment he learned the creed by heart, the believer was taught that he had at his disposal the whole content of Christian textual culture. Surely, as he listened to Augustine's sermon, he would have found satisfaction in the realization that the creed

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<sup>3</sup> *Serm.* 398.1.

that he knew by heart was at the centre of the literary culture in which he was participating, even if he could not follow the reasoning that led from the scriptural passage of the *regula fidei*. Surely the suggestion that the uneducated Christian recognized that he was participating in the fullness of Christian education and culture is justified. At the least, the educated members would be forced to recognize that in spite of their secular education and status, the uneducated were participating equally in the Christian literary culture of the basilica.

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<sup>4</sup> *Serm. 212.2. In quo symbolo quod audieritis, totum in isto sermone nostro breviter collectum agnoscetis. [...] Hoc est ergo Symbolum, quod vobis per Scripturas et sermons ecclesisasticos insinuatum est: sed sub hac brevi forma fidelibus consistendum et proficiendum est.*

## Texts and Translations

### Abbreviations and Texts

- Conf.* Augustine. *Confessions*. Text and Commentary. Ed. J.J. O'Donnell. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992
- De Cat. Rud.* *De Catechizandis Rudibus*. J.P. Migne. *Patrologia Latina*.
- DDC* Augustine. *De Doctrina Christiana*. Ed. and trans. R.P.H Green. Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.
- Ennar. in Ps.* Augustine. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. J.P. Migne. *Patrologia Latina*.
- Ep.* Augustine. *Epistolae*. J.P. Migne. *Patrologia Latina*.
- Retractationes* Augustine. *Retractationum Libri Duo*. J.P. Migne. *Patrologia Latina*.
- Serm.* Augustine. *Sermones*. J.P. Migne. *Patrologia Latina*.
- Serm.* 15A, 223A, 223J, 299D, 398 *Miscellanea Agostiniana: Testi et Studi*. Vol. 1. *Sermones post Maurinos Reperti*. Ed. Germain Morin. Rome: *Tipographia Poliglotta Vaticana*.
- Serm.* 350B "Sermo de Eleemosyna." *Revue Benedictine* 77 (1967): 326-328
- Serm.* 359A "Sermo Lambot 4." *Patrologiae Latinae Supplementum*. Vol. 2. 759-769.
- Servius* Georgius Thiilo, Hermannus Hagen, ed. *Servii Grammatici In Vergilii Carmina Commentarii*. Vol. 1. *Aeneid I-V*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961
- Tract in Joh. Latina.* Augustine. *Tractatus in Johannem*. J.P. Migne. *Patrologia Latina*.
- Vita* Possidius. *Vita Sancti Aurelii Augustini*. J.P. Migne. *Patrologia Latina*.

*n.b.* The numbering used for the sermons follows that of the New City Press translation. All are found under the same number in the *Patrologia Latina*, except those for which I

give other editions.

**Translations**

The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Series Ed. John E. Rotelle. New City Press, 1991-

St. Augustine. *The First Catechetical Instruction*. Trans. Christopher, J.P. Westminster, MD: Newman, 1962.

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