Augustine and the Disciplines

From Cassiciacum to *Confessions*

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Augustine's Hermeneutics as a Universal Discipline!?

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I. INTRODUCTION

The sense of abstract terms often varies between domains of research. For our purpose, 'hermeneutics' may be defined as theoretical reflection on the conditions under which a transmitted text becomes understandable to a contemporary reader. More generally, hermeneutics is 'the classical discipline concerned with the art of understanding texts', a theory of the rules for interpretation, whereas 'exegesis' refers to the practical application of such rules to a given text or texts.[1]

If we accept these definitions of hermeneutics, we shall not be able to point to a single (extant) work dedicated as a whole to this discipline before Late Antiquity. In ancient literature of the 'classical' periods, we find only rudimentary reflections on the ways of interpreting a text correctly, integrated in various practical contexts. So, for example, in the grammatical tradition we have the fourfold way of dealing

[1] H.-G. Gadamer, *Hermeneutik*, i: *Wahrheit und Methode*, 6th edn. (Tübingen, 1990), 169; 'Die klassische Disziplin, die es mit der Kunst des Verstehens von Texten zu tun hat, ist die Hermeneutik' (p. 146 in Engl. trans. (London, 1975)). See R. Barthes *et al.*, *Exégèse et herméneutique* (Paris, 1971) for hermeneutics as 'savoir de l'appropriation du sens' (p. 15), as an enriched synonym for 'interpretation' (p. 278), and for the various exegetical methods (p. 280). See also A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1980), 10–12, and D. F. Wright, 'Augustine: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics', in M. Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, i, pt. 1 (Göttingen, 1996), 701–30.

with the canonical school authors: 'lectio' (correct pronunciation, intonation, and division of words); 'emendatio' (textual criticism); 'enarratio' (detailed commentary on the text as now established, including its historical, mythological, and rhetorical aspects);[2] and 'iudicium' (judgement of the authenticity and value of a piece of literature).[3] In rhetoric, there is the 'status'-system of the rhetorician Hermagoras (second century BC), the so-called *Status Hermagorae*; one section of this contains the *Status Legales*,[4] which give rules on how to solve specific difficulties in understanding a given, fixed text—in this case, that of a written *law*—in order to be able to apply it correctly to a specific case. Questions of the interpretation of written laws are also treated in the legal literature, as for example in the *Digest* (1. 3 and 50. 17).

In Christian tradition before the end of the fourth century, hermeneutical reflection is also relatively rare. The only exception is Origen who deals in the fourth book of *De Principiis* ('On the Principles of Christian Faith') with the topic of how to interpret Holy Scripture. He explains the method of 'allegorical' interpretation, which enables the reader to detect one or several hidden senses beneath the literal meaning of a text. This technique has its 'pagan' equivalent in allegorical interpretation of Homer, Virgil, or Orphic texts (Derveni papyrus),[5] which can be traced back to the sixth century BC.[6]

[2] K. Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and its Humanist Reception* (New Haven and London, 1997), 20–40.

[3] See, e.g., Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 1. 4. 1–3; 1. 8. 1–21.

[4] See Cicero, *De Inventione* 2. 116–54 (ambiguity, letter and intent, conflict of laws, reasoning by analogy, definition), and Augustine (?), *De Rhetorica* 11 (four types of controversy or 'quaestiones legales': 'scriptum et voluntas', 'contentio legum contrariarum', 'ambiguitas', 'conlectio').

[5] See now A. Laks and G. Most (eds.), *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus* (Oxford, 1997), including an edition and translation of the text.

[6] See esp. K. Froehlich (trans. and ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia, 1984); P. Rollinson, *Classical Theories of Allegory and Christian Culture* (Pittsburgh, 1980); D. Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992); Z. Zlatar, *The Epic Circle: Allegoresis and the Western Epic Tradition from Homer to Tasso* (Sydney, 1993).

It is already clear that a stronger interest in hermeneutical questions arises when there is a fixed and canonical text to consider, like Homer, Virgil, written laws, oracles—or the Bible. For the most part, the obscurity of a text and the difficulty of understanding it are the results of its age and the circumstances of its transmission. This factor acquires additional importance when a text is granted religious or quasi-religious authority, with the implication that its message needs to be understood. The assumption then is that the text has a meaning—probably hidden—that is relevant to the contemporary reader.

The manner of dealing with a text is in many cases highly arbitrary, and also closely connected to socio-cultural norms and prevailing ideologies. So it seems reasonable to expect that a theory of interpretation (that is, hermeneutics) will take account of at least some of the factors just mentioned, and that it will offer an intellectual framework within which hermeneutical rules are supposed to operate.[7]

The first two works to deal exclusively and specifically with the discipline of hermeneutics are Tyconius' Liber Regularum and Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana. Both authors lived at the end of the fourth century, both were from North Africa, and both were Christians. There is no clear evidence as to why these two individuals at this particular time wrote those works; they themselves give no hints at all.[8]

[7] Cf. Barthes et al., Exégèse et herméneutique, 285, where P. Ricoeur emphasizes 'qu'il n'existe pas de méthode innocente; que toute méthode suppose une théorie du sens qu'on n'est pas acquise, mais qui est elle-même problématique'; similarly J. S. Croatto, Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning (Maryknoll, NY, 1987; original Spanish edn., Buenos Aires, 1984), p. x: 'there is no such thing as a nonhermeneutic reading of the Bible.'

[8] I have written on this elsewhere: see K. Pollmann, 'La genesi dell'ermeneutica nell'Africa del secolo IV', in Cristianesimo e Specificità regionali nel Mediterraneo Latino (sec. IV–VI): XXII Incontro di Studiosi dell'antichità cristiana, Studia Ephemeridis 'Augustinianum' 46 (Rome, 1994), 137–45, and eadem, Doctrina Christiana: Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der christlichen Hermeneutik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustinus, De doctrina christiana (Fribourg, 1996), 32–65; also B. Sundkler and C. Stead, A History of the Church in Africa (Cambridge, 2000), 21–36; R. J. Forman, Augustine and the Making of a Christian Literature (Lewiston, NY, 1995), 131–6.

We can only speculate about what led Augustine in 396 to start writing a hermeneutical treatise; contrary to his practice in many other works, including (perhaps the most famous instance) the City of God, he nowhere refers to a specific occasion. That he knew Tyconius' Liber Regularum can be seen from the paraphrase of that work that he includes at the end of Book 3 of De Doctrina Christiana.[9] In general, De Doctrina Christiana seems to avoid concrete, historical allusions that could detract from the universal validity of its precepts. Nor do we know why Augustine only finished the work after a break of thirty years, at the end of his life, in 426/7. It is remarkable, in any case, that he felt able to complete De Doctrina Christiana without any major alteration of his original plan, as he himself testifies in his Retractationes. (It is often stated that the older Augustine advocated a rather negative or pessimistic anthropology, depriving humanity of almost all dignity before the grace of God. Yet he let stand remarks in De Doctrina Christiana about the human ability to be a temple and a reasonable prophet of God.[10])

In the prologue to De Doctrina Christiana Augustine defines this work as 'certain precepts for the treatment of the Scriptures' ('praecepta quaedam tractandarum scripturarum', prol. 1) and defends it against potential critics. Then he defines the purpose of the work positively: in the same way that all who know letters are able to read for themselves and do not need anybody else to read for them, everybody who accepts the precepts of De Doctrina Christiana should be able to resolve the obscurities of the Bible on their own behalf. At least they may avoid the

[9] See M. Moreau, I. Bochet, and G. Madec (eds. and trans.), Saint Augustin: La doctrine chrétienne, BA 11(2) (Paris, 1997), 562–81; Pollmann, Doctrina Christiana, 196–215. Less satisfactory is G. Bray, Biblical Interpretation Past and Present (Downers Grove, Ill., 1996), who calls Doct. Chr. 'an amplification of Tyconius, whom [Augustine] regarded as too simplistic' (p. 92).

[10] Especially in the prologue and at the end of Book 4. G. Lettieri, L'altro Agostino: Ermeneutica e retorica della grazia dalla crisi alla metamorfosi del De doctrina christiana (Rome, 2001), dedicates an extensive study to the theological differences between the earlier and the later parts of Doct. Chr.

absurdity of depraved meanings ('aut certe in absurditaem pravae sententiae non incidat', prol. 9). Thus, like Tyconius, Augustine asserts the universal effectiveness of his hermeneutical rules, but he does so with a subtle limitation, laying greater emphasis than his African precursor on the independence of the individual reader and interpreter of the Bible (e.g., prol. 1 and 9).

Augustine, we have noted, compares his hermeneutics to the letters of the alphabet by means of which persons are able to understand a given text without another's help. This is what he says:

[T]hose ... 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. So just as the person who knows how to read does not require another reader, when he gets hold of a volume, to tell him what is written in it, in the same way, those who have grasped the rules we are endeavouring to pass on will retain a knowledge of these rules, like letters (*quasdam regulas velut litteras tenens*), when they come across anything obscure in the holy books, and will not require another person who understands to uncover for them what is shrouded in obscurity. (prol. 9)[11]

Two things are remarkable about this comparison. First, we might wonder how Augustine can state that a simple knowledge of letters is equivalent to an ability to read with understanding. A German, though he or she knows the letters of the Latin alphabet, will not even be able to utter (let alone understand) an English text unless told about certain phonetic rules. Things become even more complicated when we think of the ancient habit of writing without spacing between words ('scriptio continua') and the first step of the grammatical exercise, the 'lectio', which consisted of more than simply recognizing letter-forms.[12] Augustine's

[11] Trans. E. Hill, in *Saint Augustine: Teaching Christianity* (New York, 1996), 104.

[12] On the methodology of reading see M. Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory* (Cambridge, 1994), 68–74 (accent, vocalizing, punctuating, oral delivery); also the essay by Chin in this volume.

comparison makes sense, however, when we consider the ancient notion of letters: 'letters' or 'scripture' meant the conservation of words, texts, or thoughts already understood and thereafter fixed, as becomes clear from Plato's *Phaedrus*, Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* (1. 16a: letters as symbols of the spoken words), Quintilian,[13] and the grammatical tradition down to Priscian. In this tradition, reading was connected with an already existing body of (disciplinary) knowledge. To pursue the analogy: Augustine's hermeneutics teaches a discipline or technique that enables people to decipher or retrieve what they already know, or what is already known. This principle corresponds to the famous 'hermeneutical circle' that both assumes a close relationship between the authority of a text and the exegetical principles applied to it and calls for a fusion of the horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) of the text and its reader.[14] As Gadamer puts it, hermeneutics is not just a set of rules, but the way a reader interacts with the text by being part of it.[15]

A second point arises in connection with a remark of Augustine's in his *Tractates on the Gospel according to St John* (24. 2). There he distinguishes between a picture ('pictura') and letters ('litterae'). While it is sufficient to look at the beauty of a picture and be delighted by it, the aesthetic

[13] *Inst.* 1. 7. 3. See also Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, 97–104, on letters and writing.

[14] See BA 11(2)/438–49; Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition*, 58. Heidegger in particular theorized about the hermeneutical circle (Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 194–7), and was answered by Gadamer with his notion of the fusion of horizons (ibid. 304–8). See also Gadamer, *Hermeneutik* i. 270–95; idem, *Hermeneutik*, ii: *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2nd edn. (Tübingen, 1993), 57–65. For *Horizontverschmelzung* in particular see Gadamer, *Hermeneutik* i. 311 f., 380 f., 401; ii. 14, 55, 109, 351, 436, 475.

[15] Gadamer, *Hermeneutik* i. 273 f.; 396. 'Lesendes Verstehen ist nicht ein Wiederholen von etwas Vergangenem, sondern Teilhabe an einem gegenwärtigen Sinn' ('The understanding of something written is not a reproduction of something that is past, but the sharing of a present meaning' (Engl. trans. 354)); 398 f. Cf. G. Ripanti, *Agostino teoretico dell'interpretazione* (Brescia, 1980), 73–86, on the existential, theological, and philosophical presuppositions that influence all understanding.

appearance of a letter is of only minor importance. What matters is that letters admonish us ('commoneris') not only to read but also to understand the content they convey, which exceeds their material appearance. Applying this insight to the passage highlighted in the proem to *De Doctrina Christiana*, we can infer that Augustine's treatise is to be understood not as a self-sufficient literary artefact but as a work that somehow points to a field or fields of knowledge beyond itself.

Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* thus proposes a *universally* valid 'discipline of Scripture' and at the same time affirms its own strictly *relative* or *indicative* function. The tension between these two aims permeates the whole work, as we shall now attempt to show in detail.

2. HERMENEUTICS AS A DISCIPLINE: FRAMEWORK

Book I sets the normative horizon[16] of Augustine's hermeneutics: love ('caritas') towards God and one's neighbour is the framework and aim of every interpretation of the Bible.[17] According to Augustine, 'caritas' is the common boundary between God and humanity, and the one that unites all human beings among themselves; it is the boundary between history and eternity, between dynamic desire and final tranquil enjoyment. The universal dimension of 'caritas' is justified by its goal, the eternal God. Whereas love for temporal things fades away once the desired object has been obtained, love for eternal things remains even after possession of them (*Doct. Chr.* I. 38. 42). We shall return to this eschatological aspect of Augustine's hermeneutics.

This key Augustinian notion of 'caritas', however, contains a hidden weakness that relativizes it as a hermeneutical concept. It is basically an *ethical* criterion, which is only truly fulfilled in practical application and proved by appro-

16 On this term see Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 149–54.

17 Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 121–47; I. Sluiter, 'Metatexts and the Principle of Charity', in P. Schmitter and M. J. van der Wal (eds.), *Metahistoriography: Theoretical and Methodological Aspects in the Historiography of Linguistics* (Münster, 1998), 11–27.

priate (i.e., selfless) human conduct. Augustine modifies the pagan concept of love as a desiring and therefore motivating power, through a combination of Platonic ἔρος and Stoic ὁρμή ('impulse'),[18] which belongs to the ethical part of philosophy. In Book I he emphasizes that compliance with the commandments of the Bible, as the expressed will of God, has to be the final aim of every truly successful biblical exegesis. This ethical finality is re-emphasized in Book 4, where Augustine asserts that a speaker's (i.e., a preacher's) life-style may be more persuasive than any oration, and thus it comes to frame the whole work. A similar thought had already been formulated by Origen,[19] who distinguishes between purely theoretical disciplines, like geometry, whose final aim is the understanding of their own contents, and disciplines with a practical aim, like medicine, in which knowledge is acquired in order then to be applied in another sphere.[20] To the latter category belongs 'knowledge and service of the Word' ('notitia ministeriumque sermonis'), the final aim of which is works of mercy ('opera'). Theologically, this view could be supported by the biblical injunction in Ephesians 3: 19, 'to recognize the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge' ('supereminentem scientiae caritatem Christi'). This text is quoted in a passage of Book 2 of *De Doctrina Christiana* where Augustine emphasizes the conditions for proper Christian behaviour ('omnis actio christiana'), without mentioning intellectual activity.[21] Similarly, I Corinthians 8: I—'knowledge puffs up, but charity edifies' ('scientia inflat, caritas aedificat')—forms almost a mantra of *De Doctrina Christiana*.

Besides the ethical category of 'caritas', there is a *dogmatic* restriction on the hermeneutics proposed in *De Doctrina Christiana*. Augustine stipulates that a proper interpretation

18 Augustine, *Div. Qu.* 35. 2: 'amor' = 'appetitus'.

19 Origen, *In Lucam* I (GCS 35. 8–9).

20 Similarly, Cicero, *De Officiis* I. 42. 150 f., distinguishes between 'artes liberales', 'artes sordidae', and a third, intermediate class of 'artes, quibus . . . non mediocris utilitas quaeritur, ut medicina, ut architectura, ut doctrina rerum honestarum'.

21 *Doct. Chr.* 2. 41. 62: 'bene operari in Christo et ei perseveranter inhaerere, sperare caelestia, sacramenta non profanare'.

of Scripture should conform to the rule of faith,[22] which he briefly presents in Book 1 by offering theological explanations of the Christian doctrine of God and his church, according to the scheme of the Apostolic Creed. The clear implication is that this Creed was universally accepted by the Church—admittedly more a postulate than an actual reality in Augustine's time (as indeed today).

The universal potential of Augustinian biblical hermeneutics can thus be seen as limited, to some degree, by the ethical and dogmatic conditions imposed upon it.

3. HERMENEUTICS AS A DISCIPLINE: STRUCTURE

In the opening sections of Books 1 and 2 Augustine gives a clear systematic division[23] of the contents of *De Doctrina Christiana*, explaining the intended arrangement of the material in the four books of his treatise (see Fig. 9.1).[24]

At the beginning of Book 1 Augustine first states the theme of *De Doctrina Christiana*: namely, the treatment of Holy Scripture ('tractatio scripturarum'). Books 1–3 will deal with 'the mode of finding out what has to be understood' ('modus inveniendi, quae intelligenda sunt', 1. 1. 1),

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22 See M. Fiedrowicz, *Prinzipien der Schriftauslegung in der alten Kirche* (Bern, 1998), 151 n. 2; B. Studer, *Schola christiana* (Paderborn, 1998), 215 f.; and, for Augustine's successful negotiation between doctrinal 'auctoritas' and free 'ratio', Forman, *Augustine and the Making of a Christian Literature*, 100–28.

23 i.e., a *dihaeresis* or 'partitio' into the general ('genus') and the particular ('species'). Such a systematic division is characteristic of the pagan textbook ('ars' or, in Greek, *technê*), which is the generic literary model for Augustine's *Doct. Chr.*: Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 89–104.

24 This indicates that Augustine had the general plan of *De Doctrina Christiana* in mind when he started to write in 396 and kept to it when he finished the work in 426/7. The sketch in Fig. 9.1 is a slightly modified version of the analysis offered in Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 90. For recent summaries see M. Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction* (Edinburgh, 1994; original Italian edn., Rome, 1981), 107 f., and F. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge, 1997), 270–7. In *Doct. Chr.* 2, Augustine offers some additional subdivisions of the 'doctrinae gentilium'. For detailed discussion, see Klingshirn's essay in this volume.

doctrina christiana = tractatio scripturarum

modus inveniendi   modus proferendi

doctrina

res

– frui
– uti
– frui et uti

signa

naturalia data   data

frui ... bestiae homines

cetera   verba = signa

voces   litterae (= signa verborum)

signa ignota   signa ambigua

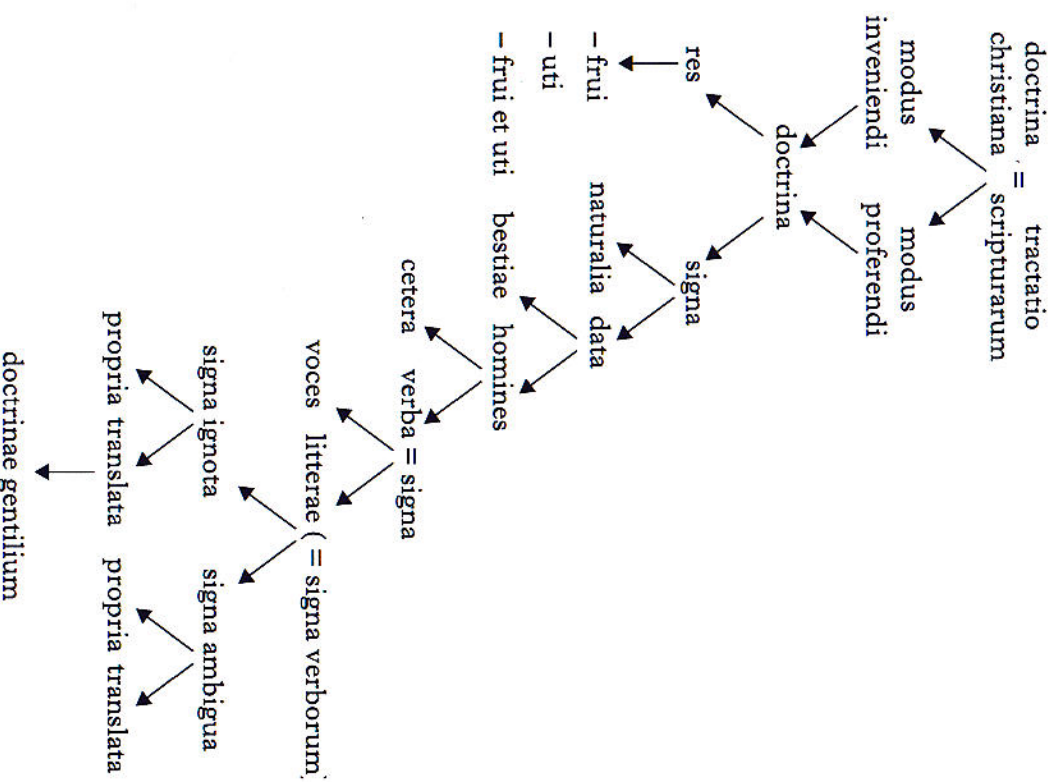propria translata   propria translata

doctrinae gentilium

FIGURE 9.1 Contents of *De Doctrina Christiana*

and Book 4 with 'the mode of making known what has been understood' ('modus proferendi, quae intellecta sunt', ibid.). At first glance it may seem strange that Augustine's hermeneutics is divided between a mode of finding, that is,

of understanding the sense of a text, *and* a mode of perform-ance, that is, communicating that sense to others. Modern hermeneutics—and before Augustine, that of Tyconius—confines itself to the former.[25] It has been suggested that Augustine's bipartition corresponds to the rhetorical div-ision between 'inventio', the discovery of ideas and subject-matter for a speech, and 'elocutio', their stylistic elaboration, but this view is open to serious objections. First, the system of rhetoric is customarily divided into five parts ('inventio', 'dispositio', 'elocutio', 'memoria', and 'actio'). Secondly, Augustine states explicitly at 4. 1. 2 that he is not composing a rhetorical textbook ('rhetorica praecepta'; cf. 'ars rhe-torica', 4. 2. 3). Thirdly, as can be seen from Figure 9.1, the traditional subject-matter of rhetorical 'inventio' and 'elocutio' does not convincingly fit the actual contents of *De Doctrina Christiana*. As an alternative explanation, we might suppose that Augustine was influenced by the originally Stoic distinction of an internal word (*logos endiathetos*) and an external word (*logos prophorikos*), which is taken over by religious thinkers from Philo onwards; indeed, Augustine briefly refers to it here (1. 13. 12), as well as in other works of his. However, the distinction in that case is one of specula-tive theology, used to account for the nature of Jesus Christ as the internal word of God in the external shape of a histor-ical human being. It is never taken for a linguistic model in *De Doctrina Christiana*.

The most convincing parallel is a fragment of Theophras-tus as quoted in Ammonius' commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*: 'The relation of speech (λόγος) is twofold, first in regard to the audience, to which speech signifies something [i.e., communication: *Doct. Chr.* 4], and secondly in regard to the things about which the speaker intends to

25 I have so far been unable to find a comparable dichotomy in modern hermeneutics, though Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 82 f., emphasizes the 'sequential rotation', in which the word generates the text and the text generates the word'. It is noteworthy that modern hermeneutical discus-sion, when dealing with Augustine at all, generally concentrates on his *Confessions* or quotes him at second-hand. This is true, e.g., for P. Ricoeur, M. Foucault, J. Derrida, and, to a lesser degree, H.-G. Gadamer.

persuade the audience [i.e., understanding: *Doct. Chr.* 1–3].[26] Augustine may be thought to have applied the twofold rela-tion or quality of speech as found in Theophrastus to his hermeneutics, making it the basis for his major subdivision of *De Doctrina Christiana* between Books 1–3 and Book 4. This would imply (a) that he sees a structural analogy between λόγος and hermeneutics,[27] and (b) that he regards the 'tractatio scripturarum' as a fundamental, if not *the* fundamental, activity of Christian understanding and communication.[28]

The presence of such a theoretical framework would also help to explain the structure of the *Confessions*, which Augustine composed after breaking off work on *De Doctrina Christiana*. It is often suggested that there is not much coherence between the first ten books that deal with Augustine's life up to his baptism and the final three books that contain a model exegesis of the beginning of

26 διττῆς γὰρ οὔσης τῆς τοῦ λόγου σχέσεως ..., τῆς τε πρὸς τοὺς ἀκροωμένους, οἷς καὶ σημαίνει τι, καὶ τῆς πρὸς τὰ πράγματα, ὑπὲρ ὧν ὁ λέγων προτίθεται πείσαι τοὺς ἀκροωμένους. See further Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 170–3. Granted, the 'ars grammatica' was similarly divided into a 'scientia interpretandi' (the science of interpreting) and a 'ratio recte scribendi et loquendi' (principles for writing and speaking correctly): Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, 6. But Augustine in *Doct. Chr.* is not interested in correct speech but in persuasion, even at the price of sacrificing grammatical correctness ('latinitas') if necessary: K. Vössing, *Schule und Bildung im Nordafrika der Römischen Kaiserzeit* (Brussels, 1997), 233 n. 901. Hence rhetorical principles are more important for his hermeneutics than grammatical ones; see also n. 41 below.

27 Already Philo had linked hermeneutical questions with an effort to penetrate the problem of language: K. Otte, *Das Sprachverständnis bei Philo von Alexandrien: Sprache als Mittel der Hermeneutik* (Tübingen, 1968); I. Christiansen, *Die Technik der allegorischen Auslegungswissenschaft bei Philo von Alexandrien* (Tübingen, 1968); Gadamer, *Hermeneutik* 1. 387–409, also sees a close link between language and hermeneutics.

28 This echoes the Neoplatonic idea that a person after the vision of the One will return and, if possible, bring word of the soul's heavenly inter-course to others (Plotinus, *Enneads* 6. 7. 35; 6. 9. 11); see also Augustine, C. *Faust.* 22. 54 (persons living a contemplative life are aflame with the love of generating, for they desire to teach what they know); Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 1. 5. 13; 2. 2. 4; and the essay by Conybeare in this volume.

Genesis.[29] If Book 10 (on memory) and Book 11 (on time) provide a generalizing link between the life of Augustine and the general experience of life in time, then the exegesis given by him mainly in Books 12 and 13 may be regarded as a particular form of the only true and possible continuation of a person's life after his or her conversion to Christianity. Given the anthropological model of *De Doctrina Christiana*, it makes sense that the one, all-embracing aspect of a Christian life-and-speech worth mentioning at this stage would be that of an activity of biblical exegesis directed towards others, this being the 'end' or ultimate meaning of any Christian's life after conversion, according to Augustine. A successful exegesis will always, finally, mean a morally good life-style.[30]

Theophrastus' 'pragmatic dimension of the sign', as it may be called, fits exactly with the immediate needs of Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana*, especially with regard to his final aim of persuading people and goading them to ethical action. In the same spirit, Augustine explains to his audience in a sermon (date of delivery unknown) on Christian 'disciplina' (= 'learning'[31]) that Christian 'disciplina' means the proper love of God and one's neighbour,

[29] For the structural problems of this change of subject in the *Confessions* see J. J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, iii (Oxford, 1992), 250–2; N. Fischer and C. Mayer (eds.), *Die Confessiones des Augustinus von Hippo* (Freiburg, 1998), 19–59, emphasizing the formal unity of the *Confessions*, considered as that of a Christian *protrepticus* in the form of a dialogue with God; and J. Holzhausen, 'Augustin als Biograph und Exeget: Zur literarischen Einheit der Confessiones', *Gymnasium* 107 (2000), 519–36, whose hypothesis that God has to be made to speak through exegesis in a biography (p. 536) is consistent with the argument advanced here.

[30] In the *Confessions*, Augustine does not so much emphasize the necessity of a morally good life-style as the goal of all truly successful exegesis as point to the eschatological end of a Christian life, the seventh day of eternal rest (*Conf.* 13. 35. 50–38. 53); cf. Fischer and Mayer (eds.), *Die Confessiones des Augustinus von Hippo*, 603–52. For the eschatological dimension of 'caritas' in *Doct. Chr*, see further below.

[31] Augustine, *Disc. Chr.* 1, echoes the etymology that would derive 'disciplina' from *discere*, which was popular in antiquity (e.g., Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 6. 62) but has now been discarded: G. Jüssen and G. Schrimpf, 'Disciplina, doctrina', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, i (Basel and Stuttgart, 1971), cols. 256–61, at 256.

which is more important than material wealth. Moreover, he makes it clear towards the end of Book 4 that he has not just a clerical, but a wider, potentially universal readership in mind as addressees for his hermeneutics, speaking of

a teacher of the truths by which we are delivered from eternal evils and conducted to eternal good things, wherever these are being presented, whether to the people, or privately to one person or several, whether to friends or enemies, whether in treatises or in unbroken discourse or in conversation, whether in treatises or in books, whether in letters either lengthy or brief. (4. 18. 37)

All Christians can read and try to understand Scripture; it will then be their task to communicate the results in sundry ways.[32]

It is noteworthy that in Book 4 Augustine, despite his generally universal scope, gives two African examples to make his point. First (at 4. 10. 24), he says that the Latin word 'os' is ambivalent, meaning 'bone' when the *o* is short and 'mouth' when it is long. He recommends for the sake of clarity that the dedicated teacher, when speaking to the unlearned, not shrink from saying 'ossum' (vulgar Latin for 'bone') rather than 'os', so as to avoid misunderstanding on the part of those unable to distinguish between short and long vowels. Interestingly, Augustine had already discussed the ambivalence of 'os' thirty years earlier, before breaking off work on *De Doctrina Christiana* (3. 3. 7). Then too he had pleaded for the common barbarism 'ossum' as a way of conveying the correct meaning without ambiguity, but without the specific reference to Africa. The new specificity of the later reference perhaps reflects the writer's own greatly increased experience of the conditions of preaching in North Africa over the intervening decades. (Note also 4. 24. 53, where, as an example of a speech in the grand style, he cites a

[32] See in more detail Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 69–75; G. G. Stroumsa, 'Milk and Meat: Augustine and the End of Ancient Esotericism', in A. and J. Assmann (eds.), *Schleier und Schwelle*, i (Munich, 1997), 251–62; I. Sluiter, 'Communication, Eloquence and Entertainment in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*', in J. den Boeft and M. L. van Ploo-van de Lisdonk (eds.), *The Impact of Scripture in Early Christianity* (Leiden, 1999), 245–57, at 250–9.

sermon of his own given in Caesarea in Mauritania around 418.[33]

Broadly speaking, in *De Doctrina Christiana* Augustine combines several fairly heterogeneous fields, including ethics ('caritas') and dogmatics (the Creed and Trinitarian thought) in Book 1, semiotics and grammar in Books 2 and 3, rhetoric in Book 4, and the pagan liberal arts at the end of Book 2, in order to show the propaedeutic usefulness of the encyclopaedic knowledge of his time for an understanding of the Bible. In this he goes further than Tyconius, who had combined theological and grammatical-rhetorical categories in his *Liber Regularum*.[34] It is therefore not surprising to find scholars criticizing Augustine's hermeneutics for its lack of coherence. The strictly systematic structure of *De Doctrina Christiana* makes it clear, however, that Augustine aimed at such coherence. The failure of modern readers to recognize that degree of systematicity probably results from the fact that, as far as we know, Augustine's organization of his material does not follow any traditional system (τέχνη/'ars'). For instance, he adopts neither the full-blown Stoic doctrine of signs nor any encompassing grammatical or rhetorical scheme. Instead, he takes up particular elements of such systems and transforms or enlarges them for his own hermeneutical purpose, which is to indicate how one should handle traditional disciplines, which methods can be used to obtain an understanding of the Bible and to expound it to others, and what the limits and final aim of this undertaking are.

Thus conceived, Augustine's hermeneutics becomes a kind of 'meta-method' or 'meta-discipline' embracing all other disciplines by indicating their instrumental service for understanding the Bible, and by denying them a specifically Christian usefulness in their own right. This is an ambitious

33 See for this K. Pollmann, 'African and Universal Elements in the Hermeneutics of Tyconius and Augustine', in P.-Y. Fux, J.-M. Roessli, and O. Wermelinger (eds.), *Augustinus Afer—Saint Augustin: Africanité et universalité, Actes du colloque international Alger–Annaba, 1–7 April 2001* (Fribourg, 2003), ii. 353–62.
34 Cf. Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana*, 55–6; and Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition*, 61, who distinguishes between broadly legal and broadly stylistic rules.

correction of *De Ordine*, written in 386, where dialectic had been called the 'discipline of disciplines' (2. 13. 38) and the 'artes' were commended as a means of gradually ascending to the highest truth (2. 2. 5, 35–44; 2. 18. 47). In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine explicitly revokes such claims.[35]

4. HERMENEUTICS AS A DISCIPLINE: TOOLS

The combination of these heterogeneous fields in *De Doctrina Christiana* is made possible by what Augustine uses as his chief hermeneutical tool: the sign.

All things, including methods and disciplines, can have the function of a sign. At 2. 1. 1 Augustine gives a definition of the sign: 'a sign is a thing (*res*), which, besides the outward appearance it presents to the senses, causes something else to come out of it into one's knowledge' ('signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire'). This definition is not exactly Stoic, because the Stoics made a systematic distinction between the sensible material σημαῖνον ('signifier') and the incorporeal, intelligible σημαινόμενον ('signified'), which can also be called λεκτόν ('sayable'). The latter plays no part in the system of *De Doctrina Christiana*, where Augustine is interested only in the relation between 'res' and 'signum'. As Ammonius testifies (*De Interpretatione* 17. 2–8), Aristotle thought that in a linguistic context 'it is not necessary to conceive of anything else additional . . . which the Stoics postulated and decided to name a "sayable"'.[36] In

35 Note esp. *Doct. Chr.* 2. 37. 55: 'tantum abest error, quo videntur sibi homines ipsam beatae vitae veritatem didicisse cum ista didicerint'. This sceptical attitude of the older Augustine towards scientific knowledge (for which cf. also *Ep.* 101. 2; *Retr.* 1. 3. 4; similarly *Civ.* 10. 29; 'ad Deum per virtutem intelligentiae pervenire paucis esse concessum') had few followers among later thinkers: H. M. Klinkenberg, 'Artes liberales/artes mechanicae', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, i. 532; C. Horn, *Augustinus* (Munich, 1995), 58–61; Studer, *Schola christiana*, 182, 226–9 (on dialectic as an acceptable tool for Christians).
36 A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, i (Cambridge, 1987), 198 (λεκτόν is the Augustinian 'dicibile' in *De Dialectica*); W. and M. Kneale, *The Development of Logic* (Oxford, 1962), 140, prefer to translate it 'what is meant'; cf. also Heßbrüggen-Walter in this volume, esp. 186, 190–1, 194–202.

De Dialectica, written in 387, Augustine mentions the Stoic λεκτόν ('dicibile'), which plays no role in _De Doctrina Christiana_ roughly ten years later. Again we can see that Augustine knew the criterion in question and omitted it deliberately. It was the rhetorical tradition, however, that knew the twofold definition of 'sign', as something sensible and intelligible. Cicero, for example, says that 'a sign is something apprehended by one of the senses and indicating something that seems to follow logically as a result of it'.[37] This formula correlates with a holistic definition of human beings as consisting of body and soul.[38]

As may be gathered from the work of a writer like Sextus Empiricus, there was considerable debate about the nature of signs in antiquity. Augustine's _De Dialectica_ shows that he was well aware of this discussion. Hence we can conclude that in _De Doctrina Christiana_ he consciously adopted elements of peripatetic and rhetorical theories of language and sign. The rhetorical focus was enlarged by Augustine himself, who dilates the system by introducing 'signa ignota' and 'ambigua', and 'propria', and 'translata' (unknown, ambiguous, proper, and transferred signs), which are all rhetorical categories.[39] This proceeding bears out the general observation that Augustine in his hermeneutics laid great emphasis on the rhetorical or communicative aspect of persuasion,[40]

[37] Cicero, _De Inventione_ 1. 39. 48: 'signum est quod sub sensum aliquem cadit et quiddam significat quod ex ipso profectum videtur'. Cf. the Aristotelian logical tradition: Aristotle, _Analytica Priora_ 70a. 7–9; _Rhetorica ad Alexandrum_ 12. 1430b, where only the intellectual, not the sensual, aspect is mentioned.

[38] Mentioned, e.g., at _Doct. Chr._ 1. 26. 27; _C. Faust._ 22. 27; _Beata Vita_ 2. 7; _Ep._ 3; _Serm._ 150. 5, following the Aristotelian tradition, and not the Platonic, as he does in other places; cf. M. Simonetti, _Sant'Agostino: L'istruzione cristiana_ (Verona, 1994), 399 n. 6.

[39] See Pollmann, _Doctrina Christiana_, 180–1.

[40] Cf. Eden, _Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition_, 42, directed against statements by Irvine—e.g., _Making of Textual Culture_, 170: 'The model for interpreting texts in _De doctrina christiana_ is grammatica, not rhetorica'; 178 (_Doct. Chr._ called a Christian 'ars grammatica'); but cf. 183 ('grammatico-rhetorical' elements). We should note that Augustine at _Doct. Chr._ 3. 29. 40 states explicitly that he does not intend to write an 'ars grammatica', but neither does he want to write an 'ars rhetorica' (4. 1. 2). Chin's essay in this volume renews the claim for the 'grammaticality' of _Doct. Chr._, but on different grounds.

meaning in this case the actualization of the biblical message and its application to the needs and interests of the individual reader or hearer. Augustine implicitly assumes that the Bible is the universal book that can replace all other reading. To sketch the principles of its interpretation is thus already to adumbrate a universal hermeneutics.

We may ask why Augustine decided to introduce the question of the sign into his hermeneutics at all,[41] and here we can look again at the text already mentioned from his _Tractates on the Gospel according to St John_, where he distinguishes between the nature of a picture and that of a letter. Horace in _Ars Poetica_ 361 says that poetry is like a picture ('ut pictura poiesis'), reflecting the Aristotelian mimetic theory of literature. Augustine does not want the Bible (or his own work, least of all _De Doctrina Christiana_) to be _mimetic_, but to be _semiotic_—in other words, full of signs admonishing us, like letters, to decipher and understand at a deeper level.[42] One should not neglect the material surface of those signs (i.e., the 'literal' sense of the Bible), but the literal sense is not necessarily an end in itself. Augustine thus manages to integrate both the historical-critical and the allegorical approaches to the biblical text, on the basis of a system that is specifically Christian in character. The sign as the principle tool of Augustine's hermeneutics allows for its universal dimension, since (a) all things can be signs anyway, and (b) signs in virtue of their relativity or relatedness are not meant to stand by themselves but need a wider context in order to be intelligible—a context that implies a limitation of their objectivity.[43]

As Kathy Eden rightly points out,[44] Augustine develops a hermeneutics of the middle way, avoiding the excesses either of a purely literal reading, associated by him with the Jews

[41] He states already at _Doct. Chr._ 1. 2. 2 that 'every discipline deals with things or with signs, but things are learned by signs' ('omnis doctrina vel rerum est vel signorum, sed res per signa discuntur').

[42] For a similar distinction between reference and mimesis see R. Lundin, C. Walhout, and A. C. Thiselton, _The Promise of Hermeneutics_ (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1999), 50–7, following Gadamer.

[43] See, e.g., _Doct. Chr._ 2. 2. 3. Gadamer, _Hermeneutik_ 1. 424 f. (on Augustine, _Trin._ 15. 10–15), ii. 174–83.

[44] Eden, _Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition_, 61–2.

in their carnal servitude (*Doct. Chr.* 3. 9. 13), or of an exaggerratedly allegorical reading, associated by him with the pagans (3. 7. 11), in order to promote the spiritual liberty ('christiana libertas') of an alternative interpretation theory (3. 8. 12; 3. 9. 13).

5. HERMENEUTICS AS A DISCIPLINE: THEOLOGICAL SETTING

Putting the fundamental claims of *De Doctrina Christiana* into theological perspective, Augustine emphasizes repeatedly that it is God who in fact guarantees the success of both understanding and communication. Here of course he touches upon his doctrine of grace, and so embeds the universal claim of his hermeneutics in the even more universal and divine frame which is simultaneously its content, aim, and support.[45]

At the end of Book 1 (39. 43), Augustine quotes 1 Corinthians 13: 8: 'As for prophecies (*prophetiae*), they shall be done away with, as for tongues (*linguae*), they shall cease, as for knowledge (*scientia*), it shall be done away with.' For him, this eschatological goal is already fulfilled in the desert hermits who live without books, solely according to the principles of hope, faith, and charity. They do not even need the Bible except for the purpose of instructing others.[46] The same is true of *De Doctrina Christiana*: it too serves to instruct others, but will ultimately pass away.

The end of the work is therefore threefold:

Pragmatic: The goal of the treatise will be attained once people have understood how to interpret the Bible and can do it for themselves: in this respect, *De Doctrina Christiana* is like a knowledge of 'letters'.

Ethical: The aim of the treatise, and of the understanding of the Bible which it seeks to inculcate, will be fulfilled once people begin to live according to the double commandment of love for God and for one's neighbour: the hermeneutics of *De Doctrina Christiana* implies an ethics.

[45] On the 'hermeneutical circle', as thus inscribed and theoretically justified by Augustine, see above, n. 14.
[46] See BA 11(2).480–3.

Eschatological: Love alone ('caritas'), the goal of all exegesis, will endure beyond the end of time, leaving even faith and hope behind (1. 39. 43): *De Doctrina Christiana* is an instrument in the salvation-historical process.

The eschatological criterion has important implications for Augustine's developing view of the kind(s) of disciplinary knowledge fit to be espoused by Christians. Already in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, written about seven years before he became a bishop, in 388/90, Augustine linked human knowledge expressed in human words to the post-lapsarian state of humanity and foresaw the eschatological destruction of this kind of knowledge. He is commenting on Genesis 2: 5:

And therefore humanity, already toiling [because of the Fall] received from the clouds rain that was needful on earth, that is, teaching with human words. Hence we were given to understand that human beings toiling on earth—that is, established in the dryness of their sins—need to receive divine teaching through human words, like rain from clouds. But such knowledge will perish. (1 Cor. 13: 8)[47]

Aside from this theological devaluation of human learning, Augustine also has a pragmatic objection to disciplines which may be hard and thorny to learn and which can in some cases be more quickly and easily acquired through observation and imitation of others who practise them (*Doct. Chr.* 2. 37. 55).

The merely temporary status of 'doctrina' is confirmed by the scheme of the seven-step ascent to God outlined at the beginning of Book 2 (7. 9–11):[48]

Step 1: fear of God (cf. Matt. 5: 3)

[47] *Gen. adv. Man.* 2. 5. 6: 'et ideo iam laborans in terra necessariam habet pluviam de nubibus, id est doctrinam de humanis verbis. ... ut intellegeremus laboranti homini in terra, id est in peccatorum ariditate constituto, necessariam esse de humanis verbis divinam doctrinam tamquam de nubibus pluviam. Talis autem scientia destruetur.'
[48] For a wider context and other instances, see M. Parmentier, 'The Gifts of the Spirit in Early Christianity', in den Boeft and van Ploo-van de Lisdonk (eds.), *Impact of Scripture*, 58–78. M. Nussbaum, 'Augustine and Dante on the Ascent of Love', in G. B. Matthews (ed.), *The Augustinian Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999), 61–90, does not discuss this passage.

Step 2: modest piety, even when we do not understand Scripture (Matt. 5: 3)

Step 3: knowledge ('scientia' = 'doctrina christiana'), leading to mourning (Matt. 5: 5)[49]

Step 4: courage, hunger for justice (Matt. 5: 6)

Step 5: counsel with mercy, love of neighbour (Matt. 5: 7)

Step 6: dying to this world, purging of the eyes to see God, putting neither one's neighbour nor oneself before truth (Matt. 5: 8)[50]

Step 7: wisdom ('sapientia') in peace and tranquillity (Matt 5: 9)[51]

[49] See the more explicit statements in *Serm.* 347. 3: 'merebuntur scientiae gradum, ut noverint non solum mala praeteritorum peccatorum suorum, de quibus in primo gradu poenitentiae dolore fleverunt, sed etiam in quo malo sint huius mortalitatis et peregrinationis a Domino, etiam cum felicitas saecularis arridet' ('They will earn the level of knowledge, so that they do not only understand the evils of their previous sins, about which they wept on the first level of their penitence, but also understand how bad their situation is in their mortality and pilgrimage away from the Lord, even if worldly happiness smiles on them') (PL 39.1525); *Serm. Dom. Mont.* 1. 3. 10, 1. 4. 11.

[50] i.e., the step of 'understanding' (Hill, *Saint Augustine: Teaching Christianity*, 163 n. 11) which, oddly enough, Augustine does not actually name here. But cf. *Serm. Dom. Mont.* 1. 4. 11: 'intellectus congruit mundis corde tamquam purgato oculo, quo cerni possit quod corporeus oculus non vidit nec auris audivit nec in cor hominis ascendit, de quibus hic dicitur: "beati mundicordes" [Matt. 5: 8] ('Understanding coincides with those pure in heart, as if their eye had been cleansed, through which one can see what the corporeal eye did not see and the ear did not hear and what did not enter the human heart, about which it is said here: "Blessed are the pure in heart"').

[51] For a clearer correlation, see *Serm. Dom. Mont.* 1. 3. 10: 'postrema est septima ipsa sapientia, id est contemplatio veritatis, pacificans totum hominem et suscipiens similitudinem dei, quae ita dicitur: beati pacifici, quoniam ipsi filii dei vocabuntur [Matt. 5: 9]' ('Finally there is the seventh level, which is wisdom itself, that is the contemplation truth, which pacifies the human being as a whole and receives the likeness of God, of which is said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God"'). 'Pacificus' may be understood as either pacifying or 'peaceful': see A. Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 AD* (Cambridge, 1949, and reprints), s.v. Here Augustine takes the latter sense for granted, allowing himself a Platonic-Stoic interpretation of the highest state of the human soul as one of tranquillity: C. van Lierde, 'The Teaching of St Augustine on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit from the Text of Isaiah 11: 2–3', in F Van Fleteren *et al.* (eds.), *Augustine: Mystic and Mystagogue* (New York, 1994), 5–110, at 55–9.

Augustine here lists the gifts of the Holy Spirit attributed to the messianic king in Isaiah 11: 2–3,[52] but works backwards from the last, the fear of the Lord, to the first, the spirit of wisdom. He reverses the Old Testament order because 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'.[53] He seems to be the first to interweave the Beatitudes of the New Testament with the gifts of the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament.[54] The Beatitudes represent programmatically the new moral order and the new reality that Jesus came to proclaim. As the founder of this new kingdom, Jesus already represents the messianic king prophesied in Isaiah; by linking that prophecy with the Beatitudes, Augustine makes it valid for every Christian taught by Jesus, who came to fulfil the Old Testament (Matt 5: 17). The messianic perspective of Isaiah is seen as something that can be fulfilled by or in a Christian individual, who thereby becomes part of its eschatological realization.

[52] LXX: 'et requiescet super eum spiritus Domini: spiritus sapientiae et intellectus, spiritus consilii et fortitudinis, spiritus scientiae et pietatis, et replebit eum spiritus timoris Domini' ('And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and courage, the spirit of knowledge and piety, and the spirit of the fear of the Lord will fill him completely').

[53] Psalm 110 (111): 10; Sirach 1: 16: 'initium sapientiae timor Domini' ('The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'). The order of the saying was first changed by Hilary of Poitiers, *In Psalmos* 118: 5. 16 (around 365); see also Ambrose, *In Psalmos* 118: 5. 39. Cf. Augustine's explanation in *Serm.* 347. 2; see also *Serm. Dom. Mont.* 1. 4. 11.

[54] The Beatitudes had already been described as steps towards the ultimate goal of perfection by Gregory of Nyssa in his *Eight Speeches on the Beatitudes* (delivered 387), which had been adapted by Ambrose in his commentary on Luke (written between 388 and 392). The gifts of the Holy Spirit had been seen as guides towards God and Christian perfection by Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses* 3. 24. 1; *Demonstratio* 9; see A. Mutzenbecher, in CCSL 35, pp. xiii–xvi. Augustine seems to be the first to combine the Beatitudes of Matt. 5: 3–10 (economized from eight to seven) with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit of Isa. 11: 2–3. There is nothing like this in the commentaries on Isaiah by Eusebius and Jerome. (Origen's commentary on Isaiah is lost apart from some fragments.) Augustine can be seen advancing this view in his *Serm.* 347. 2 ff. (PL 39.1524–6, date of delivery unknown) and his *Serm. Dom. Mont.* 1 (written between 392 and 396), where, as already noted, we find all the elements of *Doct. Chr.* 2 in greater detail. See also *En. Ps.* 11: 7; *Ep.* 171A.

Characteristically, Augustine not only changes the order of the gifts of the Holy Spirit but also lines them up as a *progressive sequence* in which every step must follow the one before, whereas the Old Testament passage provides merely a cumulative enumeration.[55] Moreover, the messianic-prophetic context has now changed. In Isaiah, the messianic king is endowed with God's spirit (11: 2), which can be taken to imply that every individual needs the help of the Holy Spirit for a successful ascent.[56] But whereas the passage in Isaiah depicts a future vision that will transform the whole of society and establish a new and just order, Augustine concentrates on the spiritual progress of the individual.[57] Here Neoplatonic influence is visible, though the language and ideas are otherwise wholly biblical. The idea of progress and ascent is Neoplatonic, as is that of the final vision in a state of calm (compare Plotinus, *Enneads* 6. 9. 11) and of fellow human beings left behind.[58] For Augustine, however, these effects can only be worked by

[55] See also Augustine, *Serm.* 347. 2 f. (PL 39.1524 f.). There is no progression noted in Eusebius' or Jerome's commentaries on Isaiah or in Jerome's on Matthew: CCSL 35, p. ix. But in other contexts such moral progression had already been spelled out: e.g., Origen, *In Numeros Homiliae* 27 passim (esp. GCS 30.263, 272: 'ordinem protectuum', and 276); Ambrose, *In Lucam* 5. 50–2 (CCSL 14.152–3), and esp. 60: 'vide igitur ordinem ... nisi pauper fueris, mitis esse non poteris' (CCSL 14.155), based on Gregory of Nyssa, *Beat. Or.*

[56] e.g., *Doct. Chr.* prol. 8; 4. 15. 32; B. Kursawe, *Docere–delectare–movere: die officia oratoris bei Augustinus in Rhetorik und Gnadenlehre* (Paderborn, 2000), 39–41, at 46 f. Already Gregory of Nyssa saw the ability of a human to perform the Commandments implicit in the Beatitudes as a gift of God: *Beat. Or.* 7: ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ καὶ τὸ ἔργον ἐφ' ᾧ τὸν τοσοῦτον μισθὸν ἐπαγγέλλεται ἕτερον δῶρον εἶναι (PG 44.1281A).

[57] According to Augustine, this can only rarely be achieved in this life, and then only temporarily; R. Teske, 'St Augustine and the Vision of God', in Van Fleteren et al. (eds.), *Augustine: Mystic and Mystagogue*, 287–99, at 299. A similar opinion is expressed by Plotinus, *Enn.* 6. 9. 10.

[58] This 'anti-social' element is made explicit only in the model of ascent as described in *Doct. Chr*, and is not made sufficiently clear in the otherwise excellent commentary in BA 11(2).472. Cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 6. 7. 35 (someone having the vision of the One forgets all other objects of contemplation).

divine grace; there is thus a genuinely Christian quality to his presentation.[59]

What is most important for our purpose, though often ignored, is that Augustine allocates the work of *De Doctrina Christiana* itself to the third step, near the beginning of a person's progress towards the understanding and vision of God and the grasping of wisdom. There is a substantial gap between 'scientia' (also 'doctrina' or 'disciplina')[60] as a purely rational faculty of knowledge, the understanding of a clearly defined area or subject-matter with an ethical aim, and 'sapientia', the contemplation of eternal truths.[61] This emphasis is again Neoplatonic,[62] and corrects Augustine's earlier, more optimistic ideas about the capacity of dialectic

[59] See van Lierde, 'Teaching of St Augustine on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit', 18–24.

[60] H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, 4th edn. (Paris, 1958), 554–8, at 562, and, e.g., *Doct. Chr.* 2. 38. 57 for 'doctus' as opposed to 'sapiens'. Kursawe, *Docere*, 144 n. 643, claims that 'scientia' usually denotes 'personal knowledge', as opposed to 'objective discipline', which is certainly not always the case in Augustine.

[61] e.g., Augustine, *Serm.* 347. 2: 'sapientia, lumen scilicet mentis indeficiens' (PL 39.1524); *Serm. Dom. Mont.* 1. 4. 11: 'sapientia, id est contemplatio veritatis'. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, 564–9.

[62] In Neoplatonic thought, the intellect must be eternally out of its mind in order to be one with the divine mind. For this paradoxical self-transcendence of the intellect, see, e.g., Plotinus, *Enn.* 5. 3. 13: 6. 9. 11; C. Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 2nd edn. (London, 1960), 338 ff.; J. J. O'Meara, 'The Neoplatonism of Saint Augustine', in D. O'Meara (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (Albany, NY, 1982), 34–41, at 40. Analogously, in Augustine, seeing eternal truth means leaving behind the faculties of language and thought: *Ver. Rel.* 72: 'transcende et te ipsum. Sed memento, cum te transcendis, ratiocinantem animam te transcendere'; *Conf.* 9. 10. 24: 'et venimus in mentes nostras et transcendimus eas'; 9. 10. 25: 'et ipsa sibi anima sileat et transeat se non se cogitando'; G. Madec, 'Ascensio, ascensus', *AL* i. 465–75, at 469, 473; Studer, *Schola christiana*, 277–80; more generally Horn, *Augustinus*, 61–87; P. Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* (Cambridge, 2000), offers a different interpretation, emphasizing that Augustine, like Plotinus, sees the ultimate vision of God as a perfection of the activity of the mind, as opposed to Ps-Dionysius, where the realm of the mind is indeed left behind in the ultimate vision.

and philosophy to enable true understanding and wisdom (e.g., *De Ordine* 2. 18. 47–8).[63]

This relative positioning of the hermeneutic agenda of *De Doctrina Christiana* is consistent with the specific quality of its tool of choice, the sign. As already noted, signs are universally present, but their very nature is to hint at a different, higher reality, a reality that they do not and cannot represent fully in themselves. Besides this cognitive restriction, it should be borne in mind that Augustine says repeatedly that all successful biblical interpretation must result in ethically good behaviour: love towards God and one's neighbour. Such behaviour can even be a substitute for right interpretation, whether one is trying to make sense of the Bible for oneself (1. 39. 43) or attempting to convey its meaning to

63 We must therefore disagree with Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, 564, who, commenting on this passage in *Doct. Chr.*, asks rhetorically, 'la *scientia*, don de l'Esprit, n'est-elle pas la grâce qui nous permet de retirer un fruit spirituel de l'étude de l'Écriture et aussi ce fruit lui-même?', as if 'scientia' could here be identical with 'sapientia'. Note that for 'scientia' as a 'theological term', Marrou quotes only *Serm.* 347. 2 f.; *Serm. Dom. Mont.* 1. 4. 11–12; and *Doct. Chr.* 2. 7. 10—all places where Augustine treats Isa. 11: 2 f., where the Latin version includes the term 'scientia'. It is likely that, here as elsewhere (see Burton's essay above), Augustine was influenced by the biblical terminology; however, the context makes it clear that 'scientia' is used as a synonym for 'disciplina' (on which see refs. provided by Marrou, 562 no. 2, with Klinkenberg, 'Artes liberales', col. 532). Likewise, not strictly correct is the observation in BA 11(2) *ad loc.*, where it is claimed that Step 3, 'scientia', has a privileged place in the sevenfold ascent to God. This is true, of course, inasmuch as that is what Augustine wants to talk about in the treatise at hand (as stated at 2. 8. 12: 'sed nos ad tertium illum gradum considerationem referamus, de quo disserere quod dominus suggesserit atque tractare instituimus' ('But let us now turn our attention to that third level, on which I proposed to discuss and consider whatever ideas the Lord may have provided')), but it is not true from his overall theoretical point of view. All steps are indispensable, since all are conditions for a successful ascent, but each will be superseded in its turn, with the exception of the last. This is so despite the fact that, naturally, for Augustine the 'scientia divinarum scripturarum' ('knowledge of the Divine Scriptures') stands much above the 'scientia gentium' ('knowledge of the Gentiles') (*Doct. Chr.* 2. 42. 63), following 2 Tim. 4: 3, where the Christian 'sana doctrina' ('wholesome knowledge') (singular!) is contrasted with the plurality of false 'doctrinae' of heterodox groups and others. See also *Doct. Chr.* 1. 39. 43, where he quotes 1 Cor. 13: 8 about the eventual perishing of all prophecies, languages, and knowledge ('scientia').

others (4. 29. 61). The intellectual effort of interpretation is thus subordinated to a wholly ethical perspective, which is in turn superseded by the final step in the process of ascent, the possession of wisdom and the vision of God. This vision or fruition of God, though an act that fellow human beings will be able to enjoy mutually, will not contain any ethical or altruistic component.[64]

6. CONCLUSION: A UNIVERSAL DISCIPLINE AND ITS LIMITS

The preceding analysis should have made clear not only how in *De Doctrina Christiana* Augustine has endeavoured to provide a systematic, scientifically based theory of biblical interpretation from a Christian point of view, but also how he affirms this as the only justifiable intellectual occupation for a Christian. Other, 'worldly' disciplines are useful only in so far as they help with the understanding of the Bible. Augustine's hermeneutical claim is that biblical interpretation is the one true (Christian) discipline, comprising all others and giving them a perspective. In its theoretical comprehensiveness, this hermeneutics is a *universal discipline*. Not surprisingly, it is difficult to master. (Some of its requirements, such as familiarity with Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible, are known to have exceeded even Augustine's own abilities.) We must also conclude that, for Augustine, the phrase 'universal discipline' would be an oxymoron. Indeed, in his setting of pragmatic, ethical, dogmatic, theological, and eschatological restrictions on the 'meta-discipline' of the Scriptures, he seems at times remarkably prescient of modern debates on the limits of scientific or disciplinary knowledge.

64 e.g., *Doct. Chr.* 1. 22. 20; 23. 22; 29. 30; cf. *Civ.* 22. 30.