



Teaching Augustine with Dr. Junius Johnson

Lecture 4: Augustine's *De Doctrina*, Part I

Augustine's *On Christian Teaching*: Books I-III
Exploring hermeneutics, homiletics, and apologetics.

Introduction

- **Overview:**
Augustine's *De Doctrina* was published in three books in 397, with a fourth added in 426.
 - **Books I-III** reflect Augustine's pre-*Confessions* period, while Book IV was written later during his anti-Pelagian phase.
 - **Significance:**
 - A foundational text applying classical rhetoric to biblical interpretation.
 - Historically important in both theology and literary criticism.
 - Concerned with hermeneutics (interpretation of Scripture), homiletics (preaching), and apologetics (defending the faith).
-

Book I: Signs and Things

- **Distinction between Signs and Things:**
 - **Things:** Realities that do not signify anything else (e.g., a rock or a sheep).
 - **Signs:** Things that signify other things (e.g., words or gestures).
 - **Scripture's use of signs:** Augustine focuses on interpreting signs within Scripture, not general metaphysics.
- **Using (*utor*) vs. Enjoying (*fruor*):**



- **Enjoyment:** Loving something for its own sake (e.g., God).
 - **Use:** Loving something as a means to an end (e.g., a tool or resource).
 - **Example:** A traveler loves home (the destination) but makes use of the plane to get there.
 - **Application to Human Relationships:**
 - Humans (and angels) are to be *used* for God's sake, not enjoyed for their own sake.
 - The concept of "ordered loves": Only God should be enjoyed as the source of ultimate happiness. To enjoy anything else as the ultimate is idolatry.
-

Book II: Natural and Artificial Signs

- **Types of Signs:**
 - **Natural Signs:** Occur without human imposition (e.g., smoke indicating fire).
 - **Artificial Signs:** Created by humans (e.g., language or gestures).
- **Scriptural Interpretation:**
 - Scriptures are composed of both clear and obscure passages to prevent both boredom and discouragement.
 - Augustine's assertion: Obscure passages are often explained more plainly elsewhere in Scripture.
- **Stages of Spiritual Progress:**

Augustine describes seven stages of spiritual growth, which became foundational for Medieval spiritual manuals:

 - **Fear of God:** Entry point of spiritual development.
 - **Submission:** Holiness makes the soul teachable.
 - **Knowledge:** Self-awareness and understanding of one's unworthiness.
 - **Fortitude:** Strong desire for righteousness.
 - **Counsel:** Turning toward the good of others to purify selfishness.
 - **Purifying of Vision:** Attaching the soul to God's truth.
 - **Wisdom:** Reaching a state of rest, free from worldly cares.
- **Application:**
 - Focuses on humility and understanding the disorder of human loves.



- Practical approach to self-examination and spiritual growth through Scriptural contemplation.
-

Book III: Interpretation of Ambiguities

- **Ambiguities in Scripture:**
 - Augustine provides examples of ambiguous passages, primarily from Latin translations of the Bible.
 - He recommends returning to the original language (Greek or Hebrew) to resolve ambiguities.
 - **Relevance for Teachers:**
 - Modern-day recourse to original languages to clarify biblical texts.
 - Augustine's principles can still apply to contemporary biblical interpretation.
 - Augustine's own limited knowledge of Greek encourages humility for students—perfect knowledge isn't required for effective interpretation.
-

Key Themes in Books I-III

1. **Hermeneutics:**
 - Understanding the difference between signs and things and applying it to Scripture.
 - Avoiding idolatry by properly ordering love toward God, the only entity to be truly enjoyed.
 2. **Homiletics:**
 - Augustine's focus on how to teach Scripture effectively using classical rhetoric, balanced with Christian humility.
 3. **Apologetics:**
 - Defending the faith by understanding and clarifying ambiguous biblical texts.
-