

The Forgotten Three Decades and Book IV of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*

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Augustine's On Christian Doctrine (De Doctrina Christiana) is a treatise on how to teach and interpret the Scriptures (Williams 449). While previous research tended to consider the three decades that elapsed after the completion of the first three books of On Christian Doctrine as merely a literary fact, this paper aims to study the writing process of Augustine's text with a specific focus on the thirty-year lapse between the first part (Books I-III) and the last part (Book IV) of the work. Employing textual analysis and constant comparison method in the Grounded Theory, this paper concludes that as is demonstrated in Book I and restated in Book IV, the writing of the Book IV was planned in advance. Between 397 and 427, Augustine was involved in intensive writing tasks and ecclesiastical responsibilities. Augustine's writing was closely related with his debates with Manichees, Donatists, and Pelagius. These debates not only provided Augustine with an opportunity to enhance his own understanding of the Scriptures, which he focused on in Books I-III, but also offered a springboard for the development of his insights about Christian rhetoric in Book IV.

The state of rhetoric at the end of the Classical Period was highlighted by Aurelius Augustinus, or Augustine (c. 354-430 AD), a saint of the Roman Catholic Church who "transformed rhetoric into an apparatus for biblical hermeneutics" (Williams 416). Among works of his maturity is *On Christian Doctrine (De Doctrina Christiana)*, a treatise on how to teach and interpret the Scriptures (Williams 449). The work is divided into two parts: Books I-III focus on the discovery of meaning in the Scriptures; Book IV focuses on the teaching of that meaning. While the first three books were written at about the time he became Bishop of Hippo in 396 (Dyson 3), the fourth book was added around 427 (Bizzell and Herzberg 451). Despite extensive perusal of Augustine's voluminous oeuvre, previous researchers tended to overlook the three decades that elapsed after the completion of the first three books of *On Christian Doctrine* as merely a literary fact. Augustine's writings were staggering in quantity—his own

incomplete review of his books numbered ninety-three. There are, besides, almost three hundred letters and over four hundred sermons (Wills xii). Moreover, the writing of *On the Trinity* and *City of God*, two other of his most important works, also involved the intermissions of sixteen years and thirteen years respectively (Chabannes 237-8). It might be legitimate to assume the long break as a natural result of Augustine's aging and hectic life as Bishop of Hippo. However, there could be another story.

The purpose of this paper is to study the causes of the three-decade intermission between Books I-III and Book IV in Augustine's writing of *On Christian Doctrine* and the influence of the intermission on the writing of Book IV. What did Augustine do between 397 and 427? Which events occurred during the period that might have had an impact on his completing the treatise in 427? How is Book IV different from Books I-III and are there connections between them? Textual analysis is the major technique used to answer these questions. However, since the exploration of historical facts is often teeming with contestation, this paper also includes Grounded Theory as the theoretical and methodological basis in hopes that the constant comparison process will offer ongoing check and balance to maximize the credibility of the study (Glaser).

This paper aims at enriching the understanding of *On Christian Doctrine* as a classic of Christian rhetoric as well as the uniqueness of Book IV compared with Books I-III. The significance of this paper is firstly connected with the significance of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*. Augustine began writing *On Christian Doctrine* around 396 as one of the building blocks of his Christian philosophy. Albeit a newly ordained insignificant bishop of Hippo—a poor African diocese—Augustine tirelessly developed the program of “preparatory culture.” He proposed to the Christian intellectuals who wished to draw the greatest possible benefit from the study of the Scriptures: the Christian should assimilate ideas of the classical thinkers which were in accordance with the true faith (Chabannes 154-5). Under the influence of this program, Augustine evidently demonstrated in *On Christian Doctrine* the platonic pursuit of knowledge and Truth and the Ciceronian doctrines in language and style (Hagendahl 424), despite the fact that his contemporary colleagues largely isolated themselves from rhetoric (Williams 314). This work shows that Augustine was not only far advanced in his knowledge of the Bible during the period following his conversion, but he was far-sighted in his efforts to disseminate Christian messages in a vast scope (Bourke 146). It is therefore worth closely studying the writing process of this work to fully explore its implications.

The significance of this paper also lies in the attempt to fill a hole in the study of Christian rhetoric in *On Christian Doctrine*. While Books I-III are more concerned with the “discovery” and interpretation of the Scriptures, Book IV is more specific in the technique of allegory, which not only marks the sublimation of various signs that were classified in previous books, but elevates the position of rhetoric as a combination of eloquence and wisdom in Christian preaching (Williams 494). This leap is closely related to Augustine’s debates or correspondence with non-Christians such as Manichees, Donatists, and Pelagians (Battenhouse 41). By exploring the events and works that contributed to the content and the style of Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine*, this paper purports to fill the hole that has long been overlooked by previous researchers and to enrich the understanding of the work.

This paper consists of four sections. Firstly is the discussion of the writing of the first three books of *On Christian Doctrine*. Secondly is the presentation of Augustine’s life and the relevant historical context between 397 and 427. Thirdly is the analysis of Book IV with its relation to the social and intellectual context. Fourthly are the limitations of research and questions that merit further research. The paper ends with a conclusion that summarizes the findings and significance.

Part I: Books I-III of *On Christian Doctrine*

Although *On Christian Doctrine* is a work of Augustine’s maturity in the discussion of rhetoric, the grounding work was laid before his conversion to Christianity in Milan (William 493). Around 387, he wrote *De Dialectica* (*On Dialectic*)—a fragmentary schoolbook containing prolegomena to logic and discussing the obscurity of language. In 389, he wrote *De Magistro* (*On the Teacher*)—a dialogue with his son Adeodatus on how and whether teaching is possible. Augustine posited that language is a system of signs: “A word is a sign of any kind of thing...A sign is what shows both itself to the senses and something beyond itself to the mind. To speak is to give a sign by an articulate utterance” (*Dial.* 5.7, qtd. in Kirwan 35). Signs are more than the reflection of the objective world. More importantly, they reflect the subjective world, as one who speaks “gives forth a sign of his will by means of articulate sound” (*Mag.* 1.2, quoted in Kirwan 36).

As speaking is giving signs that signify the speaker’s will, classifying and interpreting signs are crucial for understanding the meanings conveyed by the signs. The first three books of *On Christian Doctrine* were therefore devoted to the interpretation of evangelical signs through Hermeneutics.

In Book I, Augustine notes that "All instruction is either about things or about signs" (2, quoted in Williams 494). He developed a Platonic metaphor suggesting that, for the Christian, being in the world is like being a traveler trying to return to his or her native land, a land of blessedness or love of God. Our worldly journey to blessedness should be a cleansing or healing process during which God "cures" human impurities with the "medicine" of God's word (Bizzell and Herzberg 453). Therefore, reading the Scripture can lead humans to blessedness so long as they can differentiate signs from things. After that, Augustine directed the reader to a more intriguing question: what is the key to fully interpreting the things/signs suggested? The conclusion reached in Book I is that "love of God and its companion virtues, faith and hope, must be the norm for the perfect interpretation of the Scripture" (Sullivan 5).

Book II turned to the classification of signs into "natural signs" and "conventional signs." Natural signs cause something else to come into thought. For instance, smoke indicates fire. Conventional signs are, however, intentionally used to demonstrate "what it may be that they have sensed or understood" (*Doct. Christ.* 2.1.2-2.2.3, quoted in Kirwan, 40-1). Some of the conventional signs are scriptural signs. They deserve the Christian preacher's close attention because scriptural signs often lie in obscure and ambiguous words—God wants to correct our pride and make us value the meaning more highly since we must work hard for it. Augustine sorts interpretive problems into four categories: unknown literal, unknown figurative, ambiguous literal, and ambiguous figurative signs (Bizzell and Herzberg 453). Obscurities should be explained by the preacher to the audience. While any interpretation that encourages charity is not wrong, it is inappropriate for the reader to interpret the Scriptures in ways that the biblical author does not intend. Augustine suggested seven keys to unlocking the hidden meaning of perplexing signs: 1) fear of God; 2) piety; 3) knowledge of the Bible and Church doctrine; 4) resolve; 5) compassion; 6) purity of eye and heart; and 7) wisdom, which is founded in fear of God (Williams 494).

Book III further addressed ambiguous signs. Ambiguity may rise from punctuation, pronunciation, or translation. Comparing translations can help. More importantly, ambiguity may result from the literal or figurative connotations. Augustine distinguishes ambiguous signs between literal signs and figurative signs. Literal signs are understood by following the primary meaning of the word or words, while figurative signs include persons or situations with a symbolic context. For example, the meaning of the Christian cross is often connected with Christianity. In an era that placed extensive emphasis on the

purity of life or the correctness of doctrine, it is natural for Augustine to suggest that when the literal sense of a sign indicates immorality, this sign should be interpreted figuratively. In other words, the interpretation of the Scripture should by all means promote charity. Besides, to resolve the ambiguity of a figurative sign, Augustine suggests looking at how the ambiguous sign is used elsewhere in the Scripture (Williams 494; Bizzell and Herzberg 454).

As a compendium of biblical hermeneutics, *On Christian Doctrine* aims to serve two purposes: to discover the proper meaning of the Holy Scripture; and to explain that meaning, once discovered. These two purposes of the work were given in the opening lines of Book I (Sullivan 5), which means the expression of the Holy Book had been included in Augustine's writing plan long before he started writing the fourth book. At the beginning of Book IV, Augustine restated the division of the work:

According to the plan adopted at the outset, I divided this work of mine, which is entitled Christian Instruction, into two parts. After the introduction in which I replied to those who would have censured it, I said: "The entire treatment of the Scriptures is based upon two factors: the method of discovering what we are to understand and the method of teaching what has been understood. I shall discuss first the method of discovery and then the method of teaching." (*Doct. Christ.* 4.1.1, qtd. in Augustine, *The Retractations* 127)

Although he did not clarify the reasons why he would wait for about thirty years to achieve the second goal, it is possible that Augustine was aware that he would not realize both goals at one time. When it comes to a highly productive writer like Augustine, it would be quite absurd to attribute the procrastination to common reasons like sluggishness. It is more likely to be some significant societal changes or personal experiences which led to Augustine's change of mind in finishing this exposition of Christian rhetoric.

Part II: Augustine in 397-427

According to Sullivan, the first part (Books I-III) of *On Christian Doctrine* was written some time shortly after 396. Book II mentioned that St. Ambrose was still alive at that time in Chapter 40 (par. 61), so the first part was written before April 4, 397, the date of Ambrose's death. The early months of the year 397, in this manner, are the accepted date of the first three books (3-4). The exact written date of the last part was unknown, but 426-427 seems the most probably date, as Augustine stated in Chapter 24 (par. 53), in Book IV, his trip to

Caesarea Mauritania occurred "almost eight or more years" before its composition, and the date of this trip, according to several testimonies, is 418 (Sullivan 4).

However, another position frequently held is that Books I and II and Book III up to Chapter 25 (par. 35) were written around 397, and that the remainder of Book III and all of Book IV were composed about 426 or 427. Such a position is supported by indications in the work itself and in other works of the author and by Possidius's *Vita Augustini*. For example, Augustine mentioned in *The Retractations* about the incompleteness of Book III:

Accordingly, I completed the third book which had been written up to the place where mention is made of a passage from the Gospel about the woman who "buried leaven in three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." I then added a last book and thus completed this work in four books. (125)

Nevertheless, considering the facts that Augustine finished 25 out of 37 chapters of Book III around 397 and that Augustine appeared to have planned to write only 25 chapters for Book III at the beginning, I decided to keep using 397 as the completion date of the first part (Books I-III) of *On Christian Doctrine*.

Between 397 and 427, Augustine remained in Hippo (though he travelled to Carthage at least once a year), a backwater farming community which was so isolated that most of the common people working the farms outside the town did not speak Latin (Brown, qtd. in Williams 455). The isolation enabled Augustine to focus on producing a voluminous body of writing including texts, letters, and sermons. To expedite production, he dictated to a team of shorthand transcribers, who took down his words and then turned them over to copyists (Williams 455). Here is the list of principal works finished between 397 and 427:

- 397: *On Various Questions to Simplicianus*
- c. 400: *On the Trinity* (first part), *On the Gospels*, *On the Work of Monks*
- 400: *Against Faustus, the Manichaen*, *Confessions*
- 400-2: *Against the Letters of Petilianus*
- 401: *On Marriage*
- 401-15 *Genesis*
- 405: *On the Nature of Good*
- c. 405-11: Letters to Emeritus
- 408: Two Letters to Olympius, Letters to Vincent the Rogatist
- 409: Letter to the Donatists

- 410: *On Single Baptism*, Sermons on the Sack of Rome
 410 or 411: Letters to Dioscorus
 411: Discourse on Peace, Sermons against the Pelagians
 412: *Treatise on the Punishment and Remission of Sin, The Spirit and the Letter*
 413: *City of God* (first part)
 415: *On Nature and Grace*
 416: Sermons on the First Epistle of Saint John, On the Trinity (end)
 417-27: Four Letters to Boniface
 418: *Against Pelagius and Coelestius, Discourse in Caesarea on Catholic Unity*
 419-20: *On Marriage and Concupiscence, On the Origin of the Soul*
 c. 421: *Against Julian and the Pelagians*
 424: *Letters against the Semi-Pelagians*
 426: *City of God* (end)
 426-7: *On Grace and Free Will, Retractations* (Chabannes 237-8)

An overwhelming majority of the works in this era was theological and polemical, which reflects his responsibilities as a bishop and his zeal for the Christian orthodoxy. Besides, Augustine gave sermons daily and managed a range of ecclesiastical duties. For instance, in 407, Emperor Honorius gave bishops judicial authority to enforce the laws against Jews, pagans, and heretics, which meant that Augustine frequently spent entire days hearing court cases (Williams 455). Augustine's efforts were unbending against Manichees, Donatists, and Pelagius, the last of which occupied his attention even until his death (Battenhouse 41). It is very likely that the practice of combating heresy enriched Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine*, a handbook of Christian rhetoric that focused on delivery and style.

Against Manichees

Augustine's case against the Manichees was rooted in his belief in Manichaeism for nine years before conversion to the Christianity. His investigations into spirituality and true happiness led him to Manichaeism, a dualistic religion from Persia that had shared many fundamental beliefs with Christianity. One of the disputes between Manichaeism and Christianity is about why good and evil coexist in the world. While the Christian doctrine held that evil was created by a good and powerful being, Manichaeism proposed that good and evil coexist in the world: there are two equally powerful gods in the universe, one good, the

other evil. These two gods respectively created light and darkness and are in perpetual battle (Hopper 155).

Two factors caused Augustine's adherence to the Manichees. One was association and familiarity with the Manichees of Carthage, where the sect was very strong. The other was the youthful arrogance that made him despise the simplicity of the Scriptures: he "shunned their style," which was "honeyed with heaven's honey and luminous with its light" (*Confessions*, 3.5.9, qtd. in Hopper 155). His easy victories in religious debate, "in arguing with ignorant Christians," also brought ego-satisfaction. His "ardor in disputations" increased daily, and with it, his affection for the Manichees. He was flattered into approving whatever they held, "not because I knew it to be true, but because I wished it to be" (*On Two Souls, Against the Manicheans* 9, qtd. in Hopper 155). However, as Augustine was influenced by Bishop Ambrose, he grew skeptical of Manichaeism, finding "certain flaws in its doctrines and a lack of intellect in its leaders" (Williams 453).

Augustine's breaking away from the Manichees was closely related to his living and learning experiences. First, Augustine's mother Monica constantly urged Augustine to dissociate with Manichaeism. Second, the death of an unnamed friend who was converted to Christianity shortly before his death also shook Augustine considerably. Third, his studies in science, together with the arguments of friends, led him to distrust astrology, and thus to recognize the scientific incongruities in Manichees' heavenly scheme. Fourth, Augustine grew disillusioned toward the moral and religious defections demonstrated in the Manichean elites. Fifth, while Augustine had opportunities to consult with the Manichean gurus such as Faustus and Fortunatus about questions to which no local answers were forthcoming, he was disappointed by their failures to solve his questions. Before long, he came under the influence of Bishop Ambrose at Milan, and under the influence of Neo-Platonism (Hopper 157).

Augustine's refutations of the Manichean religious system centered around the theological, cosmological, and psychological difficulties: the nature of God and his relation to the world, the nature of the world, the nature of man, and the problem of good and evil. Augustine based his refutations on pointing out the irreconcilable dilemmas for his opponents, and on the Neoplatonic theses learned from his reading of the Platonists (Hopper 158). For instance, in his disputation with Fortunatus regarding the theological difficulty, Augustine posed the question of whether God is corruptible or incorruptible. Fortunatus held God to be incorruptible. Augustine said:

In the substance of light...God is to be held incorruptible; but here was a contrary nature of darkness...my argument is brief, and as I suppose, perfectly clear to anyone. If God could have suffered nothing from the race of darkness because he is inviolable, [then] without cause he sent us hither that we might suffer distress. But if anything can suffer, it is not inviolable, and you deceive those to whom you say that God is inviolable. (*Disputation Against Fortunatus and Manichean*, 1. 18; 1. 7, qtd. in Hopper 159)

The juxtaposition of the dilemma also proved effective in Augustine's debates with Felix, the famous student of Fortunatus, in the basilica of Hippo in 404 before an assemblage of the people (Chabannes 162).

In the debates about the cosmological difficulty, Augustine attacked the Manichean view of the existence of two kinds of souls, good and evil. Augustine pointed out that this view contradicted another Manichean view that human soul is particle of God but God is not contaminable. Therefore, the question is: if the soul were a particle of God, why should He have placed it in mortal bodies belonging to the devil (*Confessions*, 8.10.22-4, qtd. in Hopper 160-1)?

Lastly, Augustine attributed the Manichean conflict between asceticism and perfectionism to their distorted view on the enjoyment of good living. While the Manichees considered marriage as sinful and begetting children as even more sinful, Augustine held that "by such assertions they cut themselves off not only from Christians, but from mankind" (*On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, 28.57, qtd. in Hopper 161).

As is shown above, the debates with the Manichees demonstrated Augustine's profound understanding of the Scriptures, probably owing to his writing of Books I-III of *On Christian Doctrine* less than ten years prior. The study of the Scriptures not only made him adept at discovering contradictions in the Manichean doctrines, but it enhanced his belief in Christianity.

Against Donatists

The main issues in Augustine's debates with Donatists included the authority of the church and the policy toward schismatics (Dillistone 181). The question of the seat of proper authority has recurred again and again in the history of the Church. Donatists argued that if there had been some clear guidance from the Scriptures, which has normally been regarded as carrying final authority, why would there be so many cases where there was neither reference to the matter in the canonical writings nor indisputable interpretations (Dillistone 181-2)? Donatists proposed the solution of schism, the separation of a church into two

churches or the withdrawal of one group over doctrinal difference. Yet, this was not allowed by Augustine:

What the custom of the Church has always held, what this argument [i.e., of the Donatists] has failed to prove false, and what a general Council has confirmed, this we follow! To this we may add that it may also be said, after a careful inquiry into the reasoning on both sides of the discussion and into the evidence of Scripture, "What truth has declared, that we follow." (*On Baptism*, 4.9, qtd. in Dillistone 183)

Regarding the policy toward schismatics, Augustine insisted that the power of persuasion should be maximized in drawing schismatics back to the Catholic Church. In a letter to Boniface, he proposed that "men should be led to worship God by teaching" under the guidance of love as well as "by fear of punishment or pain" (7.24, qtd. in Dillistone 191-2), which corresponded to his advocacy for the charity of church and fear of God in interpreting the Scripture signs in Books I-III of *On Christian Doctrine*.

Compared with his anti-Manichean writings, Augustine's writings against Donatists showed great influence by the writings of St. Paul. The writings are full of meaningful parables and vivid images like the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, the good tree and the corrupt tree. Yet, there is a sense of continuity through the Scripture record and the old and the new covenants, which reflected once again Augustine's increasing familiarity with the Scriptures. The writings were also filled with Augustine's spirit and the sincerity of his desire to move the audience/reader towards Christianity (Dillistone 197-9). Considering the content and the style demonstrated in his anti-Donatist writing, I am fairly certain that the debates with the heresies had served as a springboard for the writing of Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine* and equipped him with rich experiences for moving the hearer's mind with the power of rhetoric.

Against Pelagius

Augustine had a long and lively controversy with Pelagius. The burning question concerned the truth and the relevance of the Christian view of man (Lehmann 203). The principal anti-Pelagian writings of Augustine are fifteen in number. They applied many of Pelagian's own words which are themselves characterized by eloquence and cogency. However, Augustine managed to use the rhetorical vividness and power of Pelagius against him, which resulted in accomplished

irony and innuendo (*On Nature and Grace*, 8.12; *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, 10.44, qtd. in Lehmann 207).

Pelagius held in *Defense of the Freedom of the Will* that “we have implanted in us by God a possibility for acting in both directions”—the one towards virtue and the other one towards vice—and “previous to the action of our own proper will, the only thing in man is what God has formed in him” (208). Trying to discuss the issues in Pelagius’ terms, Augustine pointed out the inconsistency between Pelagius’ theory and application: although Pelagius claimed that man is deterministic because even free will is endowed by God, he laid all stress upon human volition in the presented examples, the actual application of his view.

The general character of Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings is his matter-of-fact use of the bible and his rhetorical use of analogy. In the debate about the inevitability of death, Augustine seized Pelagius’ statement about “the necessity of dying,” which many people tend to pass over, and attacked this point by drawing an analogy between death and illness:

Now previous to the change into the incorruptible state which is promised in the resurrection of the saints, the body may have been mortal, although not likely to die; just as our body in its present state may, so to speak, be capable of sickness, although not likely to suffer sickness. For whose is the flesh which is incapable of sickness, even if from some accident it die before it ever experienced an illness? In like manner was man’s body then mortal, but this mortality was to have been superseded by an eternal incorruption, if man had persevered in righteousness, that it so say, obedience. (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*, 1. 2-3, qtd. in Lehmann 214)

Employing the analogy, Augustine argued that man’s failure to persevere in righteousness led to serious defection. Also, by equating righteousness with obedience to Christian doctrine, Augustine based his argument on solid theological ground.

The above examination of Augustine’s life and works between 397 and 427 suggests that while he broke off the plan of finishing two parts of *On Christian Doctrine* in four books at one time, he began exploring the expression of Scriptural signs through practical experiences. It was probably an intentional attempt, which aimed to reaffirm his study of the Scriptures and to better prepare himself for the writing of Book IV.

Part III: Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine*

Augustine creates a dramatic turn in the history of rhetoric by adapting rhetorical invention to the goal of interpreting the Bible. One of the dominant problems facing Augustine is: how can preachers reach people who know what they should do, but do not do it? Augustine articulates a new rhetoric and a new psychology that draw on the Ciceronian relationship between knowing and moving (Olmsted 34). This was offered in Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine* as the substance of Christian rhetoric. He emphasized the duty of the preacher to teach what is right and what is wrong. The goal was to unite eloquence and wisdom, following the stylistic model of the Gospels, especially the Pauline texts, which had greatly influenced him in the debates with Donatists. Style on this account becomes a major feature of Christian rhetoric (Williams 494).

At the beginning of Book IV, he reclaims that he would not enumerate the "rules of rhetoric" (Williams 495), which I consider as an attempt to direct the reader's attention to the relationship between eloquence and, specifically, Christian truth. He claims that it is lawful for a Christian teacher to use the art of rhetoric.

Augustine explains the requirements for both a Christian teacher and the students. The proper age for acquiring rhetorical skill is probably less than ten years old, because "it is enough that boys should give attention to it" (Williams 496). However, he warns that "only those who are not yet engaged in any occupation of more urgent necessity, or which ought evidently to take precedence of it." The proper means for acquiring rhetorical skill is "by reading and learning the speeches of eloquent men, and by imitating them as far as they can" (Williams 496). The duty of the Christian teacher is "both to teach what is right and to refute what is wrong, and in the performance of this task to conciliate the hostile, to rouse the careless, and to tell the ignorant both what is occurring at present and what is probable in the future" (Williams 496-7).

Like Cicero, Augustine claims that the knowledge of the biblical truth is more important than eloquence to the Christian teacher. The sacred writers unite eloquence with wisdom. Examples of true eloquence are drawn from the epistles of Paul and the prophecies of Amos. When it comes to difficult passages, the preachers should be ready to discuss them even in private conversation, which clearly demands the zeal for biblical Truth (Williams 497-500).

In the expression of biblical Truth, perspicuity is a must. There are three styles available: the subdued style is suited for teaching, the moderate style is suited for pleasing, and the grand style is suited for moving. Beauty of diction

should be kept in accordance with the matter, which is probably associated with Augustine's early contempt for the biblical style that is "honeyed with heaven's honey and luminous with its light" (*Con.* 3.5.9, qtd. in Hopper 155). The Christian teacher must use different styles on different occasions to appeal to different types of audiences. Various examples from the Scriptures, Ambrose, Cyprian were presented in the arguments (Williams 501-11). While later in the book Augustine discussed how the various styles should be mingled, he stressed that in every style the orator should aim at perspicuity, beauty, and persuasiveness. The man whose life is in harmony with his teaching, said Augustine, will teach with greater effect. His urge for the preachers to acquire Truth (wisdom) and eloquence through the Bible is therefore clearly laid out (Williams 512-7).

Comparing the content of Book IV and the life and works of Augustine between 397 and 427, we can see the influence of the time lapse on the writing of Book IV, which is half of the length of Books I-III altogether (Bizzell and Herzberg 453). Despite the experience that the time lapse prepared Augustine for in the writing of Book IV, it should also be taken into consideration that around 426-427, Augustine initiated the reassessment of his own career by getting into the laborious task of cataloging all his own writings in the monastery archive and eventually, creating a new book, *The Retractations*, in which he commented on the works written in his life. The plan of writing *The Retractations* was probably another reason that led him to finish Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine* at such a point of his life.

Part IV: Limitations and Further Research

The obstacles I encountered in answering my research questions are mainly from two areas. The biggest obstacle in my research is the various versions of translated texts. The inconsistencies among different translations have perplexed every researcher of classical rhetoric, which constantly demands that the researcher compare and analyze. I tend to choose the translated texts that are accompanied by the most profound analyses, because I believe that the more a researcher delves into a question, the more likely he or she will choose the most reliable translated texts. However, different levels of familiarity with the Latin language have perpetually created disputed understandings of the texts. For example, while I used the term "On Christian Doctrine" as the translation of the book title, I noticed other translations as well. The reference website of *Augnet* pointed out that translating the Latin title, *De Doctrina Christiana*, into English as simply *On Christian Doctrine* is inaccurate, as the book is not a compendium of Christian doctrine, but a treatise upon how Christian

doctrine might be taught. An accurate title in English would be *On the Form of Teaching Suitable for Instructing Christians*. However, I kept the disputed title translation in this paper for the reader's convenience.

The second obstacle was the rarity of original materials regarding my research question. While few materials directly addressed the interval of thirty years which occurred between the compositions of the first and the last parts of *On Christian Doctrine*, even fewer were presented in Augustine's own terms. Augustine only mentioned in *The Retractationes* his incompleteness of the work: "When I discovered that the books, *On Christian Instruction*, were not completed, I chose to finish them rather than leave them as they were and go on to the reexamination of other works" (125). However, he didn't clarify the reasons why he finished four books in one shot.

While this paper focuses on Augustine's attack on heresies, I suggest more angles to discuss the influence of the forgotten three decades on the writing of Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine*. The advent of refugees pouring into Hippo because of Alaric's capture of Roman between 409 and 410 (Chabannes 166-7), Augustine's sense of moral danger in torpid despair and resignation (Chabannes 172), and the writing of other works such as *City of God* and *On the Trinity* might all offer clues about the delay of Book IV.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrated the writing process of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, with a specific focus on the thirty-year lapse between the first (Books I-III) and the last part (Book IV) of the text. Research and analysis propose the following: first, the writing of the fourth book was planned in advance. This is demonstrated in Book I. Second, the delay of the writing plan of Book IV was probably intended. Between 397 and 427, Augustine was involved in intensive writing tasks and ecclesiastical responsibilities. Despite routine sermon-delivery, Augustine's writing was closely related with his debates and correspondence with the Manichees, the Donatists, and Pelagius. The disputation surrounding the nature of God and his relation to the world, the nature of the world, the nature of man, the problem of good and evil, the authority of Church, the policies towards Schismatics not only provided Augustine with an opportunity to examine his own understanding of the Scriptures, which he focused on in Books I-III, but also offered a springboard for the development of his insights about Christian rhetoric in Book IV. Probably through this process, Augustine realized the difficulty of fully interpreting the biblical Truth and effectively moving people's will for the elevation of the soul, which prompted him to closely

examine the styles available for preachers to explain the Scriptures. Last but not least, the writing of the *Retractions* served as another possibility of finishing Book IV at this specific time of his life. Although the conclusions of this paper are still tentative and merit future research, it is worthwhile to consider the relationship between the usually forgotten three decades and the writing of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*.

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