

Questions for Augustine's  
*De Doctrina Christiana*

**I. Questions on the Prologue:**

1. In the prologue, Augustine deals at the outset with the anticipated critics of his book. What do these critics say and how does Augustine respond to their criticisms? 101-102
2. Focus especially on Augustine's response to his third kind of critic, those who say that no one needs the rules that Augustine lays down and there is no need for a teacher to teach them these rules. There are about seven arguments Augustine uses to refute this perspective: what are they specifically? 102-104
3. Why do you think Augustine undertook this project to respond to his critics at the beginning of his book?
4. What kinds of applications can you derive from this prologue for the enterprise of Christian education and scholarship?

**Book One: Things (especially God who is to be loved)**

5. What is the macro-structure of DDC according to Augustine in 1.1? In other words, what is its twofold purpose?
6. What does Augustine mean by "things" and "signs"? What does he mean when he says that all teaching is about things or signs and all things are learned about through signs? Can you fill in the lines on this outline on Augustine's thinking on the difference and relation between things and signs? Are you familiar with the discipline of "semiotics," that is, the study of signs and symbols?  
1. 2

I. Things as Things

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_

II. Things as Signs of Other Things

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_

III. Signs as Things Which Signify: \_\_\_\_\_

7. What will Augustine address in this book 1: things or signs?
8. God is the ultimate *thing* to be loved for its/his own sake. He is the ultimate reality, the final truth, the singular source of genuine happiness, and God is learned about through *signs*.  
  
How important, then, are these signs that make God known? Where are they to be found? How should they be interpreted? How does Augustine answer these questions in book 1?

9. Analyze Augustine's discussion of things and what they should do for us (1.3):

Things to be enjoyed: \_\_\_\_\_

Things to be used: \_\_\_\_\_

Things doing the enjoying and the using: \_\_\_\_\_

10. How does Augustine illustrate the abuse or misuse of things? Do you agree or disagree with the content of his illustration or does it make you feel uncomfortable? If so, why? Is Augustine a dualist? 1.4

11. According to Augustine, what thing is to be enjoyed for its/His own sake? Analyze this classic statement of the Trinity. 1.5

12. How does Augustine conceive of God, especially in a classic definition in 1.7?

13. How does preoccupation of with the bodily senses or the intelligent spirit lead to alternative conceptions of God? 1.7

14. What stair-steps lead to a discovery of God as Unchangeably Wise? How is this known? Whose philosophy might be in the background here? 1.8-1.9

15. Augustine asserts that it is by means of the incarnation of Wisdom that human beings are purified or saved and restored to their true home. Discuss this process, especially the clever linguistic illustration of the incarnation in 1.12 and the medical analogy of contrary and homeopathic treatments. 1.13

16. What theological themes does Augustine elaborate on in explanation of the healing that Wisdom incarnate has provided for us? 1.14-19.

17. What is Augustine's conclusion to this matter about the superlative nature of God in 1. 20?

18. Having discussed God as the supreme objective of love, now the attention shifts to human beings and how they are to be loved. Are they to be used or enjoyed or both? How does Augustine answer this question? How does this relate to the issue of happiness or bliss? 1.20-21

19. According to Augustine, why do we not need to be taught to love ourselves? The issue is not whether but how we are to love ourselves. How should we? What role does asceticism play in this? 1.22-1.26

20. For Augustine, then, upon what two commands does all aspects of human life converge as its ultimate and final end, that is, its TELOS? 1.27

21. Outline and explain the classic Augustinian notion of the *ordo amoris*—the order of the loves—in 1.28.

22. What is that one single end to which we ought to love others and why? How does Augustine's "fans of an actor" illustration get the point across? 1.30

23. Are we commanded to love the angels? Why or why not? 1.31-1.33

24. Does God love us or make use of us? In what sense does He make use of us? 1.34-38

25. What, then, is the end of the Scriptures and the goal or end of reading and interpretation of the Scriptures? What might the expression "agapic reading" mean in this regard? What kind of application does this have for Christian scholarship and teaching? Should it have the same telos as well? 1.39-40 For more discussion, see the introductory essays on pp. 17-22,80-81

26. What if you reach this end or goal of reading and interpreting the Scriptures in error? What counsel does Augustine offer to such a misinterpreter of the Bible? 1.40-41

27. Of the virtues of faith, hope, and love, why does Augustine extol love over hope and faith? How does he relate these virtues to one another? 1.41-1.44

28. Why does Augustine begin this treatise with a discourse on God, love, and true happiness? What is the tacit connection between books 1 and 2 and the shift from an emphasis on things (God especially) to signs (words especially)?

29. How might book one set up a “rule of faith” as a set of parameters, guard rails if you please, in which the signs of the Bible ought to be interpreted?

### **BOOK 2: Unknown Signs (that is, words)**

30. What is the subject of book 2? 2.1. and 2.21

31. How does Augustine define the notion of a sign and what two distinctions does he make among them? In terms of these two categories, which one will Augustine treat in this book? Why does he eliminate zoosemiotics from discussion (that is, the discussion of animal signs)? 2.1-2.3

32. How do signs relate to the senses of sight, touch, and hearing, and to words and letters? How has the tower of Babel affected this production of signs? What of the role of the Bible in this confusion of speech? 2. 4.-2.5

33. What does Augustine say is the one primary goal of reading the Bible in the last sentence of 2.6 See the repetition of this goal on pp. 132, 135.

34. What is the common problem in reading the signs of the Bible rightly, and why has God in his providence made it so difficult? How does Augustine illustrate his point from the Song of Solomon? What principle does he lay down, however, that guarantees that the difficult parts of Scripture are can be understood? 2.7-2.8

35. What qualities does a reader and student of Scripture need to possess to understand them rightly? How does this connect to the qualities to be found in students who become philosopher-kings in the *Republic* 7 (535b-541)? 2.9-2.12

36. What are the canonical Scriptures? On what books does the canon properly consist? 2.12-2.13

37. What steps does Augustine recommend in reading and studying the Scriptures? 2.14

38. What are the two reasons why texts and their words (signs) are not understood? What are the two kinds of signs as well? 2.15

39. What is the remedy for ignorance of proper signs? In this regard, what does Augustine say about languages (Martin Luther will also emphasize this later) and various translations, as well as ambiguities in the original language and solecisms? 2.15-2.20

40. While Augustine deals in part with ambiguous signs, he is mostly interested in unknown signs, that is, unknown words and expressions. What role does memory play in this problem and also the process of correcting copies of the Bible? 2.21 What particular value do the Old Itala Latin and Greek Septuagint versions play in this process? 2.22

41. In what ways does Augustine suggest the strategies of a knowledge of language and of things for interpreting unfamiliar metaphorical signs? 2.23 How would a knowledge of animals (serpents), stones, herbs, numbers and music assist in this process? How and where would these subjects be learned to assist in this process? 2.24-2.26

ISN'T AUGUSTINE BEGINNING TO LAY OUT A CURRICULUM HERE, A COMPREHENSIVE LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION, NECESSARY FOR UNDERSTANDING THE UNKNOWN METAPHORICAL SIGNS OF THE BIBLE?

TO WHAT FINAL END IS THIS CURRICULUM A MEANS TO ACHIEVE?

IS THIS THE CONTINUATION OF *PAIDEIA*, BUT IN A DISTINCTIVELY CHRISTIAN DRESS? ARE THERE NOT MORAL VIRTUES, METHODS, AND CONTENT TO BE MASTERED IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE TEXT OF THE BIBLE?

IF PLATO'S PROPOSAL OF A SYSTEM OF EDUCATION WAS TO BENEFIT THE *POLIS* (THE CITY), THEN WHAT COMMUNITY IS AUGUSTINE'S SYSTEM OF EDUCATION DESIGNED TO SERVE?

42. What role should secular teachings and the errors of pagan superstitions be studied in order to understand the Bible? In what context and with what meaning is the famous phrase, "All truth is God's truth" to be found? 2.27-2.28

43. In 2.29, Augustine gives his basic division for the rest of the discussion. Of what two kinds of institutions does he speak that serve as the basis for the moral life of the heathen?

44. The first of the two kinds of institutions established by human beings are superstitious, that is, they are established between humans and the demons and deal with what Augustine calls "physics" and "astrology." What should be the Christian's response to the study of these institutions and why? 2.30-2.37

Notice the important discussion on assumptions and presuppositions in 2.37 and how Augustine applies his reflections to the open reception some people give to superstition.

45. But there are also human institutions that are not superstitious, for they are established by humans only. What are the categories into which Augustine divides these human institutions and which are to be studied and mastered in service to the interpretation of the Bible? What role should memory play in learning about these matters? 2.38-2.40

46. The next part of Augustine's curriculum has to do with the arts and sciences, developed by human beings by investigating the past or what has been established by God. What details does Augustine offer regarding these following categories?

Disciplines that pertain to the **senses** of the body for the study of the Bible (2.41-2.47):

- History
- Narrative
- Astronomy
- Other arts and crafts

Disciplines that pertain to the **mind** for the study of the Bible (2.48-2.57):

- Rational discourse/logic

What does he say about sophistry? what role do assumptions play in reasoning? who is responsible for the valid rules of logic? what lessons in logic does Augustine offer? Is there an objective reality? What do these quotes below mean? What might their implications be for Christian scholars today?

“These valid rules of logic, however, have not been instituted by human beings, but observed and noted down by them, so that they can either learn or teach them, because they are inscribed in the permanent and divinely instituted rationality of the universe” 2.50

“So this rule, that if you deny the consequent you must necessarily deny the antecedent, was not instituted by human beings, but demonstrated.” 2.50

“. . . knowledge of how to define terms [is] . . . discovered in the very nature and intelligibility of things.” 2.52

Numbers “have their immutable rules which have in no way been instituted by human beings . . . . 2.56

- Rhetoric/eloquence

Note the sidebar comment that the happy life is not to be found in learning logic and rhetoric in 2.55

Note the sidebar about how education or training in logic and rhetoric has a value in and of itself as Newman will affirm later. 2.55

- Arithmetic

47. What are the attitudes in which such “secular” studies ought to be undertaken? What does Augustine mean by the phrase “nothing too much”? Do you agree or disagree? 2.58 What do you think of Augustine’s call to scholarship in 2.59?

48. Augustine’s Egyptian gold analogy is one of the most famous and important to Christian scholars. What is its basic thesis? Unpack its sub-themes and meanings 2.60-2.61

49. What spiritual warning does Augustine give to students who immerse themselves in studies of the liberal arts? 2.62

50. What final comparison does Augustine make between the value of the learning acquired from this liberal curriculum and the knowledge derived from the Bible? How does he elevated the Bible and its study over all other academic enterprises? 2.63