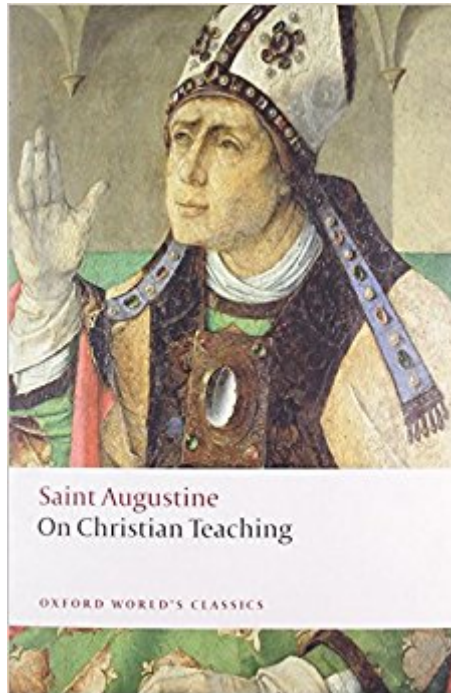




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# On Christian Teaching



## Synopsis

The *De Doctrina Christiana* ("On Christian Teaching") is one of Augustine's most important works on the classical tradition. Undertaken at the same time as the *Confessions*, it sheds light on the development of Augustine's thought, especially in the areas of ethics, hermeneutics, and sign-theory. This completely new translation gives a close but updated representation of Augustine's thought and expression, while a succinct introduction and select bibliography present the insights of recent research. About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

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## Customer Reviews

`a great chance to see how clever Augustine was. ... (It is more than a work on Christian teaching: it is a book about teaching. Or learning, in fact.)'The Guardian G2 section, 17 July 1997

R. P. H. Green is Professor of Humanity (Latin) in the Dept. of Classics, University of Glasgow. He has published books on Augustine's contemporaries Paulinus of Nola and Ausonius.

This small book summarizes much of Augustine's thought and theology. All good comes from God and man's fall precipitated the covenants, laws and finally Christ. Our source for this is the Bible but how should that book be read and taught? Augustine reveals the importance of identifying metaphor in analyzing texts and the danger of being over literal. Language, therefor, is the key theme both in understanding scripture and explaining it appropriately to the education and intelligence of the listener. He then goes on to emphasize the need for the homilist to understand rhetoric at least to balance the rhetoric of disbelievers. I would consider this book essential reading for any serious Christian today or, for that matter of any student of philosophy. I have yet to read any modern or even earlier writer who thinks and writes more clearly on scripture and language.

Even for those who no longer believe in its message, the Bible is generally regarded as a treasure trove of poetic and artistic gems that over the centuries (from Dante to Shakespeare, Milton and T.S. Eliot, to throw out names almost at random) have shaped Western values and sensitivities. It might, therefore, be hard for us to imagine how foreign, even barbaric the Bible appeared to the cultural expectations of late Antiquity. In his "Confessions" Augustine freely admits that for a long time he found it impossible to accept the message of the Bible because it was written in a style so foreign to the liberal arts he had been trained in. It was only when he heard Saint Ambrose of Milan preach on the Bible with all the rhetorical skills late antiquity demanded of its cultural elite that he began to appreciate the Biblical message in its own right. Ten years later--by now probably already bishop in the African town of Hippo--Augustine sits down to help others to make a similar transition from disdain to admiration for the Bible. Augustine first summarizes the central message of the Bible (quite an astounding and beautiful accomplishment) and then turns to the difficult medium of the message. He gives advice on how to gain the necessary factual and linguistic information to approach the biblical environment and how to deal with its often so strangely figurative and obscure style of expression. After an hiatus of over 40 years, in which he--like Ambrose--preached on themes of the Bible using all the tricks of the rhetorical trade of his time, he concludes his treatise by taking a decidedly different approach: He shows his contemporary readers that the Bible should not be perceived as a barbaric import because it exhibits many of the rhetorical devices that even a Cicero could not have improved on. These are the same strategies he recommends to a new generation of preachers. -- The value of this treatise is, in my view, primarily an historical one. It shows a crucial turning point in Western culture and it shows the architect of that turning point at work. After Augustine the Bible could no longer be regarded as a foreign import into Western culture. Instead it became fully integrated and soon even assumed the role of foundation stone of

that same culture, an astounding turn about. -- This is a fascinating book, though the editor could have been more forthcoming in explaining some of the rhetorical concepts that are important for Augustine's argument.

Augustine is to be greatly appreciated for his impact on culture, sacred and secular. The man was a theological genius whose writings are extremely practical, addressing the issues of his day within the church. This is considered by many to be one of the first treatments of the fields of homiletics and hermeneutics. Highly recommended for anyone studying Christian preaching and = teaching. Be warned though, Augustine's tendency to allegorize much of Scripture might offend the modern mind which prefers a more literal hermeneutic.

In this short work (though Augustine admits it was longer than he hoped), Augustine sketches his theological hermeneutics—how to interpret scriptures. The centrality of the twofold love command (love God, love neighbor—<sup>TM</sup>) has full rein over Augustine's hermeneutical lens. With whimsical tact, Augustine tackles troublesome and ambiguous passages, relishing and defending allegorical interpretations. His explanation of signs—<sup>TM</sup> (sigma) and things—<sup>TM</sup> (res) is worth pouring over.cf. [...]

Very classic and very helpful. I can see St. Augustine's strong influence on the training of clergy in this book which contains practical and thoughtful insights.

St Augustine is one of the leading authorities on Christianity, and this book reflects his teaching very well.

This book's title does not give the impression that it is about rhetoric or public speaking, but it definitely is about them.

This gave perspectives that were timeless. Sometimes one thinks that old literature is not contemporary. Not true with this. Very readable.

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