In 391, Augustine was ordained as a priest, and amongst such duties as teaching the catechism, engaging in a formal debate with his former friend, Fortunatus the Manichee over a period of two days, and writing a song, his ‘ABC against the Donatists’ for a highly unconventional singing debate, in a garden close by the bishop’s residence he set up a monastic community at Hippo. This monastery was still recruited from among Augustine’s past friends — (Alypius was there), but inevitably it attracted younger men whose tastes, culture and past history brought a fresh spirit into the community. Such a person was Possidius, a straightforward, loyal disciple who wrote the only contemporary biography of Augustine. These ‘servi Dei’ as Augustine refers to them came to form a remarkably influential group in the African church, one of the most notable being Aurelius, who became bishop of Carthage in 392, and who actively encouraged Augustine to form a centre of brilliant men for the service of the church. Augustine’s monastery at Hippo in time became a ‘seminary’ in the true sense of the word: a ‘seed bed’ from which Augustine’s proteges were ‘planted out’ as priests, and as bishops, ten at least in his own lifetime.

In 396, Augustine succeeded his mentor, Bishop Valerius as Bishop of Hippo, and as he sat as a bishop on his cathedra with a book open across his knees, he would have found himself in a position not very different from that to which he had been accustomed in his previous career. As at Cassiciacum, Augustine was determined to be the educationalist of his circle, but now this circle consisted of the clergy and devout laymen of Africa, fearing God and seeking the will of God, and not of sons of the nobility wanting, as in Milan, to be groomed as ‘well trained souls.’ When first consecrated, Augustine had intended to continue living in the monastery in the garden at Hippo, but he soon realised
that his episcopal responsibilities were inconsistent with public withdrawal, and so he moved to the bishop's spacious residence. Augustine organised the episcopal residence so that it became two things at once, a *monasterium clericorum* and at the same time a school, *schola nostra*, for Augustine wished to retain his contact with the process of education in his new responsibility.\(^{22}\) This cathedral school of Augustine, which certainly had its forerunners as, for example, that established by Eusebius of Vercelli, was nevertheless the first to be set up on a deeper and more permanent foundation, providing a complete and integral formation through embracing the will and the intelligence at one and the same time. In time Augustine as bishop was the general superior of approximately twenty similar foundations, all monastic in nature under his religious rule of life, but each functioning also as a school and carrying on a process of formal instruction.

Augustine's cathedral school at Hippo maintained a scriptorium for transcribing and maintaining manuscripts and for producing and copying books according to the methods of that time. Over and above the teaching staff, Augustine had with him a group of carefully chosen research assistants, who assisted him in his various tasks of research and documentation. He almost never wrote his works by hand but dictated with all of the technical help provided by the cultural development of the time. His school thus provided him with an indispensable foundation and implementation for his intellectual and literary apostolate, even functioning as a distribution centre from which he sent out his writings in answer to requests from Paulinus of Nola and from St. Jerome — indeed from many quarters of Christendom. In all of this, Augustine was not being original but was simply using standard techniques of classical antiquity at his cathedral school in the service of the Church and Christian culture. One further aspect of Augustine's school was the growth of his library, which had grown with him and gone with him from his earliest years until it became one of the finest collections of secular and divine learning in both quality and number — although the character of the library at Hippo gradually changed to become more ecclesiastical in outlook.

The final and perhaps the most important fact concerning the cathedral school at Hippo was the body of teachers
headed by Augustine himself. Even in the busy period of his episcopal ministry he never ceased to interest himself in the intellectual formation of his students in a most direct and personal manner. His teaching methods were twofold: first, exposition and secondly, the technique of disputation and discussion. Though, in his later life, his devotion of time to teaching techniques lessened, it never ceased altogether.

Augustine presented most of his ideas on the all-important question of teaching method in a treatise entitled *De Catechizandis Rudibus* (The First Catechetical Instruction), written in response to a request from a friend, Deogratias, a Carthaginian deacon who, though a successful catechist, was desirous of further guidance. It was written most likely in 399 or 400, though one commentator puts it as late as 405. The Church required converts to submit to four periods of instruction, the longest period of catechesis being for the catechumens who formed the largest class instructed. Those who had graduated from the catechumenate by virtue of the fact that their petition for admission to baptism had been approved formed another class called *competentes*, while the newly baptized, who continued to receive catechetical instruction during the octave of Easter formed the neophyte class. Candidates for admission to the catechumenate constituted another class, the *accidentes*, and it is with this group that the *De Catechizandis Rudibus* is concerned, the only treatise for this class that has come down to us. The class of *accidentes* was composed of pagans and heretics - and such prospective converts were also termed *rudes*, in the sense of being 'untaught', but only in matters concerning the Christian religion which they desired to embrace. The term has no reference to a candidate's intellectual attainments and qualifications: the *rudes* may be rustics or educated men.

This treatise is at once a contribution to the subject-matter and to the method of catechetics, being unique in this respect, and it is no surprise to find it influencing in great measure almost all subsequent works on catechetics from the catechetical teaching in monastic schools in the sixth century to our own day. Much of its importance and appeal stems from the sound principles of psychological
pedagogy which Augustine utilizes in this logical and methodical presentation written in simple, clear and vigorous style.

Augustine's advice in general, although intended primarily for religious instruction but still pertinent to teaching as a whole, stresses the importance of first presenting the subject matter in a general and comprehensive summary, selecting those points which constitute the major theme and then weaving the remaining materials into a rapid survey. In this way those topics to be emphasized are 'brought into greater prominence by keeping the others in the background', and the student's mind is not exhausted and the memory is not confused. In other words, explain a little at a time, clearly and thoroughly. Augustine cautions that there are a number of things which may irk a teacher, thereby interfering with a good performance. Weariness of mind; an aversion to repeating again and again what is known so well; annoyance at being interrupted from doing something much more likeable and interesting than meeting a class; a piece of upsetting news; a lack of interest on the students' part or at least their failure to give any sign of being interested — these are all everyday situations that must be faced up to and Augustine proceeds to give some worthwhile suggestions to teachers to help them in a more positive approach to their students and their learning.

Augustine advises the teacher to be sympathetic, to give the timid student confidence in expressing his own opinions by being patient and gentle with him, and questioning him to find out if he understands — 'if he is exceedingly slow-witted, bear with him.' Augustine thinks of the process of teaching as 'a dwelling in each other', a unity of hearts that renews its enjoyment in the pupil's mental growth. Keeping the attention of the student, being lively when the class is bored and tired, arousing their wonder through some remark — these are the practical situations that Augustine concerns himself with. He even reveals his sympathy for the weariness or bodily discomfort of a listener when he suggests to Deogratias: 'Come to his aid with a seat'.

Augustine stresses an important principle of teaching method when he says that teaching should be regulated by the capacity of the individual pupil, and that 'the same
medicine is not to be applied to all', not only on the principle of individual differences in ability but also in other areas, for it makes a difference whether there are only a few or many in a group, whether some are educated or some illiterate, whether they are townspeople or country folk.

Finally, Augustine emphasizes the great importance of the pupil's mental activity. He has little sympathy for rules, for this very reason, preferring that pupils learn through participation from the speeches of eloquent men rather than learning rules about eloquence. Questions in order to test understanding; encouragement to give free expression or to voice difficulties; appeal to former acquaintance with the subject; the continual shaping of the lesson to fit in with responses; simplicity, illustration, explanation, conciseness, attractiveness — all are of utmost importance to Augustine, if the teacher is to 'catechize without weariness'. If these fail at any time in the task of education, if the pupil is 'of a sluggish disposition' and interest fails to respond to these suggestions, then Augustine has recourse to the ultimate recommendation, 'God help him'.

The one other educational work of the 'ecclesiastical' period of Augustine was the De Doctrina Christiana (Christian Instruction), begun in 396-397 when Books I and II were completed, Book III being left incomplete at chapter XXV, and finished in 427 by the completion of Book III and the composition of Book IV. In its final form, the De Doctrina consists of a preface, justifying the proposition that the Christian teacher should be adequately prepared for teaching, Books I to III expounding the rules governing the interpretation of the Scriptures and including in Book II a discussion of the disciplines of the liberal arts and their place in a Christian curriculum, and Book IV, an exposition of the method of teaching the Scriptures when they are understood. When Augustine wrote Book IV he adopted a procedure analogous to that followed by St Ambrose who adapted Cicero's dialogue on moral duties to Christian ends. Similarly, Augustine turned to Cicero's rhetorical works, especially to the Orator for the broad framework of his work and the general theory of his oratorical composition, giving though, as if to show his reliance on Christian authority, examples of three types of rhetoric drawn from the writings of St Paul, Cyprian
and Ambrose. His debt to Cicero is not superficial, however, for the parallelism between the classical theory of oratory and theory of Christian preaching can be traced throughout the book.

Of recent years, there has been a controversy over the purpose and object of the *De Doctrina*, as to whether it was concerned with the education of the Christian preacher only, or whether it interpreted Christian instruction in a wider sense to make it include a programme of Christian education as Howie, for example, translates *De Doctrina Christiana* after Aquinas, who interpreted *doctrina* in the comprehensive sense of the living act of teaching together with the full range of content taught. The two points of view have been presented quite convincingly, on the one hand by Van der Meer and more especially by Harald Hagendahl in his first-class work of scholarship *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, and, from an opposingly critical point of view by Henri Marrou in his equally magisterial work — *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*. Even if it is conceded that the *De Doctrina* is a manual of scriptural hermeneutics and a book on homiletics, it gives, even in Hagendahl’s view, a twofold programme of education combining two different things, ‘a profound understanding of the Scriptures and a powerful exposition of them based on the best tradition of classical oratory’ as well as a clear, self-contained guide to a programme of studies based on the liberal arts with their roots in the classical past, for Augustine was indeed ‘the great “secularizer” of the pagan past.’ Most commentators, for example, Marrou, Kevane, Laistner, Brown, Howie, Gallagher, Wise, see it as a basic treatise on Christian teaching and learning, as a cultural synthesis from the viewpoint of the priest and bishop concerned with Christian education and with the development of the Christian intellectual, even though in the eyes of some its quality has been overrated despite its great influence in the development of education in the Western world, for it was the first Augustinian work to be printed, eloquent enough proof of its prestige.

The *De Doctrina* was not, then, a scheme for independent Biblical studies but was inspired by the conviction that all
the studies known to the pagan world had their place in a Christian curriculum. They were essential ancillary subjects and played their part, somewhat strangely by modern standards, in the task of interpreting the Bible. The use of languages, history, grammar and logic are obvious enough but Augustine showed how a knowledge of all the sciences was necessary. He who would search out the difficult mysteries of the Bible must know the nature of animals and plants, the strange lore about precious stones, the symbolism of numbers, the movements of the heavens and the harmonies of music. With these aids he was equipped to comprehend the fulness of Biblical truth, and having plumbed the depths of Scriptural truth, it was necessary for the scholar to reveal his discoveries to others. For this, the queen of the arts, rhetoric was necessary to draw men’s hearts to a love of the knowledge he had found. The rhetoric of the Christian scholar was a much chastened art, purged of the extravagances of the law courts and the political platform, but it was still the art taught by Cicero.

In that unique work, the *Retractationes (Revisions)*, which gives Augustine’s own listing of his writings and the inestimable benefit of his own considered judgment upon them, the *Confessions* appear as the sixth work written by him after he became bishop, placing the date of its appearance as somewhere around 401. In this brilliantly psychological insight into the development of his own thought, Augustine gives many valuable hints for the reform of teaching based on the experiences of his youth. Although in his maturity, he thinks that constraint was for his good and that without it he would never have taken to learning, he does make a very perspicacious observation about the nature of learning when he says ‘Nor did they that forced me to my book do very well......for no man does well against his will though that which he does be good’. Obviously bearing in mind the ease with which he learned Latin and the great difficulty he had with Greek which he hated because of the difference in teaching methods, he comes to the conclusion that ‘a free curiosity hath more force in children’s learning of languages than a frightful enforcement can have.’ This is a direct recognition of the pupil’s value as a right starting point in education, and, like many of the early Church Fathers, for example, Cyril,
Jerome, Basil, John Chrysostom, when viewed in relation to the times in which they lived and wrote. Augustine shows a remarkable sympathy with the idea of freedom in education. He makes an appeal to the pupil's own values as the main guiding principle in teaching and tries to bring into play the pupil's own mental activity, his own judgment and intelligence, his powers of emulation and his love of praise; and it is to the discredit of educators down the ages that they lost sight of many of these important teaching principles.

The historical importance and the influence of Augustine in the history of educational thought, have been fully covered by others, but there is one aspect of Augustine's thinking that has been relatively neglected in connection with his approach to education. That is his message based on his experiences of 'loving to love' and summed up in his famous saying 'Only love and do what you will'. The educational implications of the philosophical and theological conclusions of 'The Doctor of Love' have never been adequately realised nor worked out in their entirety by past or even by contemporary educators. Perhaps the young flower people of today are tentatively showing the way even though their concept of love may not fit in completely with Augustine's Amor Dei, but there is an overflowing of one into the other.

NOTES


22 For a detailed account, see E. Kevane, Augustine the Educator Chapter 5, pp. 113-148.

23 No 2 Ancient Christian Writers. St Augustine, The First Catechetical Instruction (Newman Press, 1946) translated by Rev. Joseph P. Christopher, and from which the background information about catechumens has been taken.

25 See Peter Brown, _op.cit._, Chapter 23, pp 259-269.

26 In his *Christianity and Pagan Culture* (Cornell University Press, 1951) p 71


28 For example, Laistner.

29 For a discussion of this, see W. J. McCallister, _The Growth of Freedom in Education_ (Constable & Co. Ltd. 1931) Chapter V, pp 78-98