

Augustine, *On Catechizing the Uninstructed*

I-6, 9-13

*Translated by Mark DelCogliano*

## Chapter I

1, 1. You have asked me, brother Deogratias, to write you something on catechizing the uninstructed<sup>1</sup> that would be useful to you. For you have said that in Carthage, where you are a deacon, those who need to be instructed in the Christian faith for the first time are often brought to you because you are considered to have an outstanding ability to catechize by reason of your knowledge of the faith and your eloquence in speech. But you have added that almost always you experience difficulties: how we ought to communicate appropriately the very beliefs which make us Christians; from what point we ought to begin our narration<sup>2</sup> and how far we ought to take it; and, when the narration is finished, whether we ought to provide some sort of exhortation<sup>3</sup> or only those precepts which the person to whom we are speaking needs to observe in order to know how to maintain the Christian way of life and profession.

## Chapter III

5, 1. The narration is complete when the catechesis which the newcomer<sup>12</sup> receives first of all starts from what is written in scripture, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth,"<sup>13</sup> and goes up to the present times of

<sup>9</sup> See Rv 22:5.    <sup>10</sup> See 1 Cor 2:9.    <sup>11</sup> See 2 Cor 9:7.

<sup>12</sup> The word "newcomer" is not in the Latin but is added for the sake of clarity. Usually (and ambiguously) Augustine refers to the person who has approached the Christian community to become a Christian with an indefinite pronoun ("he, him"). The term "newcomer" is used because Augustine often refers to such a person as someone who has "come" to the Christians; see, for example, Chapter V, 9, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Gn 1:1.

the church. 2. But we ought not for this reason recite by memory all the Pentateuch, and all the books of Judges, Kingdoms,<sup>14</sup> and Esdras,<sup>15</sup> and all the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles (if we have learned these word for word). Nor ought we to describe and explain in our own words everything contained in these books as we give our narration. There is neither the time nor the need for that. Instead, we ought to summarize everything with attention to the main points and in general terms, in such a way that certain points among those more wondrous are selected, namely, those which our listeners will find particularly appealing and which have been established as critical to the epochs.<sup>16</sup> And we ought not to display these like scrolls still in their cases and immediately remove them from view, but we ought to take them out of their cases, as it were, and to lay them open, letting them remain that way for a while, and to offer them to the minds of our audience so that they can be inspected and wondered at. But all the other points ought to be included and weaved into the narration in a rapid review. 3. And so, in this way those points we especially want to be made known are given greater prominence because the others have been relegated to the background; the newcomer whose attention we want to arouse by our narration does not come to these points in a state of exhaustion, and the mind of the one whom we ought to be instructing by our teaching is not gripped with confusion.

6, 4. In all of this, certainly, not only ought we to fix our own gaze upon “the aim of the commandment” which is “love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith”<sup>17</sup> – and to this all that we say should have reference – but also the gaze of the newcomer for whose instruction we are speaking ought to be moved toward the same aim and be guided in that same direction. 5. For everything we read in the holy scriptures written before the coming of the Lord had no other purpose than to make his coming known and to presage the church that was to come, that is to say, the people of God throughout all nations, which is his body.<sup>18</sup> In it are included and numbered all the saints who lived in this world even before

14 The books of Kingdoms include what modern Bibles call 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings.

15 In the Latin tradition four books are attributed to Esdras (Ezra). 1 and 2 Esdras correspond, respectively, to Ezra and Nehemiah. 3 Esdras corresponds to what most English Bibles call 1 Esdras; it sequentially consists of (1) 2 Chr 35:1–36:23 (summarized), (2) Ezr 1:1–4:24, (3) additions, (4) Ezr 5:1–10:44, and (5) Neh 7:38–9:12. 4 Esdras corresponds to 2 Esdras, which is an apocryphal apocalypse from the Christian period.

16 That is, critical to the epochs (*articulis*) of salvation history. See n. 22 below.

17 1 Tm 1:5. 18 See Col 1:18.

his coming, believing that he would come just as we believe that he has come.

Therefore, all things written beforehand<sup>27</sup> were written for our instruction,<sup>28</sup> and all these things were prefigurations for us.<sup>29</sup> "And all these things happened to them as prefigurations, but they were written for our sake, upon whom the end of the ages has come."<sup>30</sup>

## Chapter IV

7, 1. But what greater reason is there for the coming of the Lord than that "God shows his love for us,"<sup>31</sup> striving with all his might to make it known? For "while we were still his enemies, Christ died for us."<sup>32</sup> And moreover, seeing that love is "the aim of the commandment"<sup>33</sup> and "the fulfilling of the law,"<sup>34</sup> his purpose in coming was so that we might love one another,<sup>35</sup> and, just as he laid down his life for us, so too might we lay down our life for our brothers.<sup>36</sup> And with regard to God himself, "because he loved us first"<sup>37</sup> and "did not spare his only Son but delivered him up for us all,"<sup>38</sup> even if it used to be bothersome to love him, it might now at least not be bothersome to love him in return . . . .<sup>39</sup>

8, 11. Therefore, with this love set before you as the goal to which all that you say should have reference, whatever you declare in your narration, declare it in such a way that the newcomer to whom you are speaking may believe, by believing may hope, and by hoping may love.<sup>40</sup>