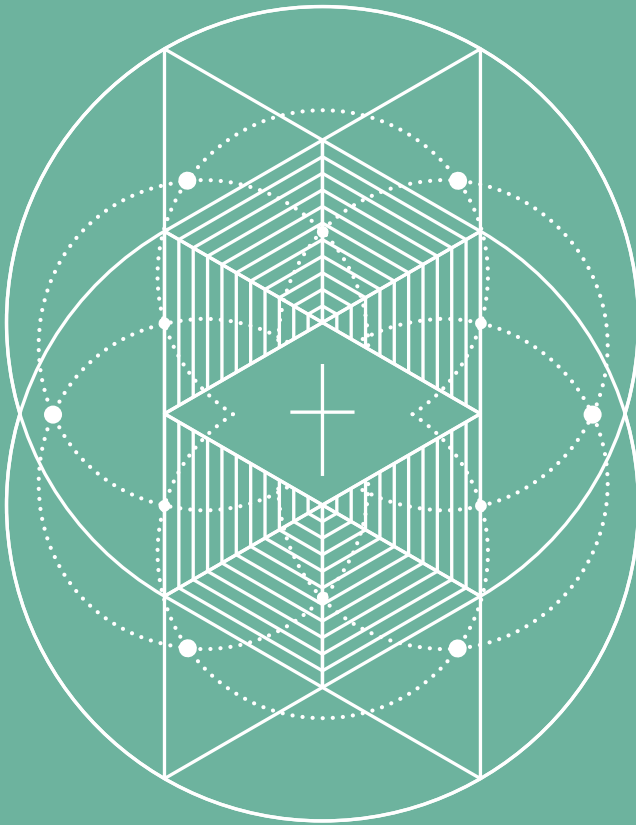


Augustine

On Christian Doctrine
and Selected Introductory Works



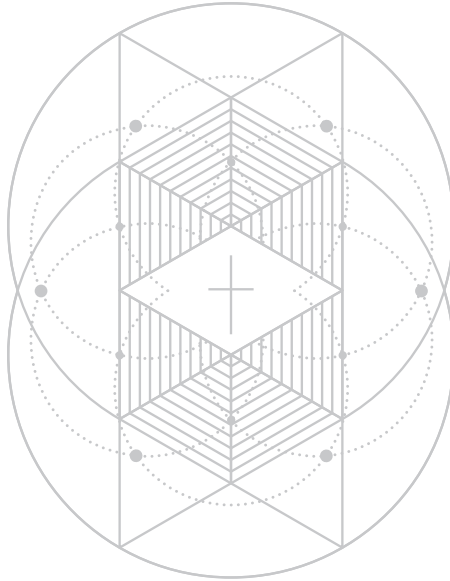
THEOLOGICAL
FOUNDATIONS



TIMOTHY
GEORGE
EDITOR

Augustine

On Christian Doctrine
and Selected Introductory Works



TIMOTHY GEORGE
EDITOR

BH
ACADEMIC
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

*Theological Foundations:
Augustine, On Christian Doctrine and Selected Introductory Works*

Copyright © 2022 by B&H Academic

Published by B&H Academic
Nashville, Tennessee

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-0877-7031-4

Dewey Decimal Classification: 230
Subject Heading: CHRISTIANITY--DOCTRINES /
DOCTRINAL THEOLOGY / AUGUSTINE, SAINT

This content has been selected from Aurelius Augustinus's works *On Christian Doctrine*, *A Sermon to Catechumens on the Creed*, *A Treatise on Faith and the Creed*, and *A Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter*. All sources are public domain. Every effort was made to retain the original text for each work. However, when needed, changes were made to correct errors or for matters of clarity.

Cover design by Emily Keafer Lambright. Cover
image by kovalto1/Shutterstock.

Printed in the United States of America
27 26 25 24 23 22 VP 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

CONTENTS

<i>INTRODUCTION BY TIMOTHY GEORGE</i>	1
On Christian Doctrine	7
BOOK I.	15
BOOK II.	41
BOOK III.	83
BOOK IV.	119
A Sermon to Catechumens on the Creed	167
A Treatise on Faith and the Creed	183
A Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter	215
<i>SUBJECT INDEX</i>	293
<i>SCRIPTURE INDEX</i>	297

INTRODUCTION

Timothy George

Aurelius Augustinus (354–430), or as he is better known to us, Saint Augustine of Hippo, was one of the most able thinkers in the ancient world and the best theologian between the death of the Apostle Paul and the birth of Martin Luther. Other great thinkers of this period including Boethius, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventura, and Thomas Aquinas all drank deeply from the well of Augustine. Luther was an Augustinian monk and Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is replete with quotations from the “Doctor of Grace,” more than any other source except the Bible. With good reason, Hans von Campenhausen could state that Augustine is the “only church father who even today remains an intellectual power.”¹

Augustine was born in the Roman province of Numidia in what is today the country of Algeria. As a young man, he gave himself to the study of rhetoric and the pursuit of wisdom. This led him on a long spiritual journey—pilgrimage (*peregrinatio*) is one of his favorite words—through various religious and philosophical movements of the day. These included Manicheanism with its radically dualist worldview; Academic Skepticism, a kind of stylish agnosticism; and on to Neoplatonism with its transcendent view of reality. This brought him to the threshold of the Christian faith,

¹ Hans von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Latin Church* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 183.

but it was the prayers of his mother Monica and the preaching by Bishop Ambrose of Milan that led to Augustine's conversion in 386. At age thirty-two, Augustine was baptized by Ambrose during the Easter vigil of 387. The baptistry where this happened can still be seen in the cathedral of Milan.

Returning to his native North Africa, Augustine was pressed into the service of the church, first as a priest in 391, and four years later as the bishop of Hippo. In his more than thirty-five years as bishop, Augustine dealt with both local church issues and with three major controversies that were troubling the church of his time. He also left behind an enormous body of writings dealing with practically every aspect of the faith. Augustine wrote against the Manichees who continued to siphon off young converts from the church; against the Donatists, rigorist Christians who advanced a sectarian and schismatic theory of the church; and, not least, against Pelagius, a monk from Britain who denied original sin and called into question the necessity of grace.

In addition to producing many hundreds of letters and sermons, Augustine also published three major works that would influence the Christian faith across the ages until our own day. *The Confessions* is the best known and most often read of these—a remarkable account of the ups and downs of his life and the joy he found in following Christ. In the *City of God*, a massive treatise written in response to the fall of Rome, Augustine set forth a Christian philosophy of history that would guide the church through the Middle Ages and beyond. Finally, his expansive discourse, *On the Trinity*, was built on the work of earlier theologians and councils, especially the confessions made at Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), while developing Augustine's own distinctive trinitarian thought focused on the reality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as an eternal community of love.

Augustine was concerned not only to expound the Christian faith in these three great works, but also to pass on to coming generations clear patterns of instruction and teaching. The writings included in this volume are of Augustine the Teacher. They are among the most fundamental summaries of Christian belief in the history of the church, and their influence has stood the test of time. They are worthy of being studied, taught, and learned by believers who love and serve Jesus Christ today no less than in Augustine's own times. Augustine's first biographer, Possidius, tells us that among the things that Augustine bequeathed to the church was his library, which contained his many books, discourses, sermons, and other writings. From the

works Augustine has left behind, including the treatises presented in this volume, one can learn about Augustine's faithful service and acts of greatness in the church, for this is "where the faithful always find him alive."²

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine tells us that this famous book, which is preserved for us as a single treatise, was actually written in two parts. The first three and a half books he composed in the late 390s, while the latter part of the third book and all of the fourth he wrote in 426. The first part was meant to show "what things we ought to teach to the Christian people," and the latter part "how such things should be expressed," what we call today the study of preaching or homiletics. The title itself is a little misleading, as it is not a compendium of systematic theology as such. Some of Augustine's other writings included in this volume contain his treatment of the creed and basic Christian beliefs. One scholar has suggested that *De doctrina christiana* ought to be rendered *On the Form of Teaching Suitable for Christians*.³ What we have here is a manual on how to read the Bible, how to study the Scriptures. As such, it became a guidebook for Christian education and an outline of basic hermeneutical principles for teaching believers to understand and to interpret the inspired words of God in the text of Scripture. *On Christian Doctrine* is a demanding book, but it is one that rewards careful study and many re-readings. As Augustine says at the end of this treatise, this task should be undertaken by the teacher or "the pastor...who is eager to toil away, not only for his own sake but for others, in the teaching of sound, that is Christian, doctrine."

A Sermon to Catechumens on the Creed

The text of this sermon of Augustine takes us back to the tradition of the catechumenate in the early church. This was a practice of intense preparation for baptism, an apprenticeship-in-training for the Christian life. We don't know how long the catechumenate extended in Augustine's

² Possidius, *Vita augustini*, 31.8.

³ James J. O'Donnell, "Doctrina Christiana, De," *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 278.

church—Hippolytus in Rome spoke of a period of three years. Prior to their baptism, these new believers would undergo all-night prayer vigils, fasting, special almsgiving for the poor, and other spiritual disciplines. As the time for baptism approached, those preparing for baptism, which was often done on the Easter vigil, would go through a public ceremony called the *traditio symboli*, in which they were literally handed a copy of the creed. After this, Augustine would then recite the creed and deliver a sermon, such as the one we have here, in which he explained the meaning of the creed line by line. Something similar happened with the Lord's Prayer. The catechumens that were to be baptized were expected to memorize the creed, recite it every day in preparation for their baptism—at which time, while still standing in the water, they would publicly declare their faith in the words of the creed.

A Treatise on Faith and the Creed

Unlike the preceding selection, which was a sermon delivered by Augustine to new Christians (catechumens) in the process of preparing them for baptism, *On Faith and the Creed* is longer, theologically richer, and polemical in the sense that a number of heresies and false views are noted and corrected. Soon after he was ordained as a priest, but before he was consecrated as a bishop, Augustine was invited to address a plenary meeting of North African bishops gathered in the city of his residence, Hippo Regius. Augustine took this occasion to expound on the deep mysteries of the Christian faith as expressed in the Apostles Creed. He would return to these themes in his many later writings, but here we have a younger Augustine speaking to an assembly of church leaders on some of the most important issues of the faith. These include: the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, looking back over his shoulder at the Manichaeans; the deity and consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, contra the Arians who were still a vital force in the late Roman Empire; the crucial role of Mary in the history of redemption, as the one through whom the eternal Logos assumed a true human nature; the recognition of the Holy Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and the Son and through whom we receive the forgiveness of sins and incorporation into the Body of Christ. Augustine concludes this formative sounding in basic Christian theology by affirming the resurrection of the body at the end of the age, a topic he will treat at greater length in Book 22 of the *City of God*. Throughout this work, he expounds, as elsewhere, both the priority

of faith and the necessity of reason. This is a good corrective against a strictly intellectualistic understanding of the Christian faith—as Augustine puts it, “unless you believe, you will not understand.”

A Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter

This is one of the major statements by Augustine affirming the powerful grace of God in the gift of salvation. *On the Spirit and the Letter* was written in 412 in response to a query he received from a certain Marcellinus relating to personal sin, divine grace, and the role of free choice. Augustine does not deny that human beings, even after the fall, do have a kind of free will, but without the help of the Holy Spirit, such free will unerringly lead to evil choices. In other words, our free will needs to be “freed,” liberated by the grace of God. Apart from the interposition of God’s grace, we are *liberi*, Augustine writes in Latin, but not *liberati*. These issues would be hotly debated for more than a decade during the Pelagian controversy.

Pelagianism is both a mood and a movement in the history of salvation. It took its origins with Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, who offered God the fruit of his own labors in order to make things right with the Almighty. Augustine encountered it in the person of Pelagius and his followers. Pelagius was a monk from Britain who came to Rome protesting the laxity of Christianity he saw there. In its place he advocated a strong moral rigorism emphasizing the human capacity to please God through good works. In his writings, Augustine opposed a number of points made by the Pelagians, including these: (1) there’s no link between mortality and sin; Adam would have died had he never sinned. Augustine, on the other hand, claimed that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23); (2) sin is passed from one generation to the next not through propagation but through imitation. Augustine believed in the corporate character of sin and the seminal identity of the human race in Adam; (3) grace is not opposed to nature but is a part of nature. Augustine believed that grace is a supernatural gift of God imparted to sinful human beings by the Holy Spirit; (4) original sin does not have a universal effect, and it is possible for human beings to live a sinless life by following the law of God and the example of Christ. Augustine taught that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), Christ only excepted; (5) predestination is based on God’s foreknowledge of human deeds. Augustine thought that predestination is based

on the divine sovereignty of God and that human good works are the fruit of divine grace but never its cause.

On the Spirit and the Letter set the tone for the Pelagian debates. The title of this treatise comes from the text of 2 Cor 3:6: “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” As Augustine interpreted this text in the light of Paul’s other writings, letter and spirit refer not merely to different levels of interpreting Scripture but also to two modalities of seeking divine favor—the one depending on the ability of the human will to merit grace and thus earn salvation through doing good works, the other, depending entirely upon the unmerited favor of God revealed in Christ and imparted by the Spirit. Already in an earlier writing (the Letter to Simplicianus, 396), Augustine had cited 1 Cor 4:7 as a pivotal text. Now, he returns to this verse—one of his favorites in all of the Bible—with its three personal, searching questions: “For who makes you so superior? What do you have that you didn’t receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn’t received it?” (CSB). *The Spirit and the Letter* would resonate throughout the history of doctrine in the many debates over free will, predestination, sin, and grace. It would be often quoted by Luther, Calvin, and other reformers in their effort to restate the radical nature of divine grace and the sovereignty of God in salvation.

On Christian Doctrine



On Christian Doctrine

Preface

*Showing that to teach rules for the interpretation of Scripture
is not a superfluous task.*

1. There are certain rules for the interpretation of Scripture, which I think might, with great advantage, be taught to earnest students of the word, that they may profit not only from reading the works of others who have laid open the secrets of the sacred writings but also from themselves opening such secrets to others. These rules I propose to teach to those who are able and willing to learn, if God our Lord does not withhold from me, while I write, the thoughts He is wont to vouchsafe to me in my meditations on this subject. But before I enter upon this undertaking, I think it well to meet the objections of those who are likely to take exception to the work, or who would do so, did I not conciliate them beforehand. And if, after all, men should still be found to make objections, yet at least they will not prevail with others (over whom they might have influence, did they not find them forearmed against their assaults), to turn them back from a useful study to the dull sloth of ignorance.
2. There are some, then, likely to object to this work of mine, because they have failed to understand the rules here laid down. Others, again, will think that I have spent my labour to no purpose, because, though

they understand the rules, yet in their attempts to apply them and to interpret Scripture by them, they have failed to clear up the point they wish cleared up; and these, because they have received no assistance from this work themselves, will give it as their opinion that it can be of no use to anybody. There is a third class of objectors who either really do understand Scripture well, or think they do, and who, because they know (or imagine) that they have attained a certain power of interpreting the sacred books without reading any directions of the kind that I propose to lay down here, will cry out that such rules are not necessary for anyone, but that everything rightly done towards clearing up the obscurities of Scripture could be better done by the unassisted grace of God.

3. To reply briefly to all these. To those who do not understand what is here set down, my answer is that I am not to be blamed for their want of understanding. It is just as if they were anxious to see the new or the old moon, or some very obscure star, and I should point it out with my finger; if they had not sight enough to see even my finger, they would surely have no right to fly into a passion with me on that account. As for those who, even though they know and understand my directions, fail to penetrate the meaning of obscure passages in Scripture, they may stand for those who, in the case I have imagined, are just able to see my finger, but cannot see the stars at which it is pointed. And so both these classes had better give up blaming me and pray instead that God would grant them the sight of their eyes. For though I can move my finger to point out an object, it is out of my power to open men's eyes that they may see either the fact that I am pointing or the object at which I point.
4. But now as to those who talk vauntingly of Divine Grace and boast that they understand and can explain Scripture without the aid of such directions as those I now propose to lay down and who think, therefore, that what I have undertaken to write is entirely superfluous, I would such persons could calm themselves so far as to remember that, however justly they may rejoice in God's great gift, yet it was from human teachers they themselves learnt to read. Now, they would hardly think it right that they should, for that reason, be held in contempt by the Egyptian monk Antony, a just and holy man, who, not being able to read himself, is said to have committed the Scriptures to memory through hearing them read by others and, by dint of wise meditation,

to have arrived at a thorough understanding of them or by that barbarian slave Christianus, of whom I have lately heard from very respectable and trustworthy witnesses, who, without any teaching from man, attained a full knowledge of the art of reading simply through prayer that it might be revealed to him after three days' supplication obtaining his request that he might read through a book presented to him on the spot by the astonished bystanders.

5. But if any one thinks that these stories are false, I do not strongly insist on them. For, as I am dealing with Christians who profess to understand the Scriptures without any directions from man (and if the fact be so, they boast of a real advantage and one of no ordinary kind), they must surely grant that every one of us learnt his own language by hearing it constantly from childhood and that any other language we have learnt—Greek, or Hebrew, or any of the rest—we have learnt either in the same way, by hearing it spoken, or from a human teacher. Now, then, suppose we advise all our brethren not to teach their children any of these things, because on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the apostles immediately began to speak the language of every race and warn every one who has not had a like experience that he need not consider himself a Christian or may at least doubt whether he has yet received the Holy Spirit? No, rather, let us put away false pride and learn whatever can be learnt from man, and let him who teaches another communicate what he has himself received without arrogance and without jealousy. And do not let us tempt Him in whom we have believed, lest, being ensnared by such wiles of the enemy and by our own perversity, we may even refuse to go to the churches to hear the gospel itself, or to read a book, or to listen to another reading or preaching, in the hope that we shall be carried up to the third heaven, “whether in the body or out of the body,” as the apostle says, and there hear unspeakable words, such as it is not lawful for man to utter, or see the Lord Jesus Christ and hear the gospel from His own lips rather than from those of men.
6. Let us beware of such dangerous temptations of pride, and let us rather consider the fact that the Apostle Paul himself, although stricken down and admonished by the voice of God from heaven, was yet sent to a man to receive the sacraments and be admitted into the Church and that Cornelius the centurion, although an angel announced to him that his prayers were heard and his alms had in remembrance, was yet

handed over to Peter for instruction and not only received the sacraments from the apostle's hands but was also instructed by him as to the proper objects of faith, hope, and love. And without doubt it was possible to have done everything through the instrumentality of angels, but the condition of our race would have been much more degraded if God had not chosen to make use of men as the ministers of His word to their fellow men. For how could that be true which is written, "The temple of God is holy, which temple you are," if God gave forth no oracles from His human temple but communicated everything that He wished to be taught to men by voices from heaven, or through the ministrations of angels? Moreover, love itself, which binds men together in the bond of unity, would have no means of pouring soul into soul, and, as it were, mingling them one with another, if men never learnt anything from their fellow men.

7. And we know that the eunuch who was reading Isaiah the prophet, and did not understand what he read, was not sent by the apostle to an angel, nor was it an angel who explained to him what he did not understand, nor was he inwardly illuminated by the grace of God without the interposition of man; on the contrary, at the suggestion of God, Philip, who did understand the prophet, came to him and sat with him, and in human words, and with a human tongue, opened to him the Scriptures. Did not God talk with Moses, and yet he, with great wisdom and entire absence of jealous pride, accepted the plan of his father-in-law, a man of an alien race, for ruling and administering the affairs of the great nation entrusted to him? For Moses knew that a wise plan, in whatever mind it might originate, was to be ascribed not to the man who devised it but to Him who is the Truth, the unchangeable God.
8. In the last place, every one who boasts that he, through divine illumination, understands the obscurities of Scripture, though not instructed in any rules of interpretation, at the same time believes, and rightly believes, that this power is not his own, in the sense of originating with himself, but is the gift of God. For so he seeks God's glory, not his own. But reading and understanding, as he does, without the aid of any human interpreter, why does he himself undertake to interpret for others? Why does he not rather send them direct to God, that they too may learn by the inward teaching of the Spirit without the help of man? The truth is, he fears to incur the reproach, "You wicked and slothful

servant, you ought to have put my money to the exchangers.” Seeing, then, that these men teach others, either through speech or writing, what they understand, surely they cannot blame me if I likewise teach not only what they understand but also the rules of interpretation they follow. For no one ought to consider anything as his own, except perhaps what is false. All truth is of Him who says, “I am the truth.” For what have we that we did not receive? And if we have received it, why do we glory, as if we had not received it?

9. He who reads to an audience pronounces aloud the words he sees before him; he who teaches reading, does it that others may be able to read for themselves. Each, however, communicates to others what he has learnt himself. Just so, the man who explains to an audience the passages of Scripture he understands is like one who reads aloud the words before him. On the other hand, the man who lays down rules for interpretation is like one who teaches reading, that is, shows others how to read for themselves. So that, just as he who knows how to read is not dependent on someone else, when he finds a book, to tell him what is written in it, so the man who is in possession of the rules which I here attempt to lay down, if he meet with an obscure passage in the books which he reads, will not need an interpreter to lay open the secret to him, but, holding fast by certain rules, and following up certain indications, will arrive at the hidden sense without any error, or at least without falling into any gross absurdity. And so although it will sufficiently appear in the course of the work itself that no one can justly object to this undertaking of mine, which has no other object than to be of service, yet as it seemed convenient to reply at the outset to any who might make preliminary objections, such is the start I have thought good to make on the road I am about to traverse in this book.

The Apostles Creed



I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead, and buried:
He descended into hell;
The third day he rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost;
The holy Catholic Church;
The communion of saints;
The forgiveness of sins;
The resurrection of the body,
And the life everlasting.
Amen.

BOOK I.

Containing a General View of the Subjects Treated in Holy Scripture

Chap. 1.—*The interpretation of Scripture depends on the discovery and enunciation of the meaning and is to be undertaken in dependence on God's aid.*

1. There are two things on which all interpretation of Scripture depends: the mode of ascertaining the proper meaning and the mode of making known the meaning when it is ascertained. We shall treat first of the mode of ascertaining, next of the mode of making known, the meaning—a great and arduous undertaking, and one that, if difficult to carry out, it is, I fear, presumptuous to enter upon. And presumptuous it would undoubtedly be, if I were counting on my own strength, but since my hope of accomplishing the work rests on Him who has already supplied me with many thoughts on this subject, I do not fear but that He will go on to supply what is yet wanting when once I have begun to use what He has already given. For a possession which is not diminished by being shared with others, if it is possessed and not shared, is not yet possessed as it ought to be possessed. The Lord saith,

“Whosoever has, to him shall be given.” He will give, then, to those who have; that is to say, if they use freely and cheerfully what they have received, He will add to and perfect His gifts. The loaves in the miracle were only five and seven in number before the disciples began to divide them among the hungry people. But when once they began to distribute them, though the wants of so many thousands were satisfied, they filled baskets with the fragments that were left. Now, just as that bread increased in the very act of breaking it, so those thoughts which the Lord has already vouchsafed to me with a view to undertaking this work will, as soon as I begin to impart them to others, be multiplied by His grace, so that, in this very work of distribution in which I have engaged, so far from incurring loss and poverty, I shall be made to rejoice in a marvellous increase of wealth.

Chap. 2.—*What a thing is, and what a sign*

2. All instruction is either about things or about signs, but things are learnt by means of signs. I now use the word “thing” in a strict sense, to signify that which is never employed as a sign of anything else: for example, wood, stone, cattle, and other things of that kind. Not, however, the wood which we read Moses cast into the bitter waters to make them sweet, nor the stone which Jacob used as a pillow, nor the ram which Abraham offered up instead of his son; for these, though they are things, are also signs of other things. There are signs of another kind, those which are never employed except as signs: for example, words. No one uses words except as signs of something else, and hence may be understood what I call signs—those things, to wit, which are used to indicate something else. Accordingly, every sign is also a thing; for what is not a thing is nothing at all. Everything, however, is not also a sign. And so, in regard to this distinction between things and signs, I shall, when I speak of things, speak in such a way that even if some of them may be used as signs also, that will not interfere with the division of the subject according to which I am to discuss things first and signs afterwards. But we must carefully remember that what we have now to consider about things is what they are in themselves, not what other things they are signs of.