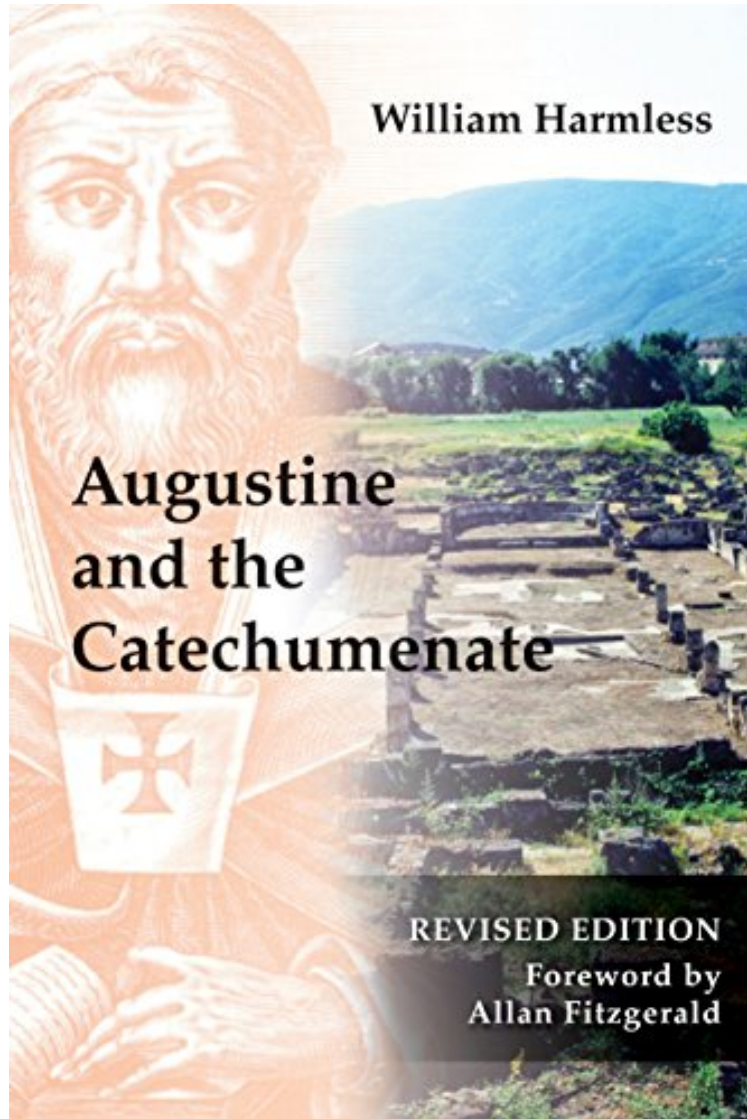


(Download pdf ebook) Augustine and the Catechumenate

Augustine and the Catechumenate

Von William Harmless
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Von William Harmless : Augustine and the Catechumenate before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Augustine and the Catechumenate:

Kundenrezensionen Hilfreichste Kundenrezensionen 0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A splendid portrait of St. Augustine as teacher of the Faith Von Ein Kunde Review of Augustine and the Catechumenate William Harmless Augustine and the Catechumenate (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995). 406 pages with charts, index and bibliography. \$34.95. St. Augustine: priest, bishop, theologian, doctor of the church, polemicist, apolo-gist, scholar-and catechist. Augustine is respected and loved by the Christian church for his many

roles, but his role as a catechist has been the least well known, until now. William Harmless has provided us with a magnificent portrait of Augustine the catechist. Harmless wrote this book to assist the Roman Catholic Church's Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The RCIA was launched in 1972 by the Vatican thus "reversing a thousand years of initiatory practice and attitude" (p. 1). Harmless' operating assumption is that "if the Church has found itself increasingly renewed by the wisdom and richness of these ancient rituals and their underlying pastoral vision, then the Church might find itself similarly renewed by our gleaning the best from ancient styles of catechesis" (p. 25). The RCIA has been used with great effectiveness in many Roman Catholic parishes. It is basically an adoption of the early church's classic catechumenate process, as that process reached a high point in the fourth century. Harmless sets out to investigate one example of the ancient catechumenate: the catechumenate of St. Augustine of Hippo. The reason for this is simple. Augustine wrote a number of treatises on the subject of catechesis and the catechumenate; he is the only patristic author from whom we have samples of each of the four stages of the ancient catechumenate; there are excellent critical editions of Augustine's works, both in the original language and in English; and finally, Harmless notes that within the past sixty years there have been many archeological and textual discoveries that offer much detailed information about Augustine and his Church in Hippo. Harmless organizes his book in a clear and orderly fashion, something that can not always be said of scholars' books. In addition to the book's excellent organization, Harmless' writing style is very engaging. This book was a delight to read. This reviewer found it hard to put down, so interesting is Harmless' narrative descriptions of Augustine as preacher, catechist, exegete, pastor and church leader. Throughout the book Harmless offers direct quotes from Augustine's sermons, a major source of our knowledge of Augustine's catechetical method and content. His translation of Augustine's sermons is vivid, as was Augustine in the original. Harmless recounts how the congregation in Augustine's day was often swept up by the Bishop's masterful rhetoric, applauding, weeping, cheering or shouting out Bible verses as Augustine preached. Harmless' book will both complement and supplement other treatments of Augustine in English. Definitive studies include Van der Meer's *Augustine the Bishop*; Brown's *Augustine of Hippo* and Bonner's *St. Augustine of Hippo*. For the best, and most complete, translation of Augustine's sermons into English we have *The Works of Saint Augustine* (New City Press, 1995). In this collection of Augustine's sermons, translator Edmund Hill has captured the vividness of Augustine's oratory and relies on the best manuscripts available, and includes copious notes. Eventually, the project hopes to make available, for the first time, Augustine's complete writings in English. Those who know Augustine only through the Victorian English of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers collection will be delighted by the New City Press edition of Augustine's works. Harmless traces Augustine's own catechetical experience under Ambrose of Milan and then takes a look at how Augustine approached each phase of the classic catechumenate model: evangelization, catechumenate, candidate for Baptism (Lenten catechesis), and then post-Baptismal catechesis. In each section, Harmless masterfully illustrates how Augustine pulled out all the stops in his efforts to reach each catechumen. He especially focuses on Augustine the master orator, indicating how Augustine both used and ignored the classic rules of rhetoric in his catechetical work. For Augustine, reaching both the head and the heart was the goal, neither whipping up hearers into mindless emotional frenzy nor boring them to death with encyclopedic lectures on theological facts. Harmless does not gloss over the challenges faced by Augustine, or paint this as some sort of utopian era for the church. He makes it clear that Augustine grew frustrated with his congregations. Writing about the catechetical task, Augustine once rehearsed the catechumen's vices: "Those depraved persons who in mobs fill the churches in a bodily sense only: . . . drunkards, covetous, extortioners, gamblers, adulterers, fornicators, lovers of shows, wearers of idolatrous charms, soothsayers, astrologers, or diviners employing vain and unholy arts" (p. 133). This was not a "pure church" - as if there ever was such a thing. Since we are not Donatists, we should not try to locate perfection in this fallen order either, or else we will become either self-righteous hypocrites or despairing pessimists. Harmless' shows us how one Christian theologian and teacher struggled with the all too human qualities of his congregation and continued to strive for uncompromising excellence in service of the Gospel. William Harmless has provided a true gem to the Christian church. He offers a very organized description of Augustine's catechetical work, in the process helping us to understand even more this great doctor of the church and how his genius for rhetoric was combined with his passion for teaching the Faith. Augustine would be pleased not only with what Harmless has to say, but how he has said it, and so will Harmless' readers. Paul T. McCain St. Louis, Missouri October 29, 1996

KurzbeschreibungAs one of the most influential thinkers in Christian history, St. Augustine (354-430) had a flair for teaching and meditated deeply on the mysteries of the human heart. This study examines a little-known side of his career: his work as a teacher of candidates for baptism. In the revised edition of this seminal book, both the text and notes have been revised to better reflect the state of contemporary scholarship on Augustine, liturgical studies, and the catechumenate, both ancient and modern. This edition also includes new findings from some of the recently discovered sermons of Augustine and incorporates new perspectives from recent research on early Christian biblical interpretation, debates on the Trinity, the evolution of the liturgy, and much more. This reconstruction of Augustines

catechumenate provides fresh perspectives on the day-to-day life of the early church and on the vibrancy and eloquence of Augustine the preacher and teacher.