Augustine and the Interpretation of Scripture from a Postliberal Perspective: An Ecumenical Appropriation

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to extract Augustine’s principles for interpreting Scripture from *De Doctrina Christiana*, and to apply these, as viewed through a postliberal, cultural-linguistic lens, to questions of division within the Church. In the first chapter, a survey of the principles that Augustine raises will be conducted. This will be followed by an examination of these principles from a postliberal perspective in the second chapter. The postliberal perspective will be taken primarily from the work of George Lindbeck; I will follow his characterization of doctrine as regulative grammar and apply this grammatical function to Augustine’s rules for interpreting Scripture. I will attempt to apply Augustine’s principles from this postliberal perspective to modern doctrinal disputes in ecumenical conversations. I will first trace the usefulness of these principles in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* before suggesting their application to future ecumenical discussion.
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1 Augustine and Lindbeck: Toward an Ecumenical Interpretation of Scripture.

On October 31, 1999, the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Since the Reformation this doctrine had been a roadblock to unity, a thorn of divisiveness; what once caused such deep polarization was the occasion for taking a stand together.

It is clear that there were and are many other issues that separate the Church, that cause fissures within. Of course, the example mentioned above only deals with differences between Protestants and Catholics, but division did not begin, and does not end here. Further, while there are multitudes of reasons for division within the Church, and while separation from one another seems to be the rule rather than the exception; I would like to examine one of the sensitive issues or raw nerves of division, namely, the interpretation of Scripture. That this is an issue is clear even from the Reformation split over the doctrine of justification. The *Joint Declaration* sums this up: “Opposing interpretations and applications of the biblical message of justification were a principal cause of the division of the Western church in the sixteenth century and led as well to doctrinal condemnations. A common understanding of justification is therefore fundamental and indispensable to overcoming that division.”¹ The authors involved in the shaping of this common declaration were aware of the role of biblical interpretation and application, indeed the “principal” role it played in the division of the Western Church. Identifying questions of

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scriptural interpretation as a major cause of division is not enough, for the *Declaration* makes clear that there must be some common understanding of the message of the Bible before progress can be made. The *Declaration* goes on:

By appropriating insights of recent biblical studies and drawing on modern investigations of the history of theology and dogma, the post-Vatican II ecumenical dialogue has led to a notable convergence concerning justification, with the result that this *Joint Declaration* is able to formulate a consensus on basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification. ²

I want to suggest that for further progress in ecumenical dialogue, what is needed along with insights from a biblical studies and theological investigations, is a rule or grammar for reading Scripture. Specifically, I am arguing that Augustine’s explicit principles for exegeting Scripture (drawn from *De Doctrina Christiana*), as viewed through a postliberal, cultural-linguistic lens to theology, offer a robust foundation for guiding the interpretation of Scripture in ecumenical contexts.

In the following pages I will attempt, in three successive stages that build upon one another, to offer what I will call a “grammar” with which to approach Scripture. Recognizing that there is more at play in ecumenical discussions than issues of biblical interpretation, I want to make a modest contribution, a small step forward toward further ecumenical growth. My goal in this offering is to stay faithful to the witness of Scripture, and the robust tradition in which it is read. I reject the notion that the Bible should be read as if it were any other book, and the treatment of

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the Bible that has stemmed from this. I will offer an alternative that I hope will foster ecumenical progress.

In the first chapter I will begin by offering a concise survey of Augustine’s use of Scripture, with particular attention being paid to his hermeneutical rules. I will suggest that these rules function as a sort of grammar that governs and regulates the way Augustine reads the text. In the second chapter I will appropriate the work of George Lindbeck, especially his proposed cultural-linguistic approach to religion and his rule theory of doctrine. I will use Lindbeck’s work as a lens to draw closer attention to the exegetical rules from Augustine that were previously examined. Finally, in the third chapter I will set forth the implications that these exegetical principles may have for fostering unity amidst the divided body of Christ, the Church. My aim will be specifically to offer a way out of disagreement that has occurred because of differing interpretations of Scripture. My hope is that this alternative will be attractive to Christians who are wanting to overcome division, and who are willing to use Augustine’s work as one means of doing so. As I will note later, I recognize that the helpfulness of my work is extremely limited, but I hope that it will help facilitate steps in the direction of unity, if only for a few.

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3 That Scripture should be read this way was posited by Benjamin Jowett. See: Benjamin Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” in Essays and Reviews, ed. F. Temple, R. Williams, B. Powell, et al. (London: Longman, 1861), 375.
Chapter 2
Augustine’s Rules for Interpreting Scripture

1 Preliminary Notes: Augustine’s Grammar

As I turn to Augustine, I will be specifically focussing on his explicit exegetical principles as they are presented in De Doctrina Christiana. I recognize that the Augustinian corpus is vast, and that his exegesis is at play throughout much of it. For the purposes of this discussion I will include only references to Augustine’s exegetical practice as they help to illumine the explicit principles already mentioned. Further, my synthesis of the principles laid out in De Doctrina Christiana is meant merely to offer one systematic order fitting to this discussion, and as such, is not the only order of configuration of these principles that is possible with respect to outlining Augustine’s exegetical method. My purpose in using Augustine’s principles comes from what I perceive to be their usefulness in ecumenical dialogue when approached from a postliberal, cultural-linguistic perspective. I want to suggest that Augustine provides a way of reading, a “grammar” for approaching the Scriptures, that fosters ecumenical discussion and openness to the other. Certainly this grammar has bounds, and though it may be flexible in places, it is wrought like iron in others. Before discussing Augustine’s exegetical principles individually in detail, I will offer a few introductory remarks.

Augustine’s exegetical principles shape the way he approaches Scripture, and I think they should shape the way we approach it in ecumenical discussion. With this in mind, we may wonder how Augustine developed such principles. The answer has several parts. Partially these principles are
developed in a symbiotic relationship with the Scriptures themselves,\textsuperscript{4} but also through the teaching voice of the Church.\textsuperscript{5} The origin of this approach is not what is of primary importance, but recognizing the particular way of reading at work is important as it plays a crucial role in the molding of the rest of Augustine’s theology.

By way of a second introductory remark, I will be extracting some of the principles that Augustine has presented and configuring these in a way that will be most beneficial for this discussion. I am wanting to think of these principles as grammatical rules, and since they appear in an order that is not particularly coherent, I have attempted to put them into an order of logical progression. Just as do linguistic principles within a language, some of Augustine’s exegetical principles take precedence over others. For instance, in English the direct object usually follows the verb (ex. “We ask these things in Jesus name...”), though it is acceptable in some instances to change this order (ex. “These things we ask in Jesus name...”). In the case of the previous example, more than one grammatical rule is at play. The pronoun “we” is in agreement with conjugated verb “ask.” This agreement is more central than the order of the direct object and the verb despite the relevance of both of these rules. In the same way, with the grammar of Augustine’s exegetical principles, there are some rules that are more central than others. I have attempted to set these out in order of primacy, though my evaluation may be disputed. Whatever

\textsuperscript{4} For an example see *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1.36.40 where Augustine makes notes that one principle for reading Scripture, namely that it should lead to love of God and neighbour, is of course a reference to Matthew 22:38-40.\textsuperscript{5} In his *Confessions*, 6.4.6, Augustine offers an account of how he came to learn of figural exegesis through Ambrose’s preaching. While it is true that Ambrose arrived at this approach to exegesis by his reading of Scripture, there are two significant points to note. First, Augustine learns of figural exegesis through the teaching office of a bishop; this discovery does not come to him directly from his own reading of Scripture. Though Augustine’s exegetical principles may have originated in Scripture, epistemologically Augustine becomes aware of them by the teaching of the Church. Second, Ambrose’s exegetical method, while being drawn from Scripture, is also shaped by certain presuppositions. There is no pure method, nor pure logic of Scripture. As for Augustine, Ambrose’s method would have developed in a similar symbiotic relationship between the internal logic of Scripture and external rules for reading.
the case may be, the exact order of primacy is not integral to my argument, but only serves to simplify the arrangement of my work. Further, the nature of Augustine’s exegetical grammar shares another feature in common with linguistic grammar. In describing the nature of English grammatical rules, literary critic M. H. Abrams notes:

...such prescriptive grammatical rules are merely rules of thumb, useful as a shortcut to guiding novices to write clearly and avoid ambiguity. The validity of such rules is based on the trained intuitions - the linguistic tact - of competent users of a language; that is, on their sense of what is grammatically normal, and also what is grammatically possible. This linguistic tact is the product of our mastery, over time, of the regularities of usage in the practice of the language we have inherited.\(^6\)

Similar to Abrams description, Augustine’s rules for interpreting Scripture are not necessarily dogmatic or inflexible. A better description of these rules would be to liken them to the theological tact that is characteristic of a mature Christian. Neither English, nor exegetical grammatical rules are making statements of what is true or not true, but what is normative - what works within the logic of each respective language, whether English or the language of scriptural interpretation.

Finally, while I wish the reader to keep in mind the further goal of ecumenism throughout their reading of this work, I want to delve into Augustine on his own terms. I will cover Lindbeck’s thesis and how Augustine’s principles relate to it, specifically with the ends of ecumenism, in future chapters. Moreover, I will more fully develop the notion that Augustine’s interpretive framework shares many commonalities with a Lindbeckian grammar. What is important at this

point is to allow Augustine to have a voice; we need to understand what Augustine means before his work can be applied constructively. This being said, I will now move into Augustine’s work, beginning with his views of Scripture.

2 Augustine’s Understanding of Scripture: Ontology

Before examining how Augustine uses Scripture and his interpretive approach, it is imperative that we gain some understanding of what Augustine believes Scripture to be. This prior understanding is important because Augustine’s comprehension of the ontology of Scripture will shape his approach and the grammar that he develops to apply to the text. The reverse, that Augustine’s approach to Scripture affects his understanding of its ontology is also true. From the start it may be helpful to note the historical situation in which Augustine comes to the Scriptures in the first place. Tarmo Toom makes the following observation about Augustine’s situation:

...there was no uniform understanding yet of what the ‘whole Scripture’ was. ‘Augustine never saw a Bible’, that is, a one-volume codex of the whole Bible. In the fourth century, the designation ‘Scripture’ did not yet denote a universally agreed upon and closed collection of inspired writings. Therefore the recommendation ‘to read all of them’ was ambiguous and Augustine had to explain that by ‘all’ he meant only ‘those pronounced canonical’...

In other words, Augustine was essentially dealing with the same texts of Scripture that we are dealing with today, though their final compilation had not yet been made concrete. The one significant difference between Augustine’s canon of Scripture and what most Protestants hold to

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is that Augustine included what Roman Catholics later termed ‘deuterocanonical’ books in his list.\(^8\)

Though *De Doctrina Christiana* is our primary focus, Augustine’s correspondence with Jerome sheds some further light on the former’s views of the nature of Scripture. One can sense the emotion in some of these letters, particularly when Augustine perceives Jerome to be attributing falsehood to Scripture. Jerome deems Paul’s scolding of Peter \(^9\) as an example of this falsehood, causing Augustine to respond apologetically:

>If you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement as made in the way of duty, there will not be left a single sentence of those books which, if appearing to any one difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away, as a statement in which, intentionally, and under a sense of duty, the author declared what was not true.\(^{10}\)

We can easily see from this quotation that Augustine is not wanting to allow for any doubt about the trustworthiness of Scripture. It seems to Augustine that if we are to subject the Scriptures to any accusations such as this we are opening the door to a whole other world of questionings; to him this is a very slippery slope. Still, Augustine is not unaware of the human element involved in the interpretation of Scripture. Augustine is clearly committed to the truth and authority of Scripture, though this does not mean he is committed to particular interpretations with anywhere near the same level of confidence. Augustine is pushing Jerome to rest securely in the veracity of Scripture, not any one particular perception of how it ought to be read.

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\(^8\) See *De Doctrina Christiana* 2.8.13 for a full list.
\(^9\) See Galatians 2:7-16.
\(^{10}\) Augustine, Letter XXVIII 3.3.
Augustine’s careful defense of the truth of Scripture carries with it some necessary implications. If either truth or falsehood can be ascribed to Scripture, the implication is that Scripture is making specific verifiable claims. In Augustine’s view, Scripture must have a voice of its own. In the thought of Augustine, if one is to ascribe falsehood to Scripture, one “demands that he be believed in preference, and endeavours to shake our confidence in the authority of the divine Scriptures.”\(^{11}\) In other words, ascribing falsehood to Scripture requires that one set oneself up above it, acting in pride and seeing oneself as superior to the Word of God. This sin must be avoided, and Augustine makes clear his own perspective on the matter; he sees the importance of holding lightly to one’s own interpretations of Scripture while holding Scripture itself in the highest regard. He notes, “I would devote all the strength which the Lord grants me, to show that every one of those texts which are wont to be quoted in defense of the expediency of falsehood ought to be otherwise understood, in order that everywhere the sure truth of these passages themselves may be consistently maintained.”\(^{12}\) Augustine reveals his views of Scripture in the previous quotation, namely that it is always true, and that the Christian should always allow him or herself to be interrogated by the text. Never is the Christian to question the veracity of Scripture, for to Augustine it is the authority that ought always be set above oneself.

What else can we say about how Augustine viewed Scripture? What is its essence? Augustine does not see Scripture as simply words on a page, or something static; Augustine views Scripture as a dynamic mystery. Lewis Ayres describes Augustine’s view of Scripture more fully:

> Augustine sees Scripture as a divine rhetorical performance ultimately ordered by the Spirit. This performance is ordered to draw those who have been called and chosen toward the Father, toward a contemplation and participation that is only accomplished at

\(^{11}\) Augustine, Letter XXVIII.3.4.  
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 3.5.
the eschaton and in grace - given humility. In this context, all scriptural authors, Paul included, frequently use forms of expression that are intentionally ambiguous in order to invite our deeper reflection on the mystery of God’s nature and salvific action. In some cases, this means that texts use metaphors that entice and draw us through their imagery; in other cases, it means that Scripture speaks obliquely in order that its mysteries will only open themselves to those who persevere.13

Ayres description of Augustine’s view is telling. One dimensional understandings of Scripture and referentiality are not present to Augustine. Rather, Scripture is a “performance ...ordered by the Spirit,” that invites the reader into deeper relationship with God. Ambiguity and obscurity within the text serve this purpose as well. While still not pinpointing an all-encompassing definition of Scripture, this description reveals a profound part of what Augustine believed Scripture to be.

A final look into how Augustine viewed the ontology of Scripture is offered by Michael Cameron. Cameron notes the following on the issue, “Scripture represents a fecund diversity of authors, genres, images, stories, laws, rituals, characters, and events – all converging upon the will of God; even its anomalies and contradictions adorn the single divine discourse.”14 For Augustine, Scripture is multidimensional, and difficult to confine to any one conception. Cameron goes on to quote Augustine:

There is but a single discourse of God [ unus sermo Dei] amplified through all the scriptures, dearly beloved. Through the mouths of many holy persons a single Word

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makes itself heard [sonet]. That Word, being God-with-God in the beginning, has no syllables, because he is not confined by time. Yet we should not find it surprising that to meet our weakness he descended to the discrete sounds we use, for he also descended to take to himself the weakness of our human body.\textsuperscript{15}

This is the closest that we will come to having a concretized description of Augustine’s views on the nature of Scripture. It is the voice of the Word himself, Christ Jesus. Thus, Scripture for Augustine is a united message made up of many voices that come together to be the voice of Christ.

3 \textit{De Doctrina Christiana} and the Need for an Interpretive Grammar

In depth exegesis permeates much of Augustine’s writing. From his commentaries on Genesis and the Psalms we can see Augustine reading Scripture closely. In his \textit{Confessions} Augustine often breaks out in praise, quoting passages of Scripture freely. As noted previously, what sets \textit{De Doctrina Christiana} apart is the explicit rules that Augustine sets out in this comparatively short work. Further, within this text Augustine gives a reason as to why such rules for interpretation are necessary in the first place, providing a defense for an interpretive guide in the first two sections of the prologue.

Within the first few sentences Augustine discloses his purpose for writing his rules, noting that he writes in order that students “...may profit not only from reading the work of expositors but

\textsuperscript{15} Quoted from: Augustine, \textit{Ennarations on the Psalms} 103.4.1.
also in their own explanations of the sacred writings to others.”\footnote{Augustine, \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}, Prologue.1.} In other words, Augustine wants to equip his readers to be proficient interpreters and commentators of Scripture while also empowering them to rightly teach Scripture to others. Moreover, Augustine is not unaware of the challenges that some would pose to his work. He anticipates several objections to his exegetical offerings, both from those not mature enough to understand the interpretative rules, and from those who understand but do not think they need an interpretative guide.\footnote{Ibid., Prologue.2.} Augustine rebuts both of these positions by noting that his goal is not to make the blind (or obstinate) to see, while maintaining that those who think they have no need for an interpretative framework ought to remember that their very use of language is an inherited system of communication taught to them by humans.\footnote{Ibid., Prologue.3,4.}

Though Augustine makes clear his intent to offer a guide for interpreting Scripture, a more specific purpose is implied in his work. \textit{De Doctrina Christiana} is one of the first books written by St. Augustine after becoming bishop.\footnote{Michael Cameron, \textit{Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine’s Early Figurative Exegesis}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 216.} Even in the very earliest stages of Augustine’s Christian life, he noticed the devastating effects that incorrect interpretations of Scripture could engender, and so uses his ministerial position to teach positively how these poor interpretations could be avoided. Before going further we must allow Augustine’s writing to illuminate the nature of both true and perverse interpretations. What is a “correct” (true) or “incorrect” (untrue) interpretation for Augustine? In our modern context, we might think about a correct or true interpretation of a text as one that refers to actual facts or states of affairs, such as the author’s intended meaning. Conversely, we would see an interpretation as incorrect if it does not
accurately relay such facts or state of affairs. Augustine’s view of a correct interpretation (specifically with regards to Scripture) has less to do with authorial intent (be it divine or human) and more to do with the practical implications of such an interpretation. For Augustine, if a correct interpretation of a passage of Scripture is one that coheres with the Christian faith, including its central principle of love, incorrect or untrue interpretations are those that are unloving or that contain “perverse teachings.”  

In his *Confessions* Augustine suggests that among these perverse teachings are those notions gleaned from a literal reading of Scripture that would portray God as physically anthropomorphic. To believe that God has a physical body is amongst other “infantile follies” for Augustine. Augustine looks to Ambrose, commenting that “those texts which, taken literally, seemed to contain perverse teaching [Ambrose] would expound spiritually removing the mystical veil.”

Readings that portrayed God as physically anthropomorphic were not the only incorrect understandings of Scripture; Augustine also perceives interpretations that do not mesh with the rule of charity to be unacceptable. It should be regarded that Augustine’s understanding of charity or love is widely divergent from some modern perceptions. He does not perceive love to be some sentimental nicety, but rather:

...Augustine’s category of love is molded in scriptural terms... it is also essentially determined by the actual meaning of the Christ-event. If God is the future as he is the foundation of a true experience of love in a person capable of such an experience on earth, it is because, as Fr. van Bavel puts its, “the person of Christ is to be seen as having a relationship with every human being, because his love is universal.” Such a central

21 Ibid., 6.3.4 and 6.4.5.
22 Ibid., 6.4.6.
notion of the salvific incarnation of God had been popularized by Athanasius of Alexandria and taken over by the Cappadocian Fathers for more than a century before Augustine. Now this centrality of the Christ-event in Christian anthropology and soteriology becomes also a key element of the Augustinian category of love. As we see, love, according to Augustine, is molded in the reality of Scripture - most specifically in the Christ event. The measure for whether or not an interpretation of Scripture coheres with the rule of charity is whether or not it is in accord with the teachings and actions of Christ. Perversity and uncharitable interpretations of Scripture, though central concerns for Augustine as he offered his interpretative grammar, were not the only hurdles to coming to a correct interpretation; Augustine was also aware of obscurity in Scripture. One of the causes of such obscurity comes from a confusion about which signs in Scripture are meant to be interpreted literally and which ought to be interpreted figuratively, pointing to a reality beyond themselves. It is in an attempt to offer tools for interpreting Scripture profitably and rightly that Augustine offers his interpretive rules. Thus, we can see for Augustine the desire for some rule to govern the way in which Scripture is interpreted originated from an experience with incorrect and uncharitable interpretations of the text. This naturally leads one to question the source from which Augustine appropriated his particular rules.

4 Augustine’s Grammar: A Genealogy

It is difficult to trace the genealogy of Augustine’s exegetical grammar with certainty, however there are a variety of sources that are clearly alluded to within his writing while others are simply

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24 Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, 2.10.15.
25 See Prologue 1.1 of De Doctrina Christiana for this rationale.
implied. I will discuss five sources of Augustine’s interpretative rules, though there are no doubt others that will not be discussed. These five sources will provide a sufficient background to uncover the influences at work in Augustine’s formulation. The five sources are (1) Church teaching, (2) Scripture, (3) the regula fidei, (4) Tyconius’ Liber Regularum, and (5) Augustine’s classical education. It should be observed that the first three sources enumerated are entwined and entangled with one another. They coexist in a collaborative relationship, each overlapping, but distinct. When speaking about Church teaching, we ought to keep in mind that the subject matter of such teaching is often from Scripture, for example, and that elements from the regula fidei are extracted from both of these as well. Moreover, allusions to Scripture are often mediated through the teaching of the Church, or have been distilled into the regula fidei. I have separated these sources only for the sake of more precise analysis, and thus the reader ought to remember this division is not hard and fast. Having noted this relationship, we can discuss each distinctive source for Augustine’s interpretive rules in some detail.

Beginning with the sources that are most explicit in Augustine’s own writing we can see that Church teaching (specifically as it is manifested in the preaching of Ambrose) is one of the sources that influenced Augustine very early in his spiritual development. One element of the faith, or more correctly what Augustine imagined to be the faith, that repulsed him in his days of seeking was an erroneous understanding of the Old Testament. Though Augustine approached Ambrose in private, it was through hearing Ambrose’s sermons containing exegesis of many Old Testament texts, that Augustine began to change his mind about the faith. Ambrose had been enunciating the passage from 2 Corinthians 3:6, “The letter kills, the spirit gives life,” and this
especially caught Augustine’s attention. It was thus very early in Augustine’s journey to faith that exegetical technique played a central role in his life, even toward his conversion.

One may object at this point, noting that Augustine really did not learn anything specifically from Ambrose, a teacher of the Church, but rather from Scripture itself. Indeed, Augustine is learning about Scripture, but he is learning about Scripture as mediated by Ambrose, a bishop. Ambrose does not merely encompass all that the text has to say; he adds his own particular interpretation to the text. Having thus summed up the manner in which Augustine learned from both Church teaching and Scripture (via a mediating voice), we will now turn to Augustine’s learning more directly from Scripture.

The above discussion reveals that Augustine learned at least something from Scripture through Ambrose whom functioned as a commentator. It can be noted further, that Augustine approached Scripture directly as well. This much comes out in De Doctrina Christiana in such instances as his appeal to the rule of love, namely, that all interpretations of Scripture ought to lead one to love God and one’s neighbours more deeply. It is impossible to know whether Augustine gathered this sentiment from a personal reading of Scripture or by hearing this expounded by some preacher. What is clear is the striking similarity between Augustine’s formulation of the principle in De Doctrina Christiana and its appearance in Matthew 22:38-40 and Galatians 5:14. Furthermore, while it is possible for Augustine to have learned of this text through Church teaching, he does not make a point to refer to a specific incident in the same manner that he referred to Ambrose’s sermons to indicate a juncture in which his thinking about

26 Augustine, Confessions, 6.4.6.
the Old Testament was revolutionized. Whatever the case may be, the symbiotic relationship between Church teaching and Scripture is a particularly close one. It may also be significant to point out that Augustine would have been working with a mediated Latin text. However these passages were learned by Augustine, they certainly played a role in the formation of his exegetical grammar.

The third source for Augustine’s interpretive grammar is the *regula fidei*. As mentioned above, this source is difficult to distinguish between the teaching of the Church and the contents of Scripture, but there does seem to be something unique about it. One scholar, R.N. Hebb points out the presence of the *regula fidei* in *De Doctrina Christiana*, but fails to be able to locate it specifically, noting, “...there is no such simple listing of the Rule of Faith. In De doctrina Christiana Augustine weaves the Rule of Faith into the entire structure and argument of the first book.”28 It turns out that identifying the exact nature of the *regula fidei* has been difficult across the board, and is not a challenge peculiar to Augustine’s work. Christopher Seitz makes a strong attempt at a definition: “The Rule of Faith is an appeal to the total witness of scripture, especially the Old Testament (OT), as constituting the speech and work of the self-same Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in Israel and in the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ.”29 For Seitz, we can see that *regula fidei* is an appeal to Scripture, apostolic witness, and Trinitarian theology. Paul Hartog explores the *regula fidei* in more detail, noting seven distinct functions of the rule.30 Though it may be objectionable to cite the *regula fidei* as a distinct source for Augustine’s exegetical grammar, there do seem to be some important unique features that it

presents. According to Hartog, for example, the *regula fidei* “...provides an underlying "dramatic coherence" and unitive plot to the diverse and heterogeneous Scriptural witnesses."\(^{31}\) Thus, as something separate from Scripture and Church teaching the rule is what binds the messages of each together; the *regula fidei* is the glue that holds the structure of Christianity together. It may be part of the cohesive whole the Christian faith, but it plays a specific and necessary role.

Augustine is aware of the *regula fidei*, and its significance for interpretive undertakings. He notes, “When investigation reveals an uncertainty as to how a locution should be pointed or construed, the rule of faith [*regulam fidei*] should be consulted as it is found in the more open places of the Scriptures and in the authority of the Church.”\(^{32}\) Here Augustine is nodding to the relationship shared between the *regula*, Scripture and Church teaching. More significantly he is suggesting that the *regula fidei* matters in the interpretation of Scripture.

Having discussed the first intertwined trio of sources for Augustine’s grammatical rules, we can now approach the final two sources which are more discrete. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine refers to Tyconius *Liber Regularum*. Douglas Leslie Anderson describes Tyconius *Liber Regularum* as being written “to establish rules for biblical interpretation whereby Christians would have a coherent and unified approach to both the Old and New Testaments. This was a first in the life of the Church.”\(^{33}\) Kenneth Steinhauser adds, “the significance of his *Book of Rules* can hardly be overestimated since it represents the first attempt in the western


\(^{32}\) Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 3.2.2.

Church at formulating exegetical rules for objectively interpreting the entire scriptures.”

Joseph Mueller offers his own description of the text noting that, “Tyconius’s Book of Rules presents seven rules to guide the reader of Scripture into a deeper understanding of, and commitment to, the Christian way of life. Probably dating from the last half of the fourth century, this Donatist work survived perhaps in large part because of the esteem in which Augustine held it.” Offering some biographical background to the Tyconius, Mueller notes he “was a Donatist Christian layman who lived in Africa in the second half of the fourth century.”

Since Augustine clearly alludes to Tyconius in De Doctrina Christiana there is little doubt that Augustine drew from him to a greater or lesser extent. Augustine does not directly incorporate any of the rules of Tyconius into his own list, but he does refer to them as a helpful subsidiary tool that ought to be used with caution. Interestingly, Augustine attributes the same purpose to Tyconius’ rules as he does to his own, namely, that the “obscure shall be elucidated.” It is not our task to determine the details of how much Augustine is specifically indebted to Tyconius, but only to recognize him as one influence. This leads the last source for Augustine’s rules for interpretation that will be discussed.

It is apparent that Augustine was influenced by his own classical education. Frances Young deftly draws attention to this:

The roots of Augustine's discussion lie in the socio-cultural community in which he was educated. Augustine attempted to build a career as a rhetor—indeed, it was a move to

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36 Ibid., 287.
37 Augustine alludes the Tyconius explicitly in De Doctrina Christiana 3.30.42,43 for example.
38 Ibid., 3.30.44.
39 Ibid.
advance his rhetorical career on a wider stage that led him to leave North Africa for Italy where he came under the influences that led to his conversion. As pupil and teacher, he must have learned and utilized the standard topics and methods of the rhetorical schools. The means of achieving rhetorical prowess, that is, speaking persuasively to a public audience, was practice-based learning informed by immersion in classical literature.  

We cannot pinpoint the particular grammar or rules that Augustine did draw from his classical education, though we know for certain that it shaped his mind. In the above quotation Young suggests that Augustine, because of his position as teacher, must have gone through education to be a rhetor, which would have included training in classical literature. This is a relatively strong base on which to build a case for this education as a source for Augustine’s rules. Knowing Augustine’s classical education played a role in his interpretive process allows us the benefit of appealing to what is known about classical education to illuminate any particularly difficult passages in his work.

The previous five sources that have been listed are not necessarily the only places from which Augustine would have drawn inspiration; they offer but a sketch of some of the major sources with which Augustine was working. Having discussed these, we can now move on to note some possible objections to using *De Doctrina Christiana* as a representation of Augustine’s exegetical method, plus a sketch of these rules with explanatory comments.

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5 Locating Augustine’s Interpretive Rules in *De Doctrina Christiana*

Though some scholars would suggest that Augustine’s articulation of his exegetical principles within *De Doctrina Christiana* is not the only significant representation of Augustine’s hermeneutical method, I would argue that it offers a crystalized form of this method that is less cumbersome to work with than the multiple thoughts and hints scattered throughout his other writing. By way of example, the following three figures serve to give us a glimpse into the debate.

Michael Cameron suggests that Augustine’s exegetical methods undergo a great deal of change throughout his lifetime.\(^{41}\) Karl Froehlich is of a similar mind, putting it this way: “A coherent Augustinian theology is difficult to extract from his writings, for Augustine was not a monolithic thinker. As he developed and changed, so did his view of the Bible, moving from snobbish disdain to unrestrained admiration.”\(^{42}\) While this is certainly the case when it comes to Augustine’s explication of his exegetical method, notes Ronald Teske, there was not such a development in Augustine’s practice. In Augustine’s Genesis commentary and in the *Confessions*, he only resorts to figurative interpretation when the literal interpretation is absurd, for example; in *De Doctrina Christiana*, on the other hand, Augustine allows quite a bit more room for figural interpretation if Scripture merely does not explicitly relate to love of God or neighbour. While the previous development can be traced in explicitly stated principles, it is not

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in fact Augustine’s exegetical principles that are developing. Teske argues that what is
developing is Augustine’s articulation of these principles.43 This can be illustrated in the way
Augustine, even in his earliest work, is willing to defer to figurative interpretation whenever the
text does not refer directly to love of God and neighbour.44

As the above engagement with Cameron, Froehlich and Teske illustrates, one of Augustine’s
chief worries is that Scripture would be interpreted in an excessively literal sense. What is of
more importance for my argument is the grammar or set of principles that Augustine sets out,
using them to create a safe interpretive hedge to protect from misunderstanding of the text.
Further, though there is some debate concerning the centrality of the interpretative grammar
presented in De Doctrina Christiana in light of the rest of Augustine’s theology, the air has not
cleared. For the time being, I will side with Teske, who argues that the general thrust of
Augustine’s exegesis has remained relatively consistent, yet will still allow room for a
development in its articulation. We shall now look at five exegetical principles that Augustine
addresses in De Doctrina Christiana.

Narrowing down Augustine’s grammar to these five specific rules is a difficult endeavor. Gerald
A. Press notes that there has been no scholarly consensus on the topic and overall structure of the
De Doctrina Christiana; no clear table of contents has been produced.45 Press does concede that
all agree that De Doctrina Christiana is in part about rhetoric and education, but there is little

43 Roland J. Teske, Augustine of Hippo: Philosopher, Exegete, and Theologian: A Second Collection of Essays,
(Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), 139.
44 Ibid.
45 Gerald A. Press, “The Subject and Structure of Augustine ‘De Doctrina Christiana,’” Augustinian Studies, 11,
research to suggest it is univocal throughout; I will go with Press’ outline for my own work.\textsuperscript{46} I will be looking specifically at Augustine’s rules for discerning figurative signs as they are presented in the second half of Book Three; these will be explored in detail. The only rule not posited here is the second, interpreting the obscure by the clear. I have chosen to include this rule only to ensure that both rules about ambiguous signs, and in this case, unknown signs, are present according to Press’ proposed outline of \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}. Also, though interpreting the obscure by the clear is applied to signs in general, its use carries over into questions of figural interpretation particularly well. In short, all of the rules I will be examining are useful for interpreting figurative signs in Scripture, and this is why they have been selected.

The first exegetical principle Augustine offers is that of distinguishing between literal signs and figurative signs.\textsuperscript{47} He notes that:

\begin{quote}
He is a slave to a sign who uses or worships a significant thing without knowing what it signifies. But he who uses or venerates a useful sign divinely instituted whose signifying force he understands does not venerate what he sees and what passes away but rather that to which all such things are to be referred.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

When determining between which signs are to be taken as literal and which figurative, Augustine offers three strategies that point the interpreter in the correct direction.\textsuperscript{49} First, one may take

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{46} See pages 100 and 116. Specifically, he divides the text as follows: Book One deals with “the things that are to be understood,” Book Two deals with “remedies for unknown signs,” Three with “remedies for ambiguous signs, and Book Four is about “setting forth what has been understood.”
\item \textsuperscript{47} The description of the following five principles is a slightly amended form of a section from a paper I wrote on Augustine’s hermeneutics. The paper was submitted to David Neelands as a term paper for a course “Readings in Augustine” at Trinity College, Toronto in December, 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Augustine, \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}, 3.9.13.
\item \textsuperscript{49} There is some great scholarly work that focuses primarily on Augustine’s semiotics, but for our discussion these details are largely peripheral. For general comments on the difference between literal and figurative signs and senses see: Charles Kannengiesser, \textit{Handbook of Patristic Exegesis : The Bible in Ancient Christianity}. (Leiden: Brill, 2004), specifically 206. and Charles J. Scalise,”The ‘Sensus Literalis’: A Hermeneutical Key to Biblical
\end{itemize}
those signs as figurative which, if taken literally, would seem shameful.\textsuperscript{50} Logical contradictions obviously cannot be tolerated, but neither can moral contradictions. The second strategy that Augustine offers is broader. He suggests that one can determine which portions of Scripture are to be taken figuratively not just by means of contradictions, but more generally: “Whatever appears in the divine Word that does not literally pertain to virtuous behavior or to the truth of faith you must take to be figurative. Virtuous behavior pertains to the love of God’s and one’s neighbor; the rule of faith pertains to a knowledge of God and of one’s neighbor.”\textsuperscript{51} It can be observed that Augustine is putting forth the idea that all Scripture has something to say directly about Christian behaviour and Christian faith.

More clarity is granted to the interpreter with Augustine’s third suggestion for distinguishing between literal and figurative signs: It is acceptable in some cases for the interpreter to view particular passages of Scripture as both literal and figurative, seeing the sense in each. This is particularly instrumental when Augustine deals with certain Old Testament figures. Augustine notes that, “...all or almost all the deeds which are contained in the Old Testament are to be taken figuratively as well as literally...”\textsuperscript{52} It is not always necessary for one to bifurcate each text into literal or figurative, but to appreciate both senses in which it can be taken. In order to be consistent with Augustine’s previous principles for distinguishing between the literal sense and figurative one must keep in mind that a passage can only be taken in both ways if it can first be

\textsuperscript{50} Augustine, \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}, 3.12.18.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 3.10.14.

\textsuperscript{52} Augustine, \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}, 3.22.32.
applied literally to the truth of faith or virtuous behaviour. If it can only relate to these things when applied figuratively, the literal sense must be applied in a very limited way.

Even if one is having difficulty in distinguishing between the literal and the figurative, one is relatively safe insofar as one’s interpretation leads to greater love of God and one’s neighbour. If one is to be deceived and come to some incorrect conclusion, as long as love is one’s end then one is arriving at the same place as would be reached with a correct interpretation. This deception being succumbed to is a very minor deception, although it would certainly be preferable for one to reach the ends of charity legitimately.\(^{53}\) This principle of charity seems to be Augustine’s furthest boundary, hedging in all others; it functions as a sort of fail-safe. It will appear often in Augustine’s work, and will be discussed in more detail at the end of this list. Augustine’s second principle of interpretation shall now be discussed.

The second principle that Augustine notes is that of interpreting the obscure portions of Scripture by those which are clear.\(^ {54}\) One of the causes of perceiving obscurity within Scripture is the result of mistaking literal signs for figurative signs (or vice versa) as described above. Augustine posits another possible reason for which one may encounter obscurity within the texts of Scripture. He suggests:

\[\ldots\text{Many and varied obscurities and ambiguities deceive those who read casually, understanding one thing instead of another; indeed, in certain places they do not find anything to interpret erroneously, so obscurely are certain sayings covered with a most dense mist. I do not doubt that this situation was provided by God to conquer pride by}\]

\(^{53}\) Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.36.41

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 2.9.14.
work and to combat disdain in our minds, to which those things which are easily discovered seem frequently to become worthless.\(^{55}\)

This is a very redemptive account as to why there is obscurity in the text. In this situation a holy humility is needed, and for Augustine, it seems that humility and charity take primacy over correct interpretation. The simile penned by Thoreau comes to mind, that it is “humility like darkness [that] reveals the heavenly light.”\(^{56}\) Giving these two reasons to describe why one comes to obscurity within the Scriptures, Augustine then offers the simple conclusion that one needs only to interpret these obscure passages by the clear. Augustine gives us an example of how this is to be done vis-a-vis the verse on which his whole interpretive framework hangs. Augustine suggests that Scripture “…teaches nothing but charity,” and thus sets this principle of love expressed in Matthew 22:36-40 as the clear standard to which all obscurities answer. Once again, this principle of charity becomes the final boundary. It is difficult to know what specifically constitutes “clarity” in Augustine’s mind when he is thinking of Scripture. It would be anachronistic to assume clarity is the result of historical-critical work, for Augustine certainly does not have in mind a clarity concerning manuscript evidence. If anything can be known about the clarity which Augustine strives for, it can be know that he is after a theological clarity.

Further, if the passage in Matthew 22:36-40, his own cornerstone of exegetical practice, is any indication of what constitutes clarity, then passages of Scripture focussing on love seem to be those that should be viewed as clear. This leads to the third principle of Augustine’s exegesis that will be explored.

\(^{55}\) Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 2.5.7.

Augustine makes the distinction between portions of Scripture that are meant to be applicable universally, and those passages that are meant for only a select group of people. He warns against those who might be holding to what they perceive to be a particularly high standard, such as celibacy, and thus interpreting all Scripture having to do with marriage as figurative.⁵⁷ Augustine uses this to illustrate his point that not all Scripture should be read in the same way by all people. Celibacy is certainly for some and should be read literally; marriage is for some and should be read literally. This third principle augments Augustine’s point concerning the figurative interpretation of Scripture that does not deal directly with virtuous behaviour. Combining these two principles one can see that not all Scripture has to deal with one individual’s behaviour, but that broadly speaking, all Scripture should be applicable to at least one individual. If not one individual is able to make use of some set of instructions in Scripture then it should be applied figuratively.

As a fourth principle, Augustine sets out a rule for dealing with certain Old Testament figures that are praised despite the evil acts that they seem to commit. This principle has some overlap with Augustine’s other standards for interpretation, although there are some unique circumstances that this principle details. He notes: “Therefore, although all or almost all the deeds which are contained in the Old Testament are to be taken figuratively as well as literally, nevertheless the reader may take as literal those performed by people who are praised, even though they would be abhorrent to the custom of the good who follow the divine precepts after the advent of the Lord.”⁵⁸ Augustine posits that the acts considered evil for a Christian living at his time were not necessarily so when committed by Old Testament saints. Augustine’s reasons

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⁵⁷ For the following argument see: Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, 3.17.25
⁵⁸ Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, 3.22.32.
for this are twofold. First, there seems to be a distinction in his mind between those who are living after the advent of Christ and those before. This is suggested in the last sentence of the above quotation. Augustine does not give us the characteristics of this difference, so we must be content with merely the knowledge that it exists. Second, Augustine goes further by suggesting that when Old Testament saints committed certain acts that he perceives as evil, these acts would not be so because the motives of those committing them were innocent. One example that Augustine puts forward is the polygamy experienced by Old Testament figures such as David. Augustine suggests that such behaviour was not practiced out of lust, but was engaged in with temperance. 59 This, in combination with the difference the advent makes, allows one to interpret these deeds in both figurative and literal senses.

The last principle that will be examined with respect to Augustine’s exegetical principles will be his writing on the acceptability of two or more interpretations of the same passage of Scripture. The first point that Augustine makes when thinking about two or more meanings that are derived from the same passage is that it is acceptable so long as these meanings find support elsewhere in Scripture. 60 Augustine goes on to note that whether one discovers the original human author’s intention or some other meaning that coheres with the Christian faith, one is doing no harm. There is nothing to fear when two different meanings are ascertained because the original human author may have, and the Holy Spirit certainly would have been aware of these. With respect to the Holy Spirit, it is especially significant that he is both the Spirit inspiring Scripture and the Spirit enlightening the interpreter. Augustine approaches the Bible with an awareness of “its unique double authorship: the timeless, eternal God who is its source and the historically and

60 Ibid., 3.27.38.
linguistically contingent humans who were its medium." No matter how many meanings can be drawn from a passage of Scripture, what is important is for one to arrive at charity and the building up of the faith. In this sense, there can be a plurality of meanings as long as they meet the requirements of coherence with Scripture and faith. Original meaning (in any sense of the word) takes second place to the building up of one in love.

In summary, the five principles that we have examined from Augustine for the interpretation of Scripture are as follows: First, one must distinguish between literal and figurative passages, and Augustine gives directions on how this ought to be done. Second, one needs to interpret those obscure portions of Scripture in light of those portions which are clear. The third principle Augustine suggests is that of differentiating between those instructions within Scripture that are meant to be taken universally, and those which are meant to be taken only by a select group of people. Fourth, Augustine offers a principle for how one ought to interpret apparently evil acts committed by Old Testament saints, giving specific guidelines with reference to this. Finally, Augustine offers a rule that addresses how the interpreter is to approach two different interpretations of the same Scripture. I have enumerated these extracted principles in list form in order that they may be grasped more easily:

Augustine’s Five Exegetical Principles
- 1. Distinguish between figurative and literal signs.
  - a. By taking figurative those signs which would be shameful if taken literally.
  - b. By taking figuratively that which does not pertain directly to doctrine and/or Christian practice.
  - c. By taking some signs that are not shameful and irrelevant to Christian doctrine and practice when taken literally to be both figurative and literal.
- 2. Interpret the obscure by the clear

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• a. By distinguishing between figurative and literal, as mentioned above.
• b. By the rule of love - that which leads to the twofold love of God and neighbour.
• 3. Distinguish between texts meant to be applied universally and those which are meant to be applied to a specific group of people.
  • a. By interpreting in a community where all groups of people are represented.
• 4. See the sin of Old Testament saints rightly.
  • a. By recognizing the difference in age before Christ and after.
  • b. By noting the innocent motives of such saints.
• 5. Accept that there can be more than one true interpretation of a given portion of Scripture.
  • a. By finding support for these interpretations elsewhere in Scripture.
  • b. By recognizing the double (human/divine) authorship of Scripture.
  • c. By testing multiple interpretations by the rule of love.

A final note about Augustine’s hermeneutical approach is in order before we move to evaluating his principles. It is true that all of the points noted above come into play when Augustine comes to the text of Scripture, and I have attempted to list them in descending order of primacy. As one can see though, there seems to be an overarching “metaprinciple” or ethic that informs all others. This is referenced by Augustine in his explanations of points two and five, but I would argue that it informs all of his work. When it comes down to it, for Augustine, no matter what conclusion one arrives at with a certain text, if such an interpretation does not lead one to love God and one’s neighbour, then the interpretation is flawed. Further, while one may be factually correct about one or another interpretation, as long as one is loving, the error is quite small and easily overlooked. This principle of love is not really on the same plane as other interpretative principles, for it is difficult to imagine it being in conflict with any of them. How can interpreting the obscure passages by the clear contradict the principle of love? It cannot, directly, unless a particular interpretation is unloving. With this in mind, it makes more sense to view the principle of love as an interpretative attitude that ought to be presumed in all exegetical practice. It is the ocean in which these principles swim, or the atmosphere in which they live; it surrounds, informs, leads, and transcends all of them.
6 Evaluation of Exegetical Principles

Having enumerated the principles above some evaluative notes must be made before we can move onto discussing Lindbeck and his ideas of a cultural-linguistic or ‘grammatical’ approach to doctrine. First, as was prefaced in the beginning of this chapter, the thrust of my argument is not dependent upon the comprehensiveness of the specific principles I have listed from *De Doctrina Christiana*. While it can be argued that Augustine’s principles may or may not have changed (as shown above with Cameron and Teske) my extraction need only serve as a snapshot. This means that some principles, especially in Augustine’s other works, may be left out. Still, what has been gleaned by a careful reading of *De Doctrina Christiana* will suffice for this analysis.

On another note, though I mentioned the origin of Augustine’s principles briefly in my introductory remarks, now, after having examined them in some detail, one can easily see that they are not all abstractions of the Scriptural witness. Make no mistake, Augustine’s reading of Scripture is shaped by Scripture. Reno and O’Keefre note:

> For the church fathers, the unity of the Bible and the basic commonality of the diverse details of their exegesis, came from the conviction that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. It is natural that they should have adopted this conviction, for the pattern of fulfillment operates within the apostolic writings that were eventually collected and named the New Testament. The church fathers continued and maximized this apostolic effort to develop what we might call a “total reading” of scripture,
organized around the fulfilling person of Jesus Christ. We cannot prove that their efforts succeeded. However, we can explain how the fathers pursued this ambitious interpretative project.62

This apt description of the Church Father’s hermeneutical method can be applied to Augustine’s approach fittingly. Augustine used Christ’s principle of love, that comes directly from Scripture (see Matthew 22:28-40) as the overarching “metaprinciple.” Still, Augustine’s reading is more than a total reading of Scripture. It is a reading of Scripture from a particular angle, in a particular light, with a particular attitude. For example, that some passages that are obscure are meant to be brought to light by those that are clear, is not necessarily a scriptural principle. Nor is it made clear in Scripture that the reader ought to distinguish between literal and figurative signs. These are interpretive principles that sit well with Scripture, but are drawn from elsewhere. Thus, Reno and O’Keefe’s description of the Church Father’s hermeneutic is sufficient, but it is not comprehensive with regard to Augustine; for Augustine there is simply more at play than what is present in Scripture.

7 Moving Forward: Augustine and Ecumenism

The previous discussion has been fruitful insofar as it has been an explication of the way Augustine approached Scripture. We have established that there are certain rules that Augustine is working with for interpreting Scripture; some are explicit in the text of Scripture, some are implied by the text, and finally, some are drawn from exterior sources. These principles are useful for a variety of purposes, though our focus will be on their appropriation in the context of ecumenism. I argue that the significance for Augustine’s rules of interpreting Scripture as he has

presented them in *De Doctrina Christiana* is that they are conducive to bringing deeper unity to the Church. Before applying these rules directly to ecumenical discussions, it would serve us well to establish an apparatus to help us view these appropriately. I will subject the principles as enumerated in this chapter to the work of George Lindbeck, specifically his postliberal, cultural-linguistic approach to theology and his rule theory of doctrine. After having done this, an application to ecumenism will occur with much greater ease and clarity.
Chapter 3
A Postliberal Apparatus: Applying George Lindbeck’s Cultural-Linguistic Theory

1 What Is Postliberalism?

Having discussed Augustine on his own terms and drawn out his principles for exegesis, we shall now apply a postliberal, cultural-linguistic apparatus to his work. Specifically I am interested in appropriating a cultural-linguistic approach to religion, and also the rule theory of doctrine developed therein by George Lindbeck in *The Nature of Doctrine*.

I should preface this discussion on postliberalism with a note concerning its viability and use. My goal here is not to present an argument to suggest that a postliberal approach to theology is superior or inferior to other approaches *in general*. With this being said, I think the postliberal method in theology offers a reliable road to getting at truth, especially in light of the failure of Enlightenment rationalism in our increasingly postmodern culture. In this work I wish to posit that postliberalism is useful in a twofold sense; it offers a fresh way of perceiving the work of Augustine while also tying this into concerns revolving around ecumenism. My use of a postliberal method is peripheral to my argument, and to the ends at which I hope to arrive; postliberal method is merely the road by which we will arrive in that place. With this being said, I think the postliberal road, or lens, will save us some trouble. Augustine’s exegetical principles, I will argue, look compellingly close to some of Lindbeck’s proposed methodological guidelines. Further, since Lindbeck had ecumenism in mind with the writing of his magnum opus, *The Nature of Doctrine*, it sets up the discussion well for progress.
So what is postliberalism? What is this apparatus, or lens that we shall apply to Augustine’s exegetical method? I will sketch out a very brief introduction to postliberalism and its central tenets before moving on to why postliberalism has been chosen as the lens by which we shall conduct further study.

The conventional point of reference for the origins of the postliberal project is the publication of George Lindbeck’s *The Nature of Doctrine*, which also serves as the cornerstone to the postliberal approach to theology. Along with Hans Frei,63 Lindbeck has been deemed one of the fathers of postliberalism. Because these two figures have significant connections to Yale, the postliberal project has been at times called “The Yale School,” though this is largely a misnomer since many without any connection to Yale have contributed. In his introduction to *Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Ronald Michener notes that postliberalism “...calls us to move beyond the historicism and rationalism that set the agenda for modernist religious thought, calling for a return to a premodern faith rooted in the faith community, while fully realizing the impossibility of a full return to premodern dogma.”64 Recognizing the problems with theological liberalism65 and the presuppositions that necessarily belong to it, Michener sees the postliberalism as a return, a ‘going back’ to an earlier, more robust faith. He goes on, noting:

Too often Christians have ‘bought into’ a positivistic view of our Christianity that looks more toward a justification of modernism’s call for ‘facts’ (that is, ‘facts’

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65 By using the term “theological liberalism,” I am referring to the appeals to Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism as foundational domains of knowledge to which theological claims can be compared. This theological liberalism has been a common thread in modern theology, specifically from the nineteenth century on. Postliberal theology is, in part, a reaction against this.
according to modernist agendas) instead of turning to the faith and tradition of the Christian narrative. This is why postliberal theology also avoids a systematic approach to apologetics and tends to avoid systematic theology.\textsuperscript{66}

Here we can see that Michener is further distancing the postliberal project from liberalism, modernism, and the alleged ‘neutrality’ that these elicit. Jon Wright formulates his definition of postliberalism differently, noting the continuing liberal and conservative tenets within postliberalism, “Postliberal theology, as we have known it, is radically liberal - a movement of updating the faith given to the saints - at the same time that it is radically conservative - nothing less than a return to the normative historical sources of the faith.”\textsuperscript{67}

As the definition for postliberalism is more fully fleshed out, we see that it is both something new, and a return to something old. Describing his own vision of Christianity in the first few pages of \textit{The Church in a Postliberal Age}, Lindbeck offers a more robust description of postliberalism as: “…neither biblicistic nor experientialist, and certainly not individualistic, but dogmatic: it commences with the historic Christian communal confession of faith in Christ. For the Reformers, as for the Orthodox and Catholic Churches of East and West, that confession is the one expressed in the ancient trinitarian and christological creeds.”\textsuperscript{68} Hunsinger offers the last description of postliberalism that will be here discussed. In this description Hunsinger pays more significant attention to the academic roots of postliberalism in philosophy and linguistics. He writes, “‘Postliberalism,’ as used here, would be that form of tradition based rationality in theology for which questions of truth and method are strongly dependent on questions of


meaning, and for which questions of meaning are determined by the intratextual subject matter of Scripture." Specifically, Hunsinger is referring to the non-foundationalist underpinnings of the postliberal project, more precisely the postliberal appeals to the authority of revelation (in Scripture and the creeds) as the starting points, and the measure by which all other doctrine must cohere. Specifically, the non-foundationalism I have in mind here is the philosophical notion that rejects any sort of ultimate foundation or objective facts on which systems of thoughts can be based. Thus, in this approach to theology, coherence within Christian belief is more central than extrasystematic propositional truth claims. In other words, Christian belief is assumed to be true (though not foundational) and one need not appeal to some “objective” truth outside of this Christian faith (what I intend by the word “extrasystematic”) to validate such belief.

Now, having given this sketch of postliberalism we shall move onto question of why it will be applied specifically in this case.

2 Why Postliberalism?

I want to suggest that postliberalism is useful for both viewing Augustine’s exegetical work and as a tool for pursuing unity; there is other precedent for connecting Augustine to postliberalism, though. In his relatively recent book entitled *Transforming Postliberal Theology: George Lindbeck, Pragmatism and Scripture*, C.C. Pecknold makes the following connection, “I argue ultimately that Augustine’s scriptural pragmatism is pre-eminently governed, in incarnational and trinitarian terms, by *the rule of charity*, which works to reconcile that which is opposed in

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interpretive disputes - a point that has a clear bearing upon what postliberalism means.”

This connection is especially relevant to our discussion on Augustine’s exegetical method, as Pecknold appeals to what he refers to as “the rule of charity,” which is one of the governing points in Augustine’s interpretive work. Pecknold develops this connection further with the following remarks:

Lindbeck rarely cites Augustine. To be fair, seldom does he cite Barth (the original postliberal semiotician). But Augustine is referred to in *The Nature of Doctrine* as a *paradigm* for the kind of theological method Lindbeck proposed. Lindbeck cites Augustine at critical junctures of the argument: on the interpretation of scripture, on realism and on practical performance. Even in his famous opinion that ‘a scriptural world is... able to absorb the universe’ he seems to have Augustine’s own logical tendencies in mind, as it was Augustine who, in Lindbeck’s words, best exemplified the ‘struggle to insert everything... into the world of the Bible.’

We see here that, according to Pecknold, Augustine was an influence and served as the one “paradigm” for Lindbeck’s work. Specifically, here again Pecknold is tracing a line between Augustine’s exegetical practice and the place that Lindbeck ascribes to Scripture.

Besides using Pecknold’s work as a starting point, there are two particular features of Lindbeck’s proposed postliberalism that call out to be used in connection with Augustine’s exegetical practice. The first of these is the postliberal notion that religions are cultural-linguistic systems while the second is the rule theory of doctrine. Lindbeck offers the following introduction to his proposed cultural-linguistic system and rule theory of doctrine:

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71 Ibid., 38.
It has become customary in a considerable body of anthropological, sociological, and philosophical literature... to emphasize neither the cognitive nor the experiential-expressive aspects of religion; rather, emphasis is placed on those aspects in which religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures (insofar as these are understood semiotically as reality and value systems - that is, as idioms for the constructing of a reality and the living of life). The function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent in this perspective is their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action. This general way of conceptualizing religion will be called in what follows a “cultural-linguistic” approach, and the implied view of church doctrine will be referred to as a “regulative” or “rule” theory. 72

What Lindbeck is describing here regarding a cultural-linguistic approach is a fresh perspective on how we ought to think about religions. Specifically, Lindbeck proposes that religions are akin to languages and cultures specifically in the way these are informed by an inner logic, and the way in which cultures or languages relate to one another. Further, Lindbeck sees religions, like languages, as shaping how reality is perceived and experienced. The “rule” theory of doctrine here presented is linked to the regulative role that grammar plays within a language. I will first focus on the significance of Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic approach to religion.

Though a cultural-linguistic approach to religion has been previously useful in other academic fields, Lindbeck is now annexing it so that it may be of service to Christian theology. The idea is that instead of viewing religions as sets of propositional statements to be believed, or

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articulations of some universal set of experiences, they should be viewed as analogous to particular languages. What governs languages is of course grammar, rules of thumb meant to offer structure to support what is to be articulated. These rules are not primarily propositional, but regulative - referring to the normative function of languages. Lindbeck suspects doctrine ought to be viewed as playing a similar role in religious life. Mike Highton reads Lindbeck as suggesting that a cultural-linguistic approach to religion works:

...like idioms for describing the world. Like a culture or a language, religions have what we may analogically call a 'grammar,' governing the way they hang together and the way new sentences (that is, practices) can be produced. A church is a community where the Christian idiom is learnt through practice. Behaviour within this idiom is rule-governed, although learning to follow the rules is more like learning a skill by internalizing the idiom in a process of apprenticeship and socialization than it is like learning to parrot a set of regulations. The system therefore consists of a 'first-order' (the actual performances of particular 'sentences') and a 'second-order' (the grammar by which those sentences are regulated), and Lindbeck keeps a fairly rigid boundary between the two.\(^73\)

This description of the cultural-linguistic approach to religion accurately brings ideas of linguistic function to play in the sphere of religion. It should be noted that the cultural-linguistic system is reflected in religion as a whole, in a variety of ways. Ronald Michener creates a list of five distinct features of this postliberal cultural-linguistic approach to religion, among these are the socially centeredness of religion, and its non-foundationalist characteristics.\(^74\) What is more, Vanhoozer makes an important note about the sort of “language” we are referencing when we

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\(^73\) Mike Highton. "Frei's Christology and Lindbeck's Cultural-Linguistic Theory." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50, no. 01 (1997), 83,84.

allude to cultural-“linguistic” systems:

‘Language’ refers not simply to English, French, Swahili, and so forth, but more specifically to the system of differences - the pattern of distinctions and connections - that a given vocabulary imposes on the flux of human experience. For example, a psychoanalyst uses a different set of categories to talk about dreams than does the neurologist, just as the sociologist uses a different set of categories to talk about the church than does the theologian.75

Vanhoozer’s point is important, because it reveals that the language being referred to is not simply a spoken language but rather specific modes of speaking that are prevalent in different fields. Of course English is a language, but theology, medicine, and cookery are also all distinct “languages” within English. Further, each of these specific areas have words with meanings peculiar to their field, including specific ways of using these words. Having now introduced how the idea of a cultural-linguistic system as a whole is helpful, we shall hone in on the significance of the rule theory of doctrine.

The rule theory of doctrine as posited by Lindbeck is a specific segment of his overarching cultural-linguistic approach to religion. More precisely, the rule theory of doctrine locates the importance of doctrine as being akin to a grammar, specifically in its regulative use. In describing his position, Lindbeck draws attention to the historical roots of his proposed way of viewing the role of doctrine. He notes:

The insight that church doctrines resemble rules, it should be next noted, is not novel.

The notion of regulae fidei goes back to the earliest Christian centuries, and later

historians and systematic theologians have often recognized in varying degrees that the operational logic of religious teachings in their communally authoritative (or, as we shall simply say, doctrinal) role is regulative. They have recognized, in other words, that at least part of the task of doctrines is to recommend and exclude certain ranges of - among other things - propositional utterances or symbolizing activities. What is innovative about the present proposal is that this becomes the only job that doctrines do in their role as church teaching.  

Lindbeck makes two points in the above quotation that I believe to be especially significant. First, it is interesting that Lindbeck sees his innovative character of his work as only a limiting of the role of doctrine. He recognizes that in the past doctrine has been held to be regulative among other things and now Lindbeck is suggesting that doctrine is merely regulative. In this sense, Lindbeck is challenging part of traditional belief and practice. The second significant point that Lindbeck raises in the above passage is what he perceives to be the regulative rules or the grammar that govern the Christian faith. It is clear that Lindbeck equates doctrine with these rules, but what constitutes such doctrines and where are they found?

Lindbeck gives us a first clue by tracing his conception of church doctrine as rules back to the *regula fidei*. As noted in the previous chapter, the *regula fidei* is hard to pin down with regards to its essence, though it seems to be a conglomeration of a series of other important pieces within the Church such as her teaching, Scripture, etc. Is the *regula fidei* the only source that Lindbeck

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77 Though Lindbeck’s description of his project on pages 18 and 19 in *The Nature of Doctrine* as quoted above seems to be a departure from the historical multivalent uses of doctrine, in his other work he presents doctrine as doing more than being merely regulative. For example see: George Lindbeck, “Article IV and Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue: The Limits of Diversity in the Understanding of Justification,” *Church in a Postliberal Age*, Edited by James Joseph Buckley. (London: SCM, 2002), 42.
is willing to connect with what constitutes or is the place of origin for doctrine? No; this does not
seem to be the case. In a collection of essays entitled *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, Lindbeck
connects the substance of doctrine to two other sources. Lindbeck first posits that doctrine is in
part formed by ancient creeds of the Church, and these function regulatively when approaching
Scripture. Identifying these creeds, he states:

For the Reformers, as for the Orthodox and Catholic Churches of East and West, that
confession is the one expressed in the ancient trinitarian and christological creeds. The
Reformers did not so much try to prove these creeds from Scripture (and certainly not
from experience), but rather read Scripture in their light, and then used the Bible thus
construed to mold experience and guide thought and action.78

The key point of this passage is that Lindbeck sees the Reformers as turning to the creeds to
regulate their reading of Scripture. Lindbeck notes that they “read Scripture in their light,”
meaning that in his view the Reformer’s exegesis was shaped by creeds, not vice versa. So
besides linking doctrine with the *regula fidei*, Linbeck links it also with the creeds. Finally, in
another chapter from *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, Lindbeck turns to a more a classically
Protestant notion as a governing rule, or rather a ‘metarule,” explaining:

...it becomes easier to understand why we hear so little about justification by faith - about
the metatheological rule - in the course of church history. Rules can be followed in
practice without any explicit or theoretical knowledge of them. Indeed, explicit
knowledge sometimes seems to be a hinderance.... In short, justification by faith propter

*Christum solum* is the *articulis stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* in the sense in which

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78 George Lindbeck, *Church in a Postliberal Age*, Edited by James Joseph Buckley. (London: SCM, 2002), 5. Timothy George sees things in a different light than does Lindbeck. According to Timothy George, the creeds and the *regula fidei* were perceived by the Reformers to be summaries of Scripture, not as some lights by which to read Scripture. He does allow for the influence of history and the Church on the Reformer’s approach to Scripture, though. See: Timothy George. "Reading the Bible with the Reformers." *First Things*, no. 211 (March, 2011), 30, 32.
grammar is essential to intelligible discourse; but this does not mean it needs to be explicitly known.\textsuperscript{79}

While it is not the primary point Lindbeck is making in this paragraph, his positioning of justification by faith as regulative is telling. So far we see Lindbeck appealing to the *regula fidei*, the ecumenical creeds, and now the principle of justification by faith as guiding principles - regulative doctrine - that keeps the Christian faith within appropriate bounds. It is explicit in Lindbeck’s writing on the creeds above, but can be implied from his other principles that they were meant not just to regulate Christian belief and practice in general, but specifically they also regulate how Christian’s ought to interpret Scripture. The sources of doctrine suggested by Lindbeck that I have mentioned are by no means exhaustive. They are sufficient, however, to illustrate that Lindbeck takes an approach to doctrine that may be described as a spiral. It is possible that Lindbeck is starting with these doctrines and then narrowing his focus to Scripture, but it seems more likely that there is again a symbiotic relationship between Scripture and doctrine for Lindbeck. He begins with the creeds, for example, which - if anything - are distillations of a particular reading of Scripture. These creeds then inform the way Scripture is read, which will reinforce the viability of these creeds. One can easily see the spiraling relationship. Scripture and the creeds are certainly distinct from one another, but they are not completely independent. Do both the creeds and Scripture carry the same weight? It seems as if they do not. If, as I have suggested, the creeds are distillations of Scripture, they have no real ontological status of their own - they parasitically feed on Scripture. Conversely, Scripture does stand on its own; it does not depend on the creeds. Both Scripture and the creeds may be

\textsuperscript{79} George Lindbeck, *Church in a Postliberal Age*, Edited by James Joseph Buckley. (London: SCM, 2002), 43. Lindbeck’s proposal as quoted here relies heavily on what others “know”, or in the case of the Reformers - have “known” in the past. I think this is a rather tenuous ground to build on given the fact that it is a very difficult theory to prove one way or another.
weighted differently in this way, but when it comes to the interpretive process, they seem to play more egalitarian roles as they mutually illuminate one another.

I will make one final point about the nature of the rule theory of doctrine that may clarify the symbiotic relationship it shares with Scripture before moving on. As noted above, the sources for Lindbeck’s regulative doctrine are the creeds or the principle of justification for example, but how do these develop in relationship to Scripture? I hinted at it in noting the spiraling or symbiotic relationship that rules have to Scripture, but what facilitates this relationship? It is difficult to make specific observations, but a general idea needs to be conveyed: rules or doctrines develop through practice. Michener makes the following observation in this direction:

> There is a parallel that is often made to grammar in postliberal theology that is significant for our understanding not only in terms of illustration, but in actual practice. Grammarians do not sit in centres of learning and invent languages, create communities by which a particular language may be used, then make the rules that govern that language. Likewise, for postliberal theology, doctrines were not simply constructed by theologians who then, in turn, formed communities that were willing to believe and apply these doctrines.⁸⁰

As Michener notes, there is no foundation or starting point for doctrine that is regulative, but it develops organically. These rules evolve through the practice of the Church community reading Scripture; this community then plays a central, though indirect, role in the establishment of this grammar. In fact, postliberalism as a cultural-linguistic approach to religion, complete with the rule theory of doctrine, is non-foundational. Hauerwas nods in this direction with the following as he casually states his approach to theology:

I think I’m doing theology the way theology should be done, that is, nonsystematically. This means we can somehow perhaps leave eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany behind. It means that you are constantly looking for ways to show how language works, to help you discover the world that you are living in, but the world that you are living in is about constant denial of the world you are living in.\textsuperscript{81}

Though this quotation is quite informal, it gets at the root the non-foundational nature of this approach to doctrine. This non-foundationalism is not without its challenges. Bruce Marshall identifies one challenge, noting:

This challenge has focused to a considerable degree on the right of the Christian community to hold beliefs which seem not to meet the epistemic standards of modernity - broadly speaking, of those views about what we have the right to believe which stem from the Enlightenment. Christian thinkers, both theologians and philosophers, have often attempted to respond to this challenge by taking over distinctively modern notions of truth and epistemic justification. Great intellectual ingenuity has gone into this effort, as we will see. But it has persistently tended to yield unsatisfying results.\textsuperscript{82}

After having diagnosed the problem, that the non-foundational approach to doctrine comes under much scrutiny, Marshall offers an alternative. Marshall’s solution, though not directly concerned with the specific doctrinal principles we have discussed is centered on the regulative function of doctrine. He starts with the trinitarian doctrine of God:

A more satisfying approach to truth as a theological problem, rather than taking the church’s central beliefs to be especially in need of epistemic support, will take the church’s trinitarian identification of God itself chiefly to confer epistemic right. In order


to plausibly maintain that the Trinity and other distinctively Christian doctrines are true, without drastically altering the meaning the Christian community ascribes to them, these doctrines must be regarded as epistemically primary across the board, that is, as themselves the primary criteria for truth. It is not sufficient simply to say that the doctrine is central to Christian identity, and that Christians must therefore hold it true; it must be regarded as the chief test for the truth of the rest of what we want to believe. This means the very notions of how we decide what is true and of what truth is must be reconfigured in a trinitarian way, transformed by the church’s central doctrines from the way we would otherwise expect them to look.\footnote{Bruce Marshall, \textit{Trinity and Truth}. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4,5. It may seem as if Marshall’s proposition about the Trinity being the “chief test for truth” is close to foundationalist truth theories. Ultimately I do not think this is the case. The first major difference between Marshall’s suggestion and a foundationalist theory of truth is that the Trinity is not propounded to be some self-evident truth in the way that certain foundational beliefs would be. It is just posited dogmatically by the Church, and must be accepted by faith; there is no particularly compelling logic about the Trinity that makes it seem true. A second difference is that all other beliefs must cohere with the doctrine of the Trinity. This is contrary to foundational truth theories as the doctrine of the Trinity does not support other beliefs in the way that foundational beliefs are used to support non-foundational beliefs.}

Thus we see that the non-foundational regulative approach to doctrine is reasonably viable, though it requires the shuffling of epistemic priorities and one’s presuppositions about the nature of doctrine. Marshall makes an important point. Doctrine can be central and regulatory, but this is only intellectually responsible if it is held to be primary. Epistemic primacy is necessary for some beliefs, otherwise there is nothing by which to judge which beliefs are more important than others. What Marshall is getting at is that for Christians, doctrine must occupy this place; specifically, he posits the doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine about God’s person.

Having now discussed what postliberalism is, further explanation will be given concerning the connection between such theology and Augustine himself.
3 Augustine and Postliberalism: Making the Connection

My goal here to flesh out in more detail the analogy that I want to make between the Augustine and postliberalism, all the while keeping in mind the end of ecumenism. I began my last section by drawing attention to the connection that Peckold makes between Augustine and postliberal theology. I think what Pecknold is doing is significant and right, though my approach differs. First, Pecknold is concerned primarily with Augustine’s theory of signs as it relates to Lindbeck. This seems important, as far as semiotics go, but it is not what is of greatest interest to me at this point. The second departure from my argument that Pecknold makes is suggesting that Augustine “sees scripture as the authoritative ‘semiotic system’ used within the community of its sign-users (who participate in reality through participation in that semiotic system) to shape beliefs and practices.”84 This is in contrast to my undertaking, which would suggest instead that Augustine’s authoritative system transcends Scripture. While it is clear that Augustine’s hermeneutical system is influenced by Scripture, it is not merely drawn from the text, but rather there is a framework outside of the text that is in a symbiotic relationship with it. Further, for Augustine, it is the teaching of the Church, the regula fidei, and his classical education that help to establish a hermeneutical system that is not drawn from Scripture itself. As has been noted, Pecknold fails to take the other influences at work in Augustine’s exegesis into account. I think Vanhoozer’s evaluation of Lindbeck actually serves to describe Augustine just as well; Vanhoozer suggests:

On Lindbeck’s view, Scripture is the paradigmatic interpretative framework that the community uses to understand the world and its own identity. However, Scripture can only be rightly understood from within the believing community. Indeed, Scripture must

be understood in terms of the ancient “Rule of Faith.” Faithfulness is thus a matter not of adhering to an abstract set of biblical propositions so much as continuing a particular tradition of interpretation. For the “grammatical rules” that count for Lindbeck are ultimately the rules embedded in the language of the church, not the canonical Scriptures.\(^8\)

Vanhoozer makes the important qualifications that Pecknold does not. Is Scripture important and central for Augustine and for Lindbeck? Of course it is. Though, as Vanhoozer notes this is not a sufficient description of what is really at work in either figure’s exegesis. Both Augustine and Lindbeck read Scripture according to the *regula fidei*, within a living tradition. I would take things further than either Pecknold or Vanhoozer by suggesting that there are a variety of other factors at play beyond the *regula fidei* that influence how both Augustine and Lindbeck approach doctrine and Scripture.

As we hone in further on the connections that exists between Augustine and Lindbeck, it may be helpful to begin by viewing their differences. In *De Doctrina Christiana* Augustine is concerned with the interpretation of Scripture. Lindbeck and the postliberal project keep Scripture very close, though the focus seems to be broader; postliberals offer an overall approach to religion and then focus on doctrine in particular. One of the analogies I want to discuss that exists between the two ideologies, namely Augustine’s approach to exegesis and the Lindbeckian approach to doctrine, is the pretheological grammar that informs interpretive decisions. Augustine and postliberals may end up at different points on the map theologically, but I believe they are very close methodologically. If we can consider their methodology the ‘trunk’ of their philosophical

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‘tree,’ they are indeed quite similar. This core of agreement is what binds Augustine and Lindbeck together, allowing us to draw freely connections between the methodology of each. The divergence is where this methodology leads in practice; the branches of this philosophical tree grow away from one another. Let us now consider one analogy between the exegesis of Lindbeck and Augustine.

Lindbeck proposes a methodological grammar that exists to regulate the formulation of doctrine. Augustine, as was explored in the first chapter, gives snapshots of what I would argue is an exegetical grammar, governing the way we read the text. The difference between the grammar proposed by Lindbeck and that proposed by Augustine is twofold, in formulation and not in essence. First, Lindbeck is more forthright and articulate about the nature of his grammar, specifically how it functions as a system. Augustine does not refer to his exegetical method as a cohesive whole (perhaps it was not) but he does allude to a variety of rules, that when extracted and placed side by side look quite like a grammar because of their regulative capacity and aim. Thus Augustine was more concerned with *ad hoc* rules for his purposes of offering a guide to interpretation. Lindbeck, in contrasts, sets out to deal with theoretical questions and does not move as far forward in how they are to be implemented.

Lindbeck’s grammar is doctrinal in content; Augustine’s is more of a mixed bag, or so it seems. Augustine does appeal to the rule of charity, something intrinsically tied to the life and teaching of Christ. On the other hand, Augustine also appeals to some rules that at first glance seem to be something other than doctrine. For example, when Augustine gives suggestions about how to interpret obscure passages of Scripture by the clear, or how to reconcile the sins of Old
Testament figures who enjoy the status of saints, one does not immediately see these as doctrinal. It seems to me, that though Augustine’s rules are not doctrines proper, they are deeply imbued with a dogmatic character. Interpreting obscure passages by the clear is an appeal to theological, Christocentric clarity; understanding rightly the actions of Old Testament saints is contingent upon Christ’s coming, and the categorical change this brings to the world. In short: Augustine’s rules are not mere personal tips for interpreting Scripture, but include doctrinal content, and in this sense they are very similar to Lindbeck’s conception of doctrine and its regulative nature.

A second difference between Augustine and Lindbeck is that the scope of each work is a second difference between Augustine and Lindbeck is that the scope of each work. Lindbeck is concerned with general theories of religion and doctrine; Augustine is concerned with a proper reading of Scripture. I would suggest that Lindbeck’s scope includes, but is not limited to, exegesis. Conversely, Augustine focuses on exegesis, but he is informed by a greater theological system, though he may not articulate it as carefully. Both Augustine and Lindbeck have in common a grammatical typology that allows them to approach theological questions, then, though they differ in clarity and scope.

Both Lindbeck and Augustine hold Scripture, interpreted in a specific way, in a central place. One interpreter of the postliberal movement puts it this way, describing the work of Hans Frei, a scholar who played an instrumental role in the movement:

So why have most Christian theologians been misreading the Bible in such obvious ways for two hundred years? Frei said the mistake follows from beginning theology with apologetics. If one starts with contemporary human experience and tries
to connect the biblical narratives with it so as to establish their truth, they fit in either as moral lessons or else as part of critically established history. Otherwise one has this story that has to be taken seriously as story but that is neither fiction nor critical history and one doesn’t know what to do with it. So a theology that begins with our world and tries to fit the biblical narratives into it inevitably distorts their meaning in an effort to make sense of them. Theology should stick instead to the descriptive task of laying out the internal logic of Christian faith; as Frei put it, “What I am proposing... is that we raise the question in a drastically non-apologetic, non-perspectivalist fashion: ‘What does this narrative say or mean, never mind whether it can become a meaningful possibility of life perspective for us or not.’" 86

Scripture is central in several senses, as Placher illustrates. It is central in place as it is the source of doctrine, but doctrine, playing a grammatical role, informs our reading as well. Further, Scripture is central because it is the starting place at which both Augustine and Lindbeck begin their respective theological enterprises. As Placher makes clear, the move is not from some outside belief to Scripture, for this has led to error. Both Augustine and Lindbeck begin in Scripture and allow it to shape their doctrine, which allows them to return to it, shaping their reading with doctrine. Grant Osborne’s description of the whole hermeneutical process is fitting: ...biblical interpretation entails a “spiral” from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance for the Church today. Scholars since the New Hermeneutic have been fond of describing a “hermeneutical circle” within which our interpreting of the text leads to its interpreting us. However, such a closed circle is

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dangerous... A spiral is a better metaphor because it is not a closed circle but rather an open-ended movement from the horizon of the text to the horizon of the reader. 87

Though Osborne may have different ideas of what the spiral is composed, the relationship he describes is a poignant illustration of the interaction both Lindbeck and Augustine are engaged in between Scripture and their interpretive grammars respectively. Osborne goes on to describe this relationship further:

I am not going round and round a closed circle that can never detect the true meaning but am spiraling nearer and nearer to the text’s intended meaning as I refine my hypotheses and allow the text to continue to challenge and correct those alternative interpretations, then to guide my delineation of its significance for my situation today. 88

Once again Osborne identifies different elements in the interpretive process, but he rightly points out that as the spiraling relationship continues, interpretation becomes more informed and refined. My sense is that for Lindbeck, and certainly for Augustine, the reader may never reach the “bottom ground” or the one “original meaning” of the text. This does not seem to be their goal, though, as both seem to allow for a plurality of meanings as long as they are governed by the boundaries of Christian grammar.

Another commonality between Lindbeck and Augustine regarding their respective approaches to doctrine and Scripture is the agreement on the metaprinciple of charity, namely, that all doctrine and interpretation of Scripture ought to lead one to great love for God and neighbour. Lindbeck makes this point in The Nature of Doctrine, saying:

88 Ibid.
Some practical doctrines, such as the “law of love” in Christianity, are held to be unconditionally necessary. They are part of the indispensable grammar or logic of the faith. There are, for example, no circumstances in which Christians are commanded not to love God or neighbour. Other rules, however, are conditionally essential. Augustine’s care to uphold this “law of love” is present throughout *De Doctrina Christiana*, and seems to be the furthermost bounds in which any interpretative endeavor must be contained. Both Lindbeck and Augustine do not merely agree that this rule of charity is one significant grammatical rule, but the *most* significant, one that overarches all others. Now some may suggest that allowing this rule to govern the reading of the text is axiomatic, but this is not the case. Let us take the last stanza of Psalm 137 as an example:

Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem’s fall,
how they said, ‘Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!’
O daughter Babylon, you devastator!
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!
Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!

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89 George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 12. There are of course other doctrines that are central, though I would suggest that the law of love is especially important for exegesis. The goal of exegesis, as posited by Augustine, is largely ethical - understanding the text affects our lives of love toward God and others. While other central Christian beliefs such as the Trinity come into play in governing the way the text is understood, it is difficult to see their *direct* correlation to Christian action.
I want to look at two readings of this text; one by John Calvin and one by Augustine. Each typifies two distinct attempts to apply a certain grammar to the text. I noted that holding to the principle of charity may seem axiomatic; I hope this comparison shows that it is not, at least for some exegetes. Notwithstanding the possibilities that Calvin and Augustine could have extremely different visions of the nature of love or charity, they approach this text in very different ways. In Augustine’s exposition, he resorts to figuration when dealing with the text. This seems to be consistent with his rules enumerated previously in the first chapter. Indeed there does appear to be some dissonance between the principle that would encourage readings of Scripture that build up love of God and neighbour if the meaning of this Psalm is simply to express the happiness that accompanies smashing Babylonian children on rocks. Augustine offers this explanation:

What are the little ones of Babylon? Evil desires at their birth. For there are, who have to fight with inveterate lusts. When lust is born, before evil habit giveth it strength against thee, when lust is little, by no means let it gain the strength of evil habit; when it is little, dash it. But thou fearest, lest though dashed it die not; “Dash it against the Rock; and that Rock is Christ.”

Thus, for Augustine, “the little ones” are representative of spiritual reality. The rock also is more than meets the eye - the rock is Christ himself. Augustine does not try to locate the meaning of this text with the illusive intent of the human author, even if this is a more literal reading. Instead, Augustine opens the doors for further interpretive possibilities that serve to edify, and that promote the love of God and others.

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90 Augustine, *Enarratio de Psalmos*, CXXXVII.12.
Calvin’s take on Psalm 137 leads down a different path; if Calvin shares any of Augustine’s interpretative method it certainly is not applied in his exposition of this Psalm. If Calvin does intend to hold to the rule of charity in his interpretation, it seems that he has fallen short or else he has a wildly divergent understanding of what loving God and others entails. He suggests:

> It may seem to savor of cruelty, that he should wish the tender and innocent infants to be dashed and mangled upon the stones, but he does not speak under the impulse of personal feeling, and only employs words which God had himself authorized, so that this is but the declaration of a just judgment, as when our Lord says, “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

We can see that Calvin recognizes the seeming cruelty of hurting infants, though to him this is not cruel because of a sort of emotional detachment on the part of the Psalmist. Calvin portrays the Psalmist as simply conveying the just judgement of the Lord. It seems to me, though, that this interpretation, though more literal, is not edifying for the Christian Church in the way that Augustine’s is. What is the difference between these two approaches to interpretation? How are Augustine’s and Calvin’s grammar functioning differently, if they are at all?

From what can be observed from both Augustine’s and Calvin’s interpretation of the Psalm, both locate their epicenter of meaning in different aspects of the text. Hans Frei offers a revealing description of Augustine’s interpretation in general, that seems to hold true for his interpretation of Psalm 137 as well:

> The Western Christian use of Christian Scripture in its most important theological representatives was similar. Augustine, for example, understood the plain sense of

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Scripture to be that which conduces to faith, hope and the twofold love of God and neighbor. The \textit{sensus literalis} therefore, is that which functions in the context of the Christian life, and James Preus is right in proposing that for Augustine this edifying or normative literal sense is actually identical with the true spiritual reading of an unedifying literal sense.\textsuperscript{92}

As Frei notes, Augustine’s identifies pragmatic concerns of the life of the Church as the locus of meaning within this Psalm. Calvin, on the other hand, is more difficult to place. We cannot know Calvin’s intent, but it seems as if he is more concerned with meaning that is situated in the context of the Psalmist’s situation. There is no difficulty for Calvin with this context, if it leads to violence, indeed Calvin seeks to justify this violence. Wallace notes that, “In several respects Calvin stands closer to modern exegetical ways in what he did, particularly in his attention to philology, his eschewing of the allegorical approach, and his less overt Christological reading.”\textsuperscript{93}

Grammatically speaking, that which regulates Augustine’s reading of the text is the symbiotic principle of charity - it is what keeps his interpretation within Christian bounds. I would suggest Calvin is appealing to another grammatical principle that in this interpretation is the most significant. From my reading of Calvin, defending the justice of God seems to be of utmost importance. Calvin does not stop to ask whether the Psalmist’s exhortation is loving (as Augustine does), but asks whether it coheres with the understanding of God’s justice. No doubt this principle of justice would have been informed by a reading of Scripture in a similar way to the manner in which the principle of charity informed Augustine’s reading. Still, Augustine and Calvin seem to be asking two different questions: “Does this lead to love?” and “Does this


\textsuperscript{93} Howard Wallace. “Calvin on Psalms: Reading His Hermeneutic from the Preface to His Commentary.” \textit{Pacifica: Journal of the Melbourne College of Divinity} 22, no. 3 (Oct 2009), 301-307.
cohere with justice?” These two principles need not be in conflict with one another, though the place that Augustine ascribes to the principle of charity is in conflict with Calvin’s place for the same. It is possible that Calvin is appealing to the principle of charity in a way similar to Augustine, though his understanding of what is charitable is greatly elucidated by conceptions of God’s justice.

Throughout the previous discussion what is imperative is that although it appears that Augustine and Calvin are working with differing grammatical systems, they are both approaching the text with a grammar in the Lindbeckian sense. Both figures are approaching the text with some rule to regulate how it is read, to smooth the hard edges of the text. Our focus will be primarily on Augustine, but I think the comparison to Calvin helps to illuminate the utility of Augustine’s grammar. My sense is that Augustine’s grammar will be of greater import in ecumenical discussion as the ethic of charity appears to have a wider embrace than does the rule of justice as presented by Calvin. The law of charity is indeed paramount for Augustine as for Lindbeck.94

I want to point out yet another affinity between Lindbeck and Augustine’s grammatical systems. The regulative nature of Lindbeck’s doctrinal scheme can be extended to Augustine’s principles for exegesis. The following description, though primarily about Lindbeck’s project, can be applied to Augustine as well:

What is needed, in Lindbeck’s opinion, is to maximise the strengths of both paradigms [that is cognitive-propositionalist and experiential-expressivist]. The answer seems to lie

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94 I think the important difference between Calvin and Augustine regarding the principle of charity is especially related to the place it is given by each of them. For Augustine, the principle of charity is unique because of its all encompassing ‘meta’ status; at the end of the day, so to speak, it is what matters most. It is indeed more fundamental to Augustine’s interpretive grammar than other specific rules. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
in understanding religions as resembling languages and semiotic systems. Religions thus become idioms, cultures for the ‘construing of reality and the living of life.’ It follows that doctrines are neither descriptive of objective states of affairs, nor symbolisations of a pre-existing and pre-conceptual religious experience. Doctrines are rules governing a semiotic system which makes possible both the experience of reality and the symbolisation of religious experiences.\(^{95}\)

Indeed this describes Lindbeck’s opinion, and if Lindbeck’s opinion has been nothing else, it has been controversial. Alternately, when this description is applied to Augustine’s rules for interpreting Scripture, I think it is far less controversial. It seems that Augustine’s principles for exegesis are even more closely akin to linguistic grammar than Lindbeck’s doctrines. When Augustine suggests obscure passages are to be interpreted by the clear, for example, it seems that he is suggesting that this is one way in which interpretation can be regulated. Further, in asserting the obscure are to be interpreted by the clear, Augustine is not making any objective propositional statements; he is not making a claim that this principle is indicative of some pre-conceptual universal experience, either.\(^{96}\) In short, if Lindbeck has to make a strong case for the viability his cognitive-linguistic approach to religion, Augustine’s principles of exegesis speak for themselves concerning their regulative nature.

Though noting the primarily regulative nature of both Lindbeck’s and Augustine’s grammar, I should also recall that these grammars are not immune to criticism. It is true that it is very


\(^{96}\) It may be objected at this point that the rule of charity is different from Augustine’s other rules because it is founded on the teaching of Jesus in a more direct way. While I do think the rule of charity has theological overtones that may translate into propositional statements about God, for Augustine its role is primarily regulative, or so it seems to me. Augustine is suggesting that a skillful Christian reading of Scripture will align with this particular rule of charity - that this is the norm, the standard way that Christians read Scripture.
difficult to prove that grammar is “wrong” or “incorrect” in the objective rationalistic sense, especially with the reference to the whole; this does not mean, though, that there is no way for evaluating the appropriateness of specific rules. Lindbeck reminds us that if doctrines are regulative, they must still cohere with the wider cultural-linguistic system, and I believe this applies to Augustine’s work as well. Specifically, Lindbeck notes:

We need, first, to distinguish between what I shall call the “intrasystematic” and the “ontological” truth of statements. The first is the truth of coherence; the second, that truth of correspondence to reality which, according to the epistemological realist, is attributable to first-order propositions. Utterances are intrasystematically true when they cohere with the total relevant context, which, in the case of a religion when viewed in cultural-linguistic terms, is not only other utterances but also the correlative forms of life.97

In this sense, we can determine whether certain doctrines (in the case of Lindbeck) or interpretative rules (in the case of Augustine), are intrasystematically true. How well these particular rules fit within the total Christian “system” will determine their usefulness and their veracity.

The final note I shall make about the correspondence between Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic grammar and Augustine’s rules for interpreting Scripture is the nature of their origination. For both Lindbeck and Augustine, their respective grammars are not formally forged by some neutral party, intentionally formulating some rules for the Christian community, be it for the interpretation of Scripture or otherwise. Rather, these rules develop rather organically, through

practice. Lindbeck makes the point that knowledge of these rules does not necessarily mean that they will be practiced rightly, but that also the converse is true. He notes the following, using the example of the doctrine of justification by faith as an example:

Just as skill in following the rule can exist without explicit knowledge of it, so knowledge can exist without skill. We have all had the experience of learning the grammatical rules of a foreign language - and, on one level, learning them very well - and yet not being able to apply them in speaking or writing.... Sometimes, indeed, preoccupation with the rule of justification seems to make it more difficult to practice the reality, just as constant attention to the rules of correct fingering can make it impossible to play a sonata or type 50 words a minute.\(^{98}\)

It is with the previous paragraph that Lindbeck is positing that the pious - those who know intuitively how the Christian faith works - are more devout than theoreticians who do not. The same could rightly be said about Augustine’s proposed approach to interpreting Scripture. Knowing the rules for interpretation, much like the recipe for a meal, does not ensure an appealing result. Rather, both endeavors require skill, and a certain finesse with which the subject approaches each task. This is not to say the rules (or recipe) are not important. Lindbeck offers an important corrective, writing, “...this does not mean that either textbook grammar or explicit doctrine is unimportant. Formulated rules of language or of faith may not be necessary when the traditioning process is working well, but they are often useful for teaching purposes; and when error is rampant in theory and practice, they become indispensable.”\(^{99}\) The usefulness of these rules when error is rampant is especially apparent today. In fact, the purpose of this


\(^{99}\) Ibid.
study is to explicate Augustine’s rules for interpretation viewed from a cultural-linguistic perspective in light of the tragedy of division within the Church.

4 Moving Forward to Ecumenism

I would like now to carry Lindbeck’s vision forward to questions of ecumenism. The groundwork has been laid by offering a sample of Augustine’s interpretive principles in the first chapter. Here, in this chapter, I have undertaken to introduce Lindbeck and his postliberal project, specifically its proposal of a cultural-linguistic system and a rule theory of doctrine. I have attempted to justify the use of this apparatus, or lens by which to view Augustine’s work; I have showed the dissimilarities, but also more importantly, the correspondence between Augustine exegetical work and Lindbeck’s project. Though this comparison has not been comprehensive in the least, I expect that the points of similarity will be sufficient justification for the reader to move forward into a synthesis and application of Augustine’s exegetical principles, as viewed through a cultural linguistic lens, to questions of ecumenism facing the Church today.
Chapter 4
Toward an Ecumenical Appropriation: Justification

1 A Case Study: Justification and the Use of Scripture

I want to begin this chapter by drawing attention to the divisive situation within the Church by focusing specifically on the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on the doctrine of justification. This will be our focus because it represents one of the significant causes of division during the Reformation in which the interpretation of Scripture played an important role. Further, the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on justification has been able to make great strides toward reconciliation and unity in ways that have not yet been made possible between other churches and in other areas. Indeed, George Lindbeck suggested the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification to be “...widely heralded as the high-water mark of postconciliar rapprochement...”\(^{100}\) The reality that this has happened relatively recently brings a freshness to the conversation.

Using the dialogue on justification as the locus of this chapter, I will begin by offering a short introduction to the division that occurred during the Reformation. From here, I intend to bring in the exegetical principles for the interpretation of Scripture as suggested by Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana*; these will be viewed through a postliberal lens, as a sort of grammar. I will work out the implications that seeing Augustine through the postliberal lens has for healing divisions in future ecumenical discussions by noting how some of his principles were at work in the dialogue on justification. I will then move to the final chapter of this work - a conclusion - including possible future uses of the grammar that I am proposing.

We shall now turn to the doctrine of justification as it has been discussed between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches. The doctrine of justification was one of the central points of contention during the Reformation. Of course there were a variety of other factors at play, but differing interpretations of Scripture played a crucial role. This is admitted in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification along with an explanation of recent progress:

Opposing interpretations and applications of the biblical message of justification were a principal cause of the division of the Western church in the sixteenth century and led as well to doctrinal condemnations. A common understanding of justification is therefore fundamental and indispensable to overcoming that division. By appropriating insights of recent biblical studies and drawing on modern investigations of the history of theology and dogma, the post-Vatican II ecumenical dialogue has led to a notable convergence concerning justification, with the result that this Joint Declaration is able to formulate a consensus on basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification. In light of this consensus, the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today’s partner.\(^\text{101}\)

We see that interpretations and applications of the Bible were points of disagreement during the Reformation, and these hurdles have been overcome to a great extent to allow for the consensus that was attained on justification and the remission of the Reformation condemnations. Is it possible to understand further the nature of these disagreements and the quality of interpretive change that has taken place? I believe the answer is yes, we can.

The usual points of focus concerning the Reformation for Lutherans and Roman Catholics are the issues that Luther addressed. Since our attention will be focused the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, a bit of background to the division that this document spoke to may be of assistance. I will specifically note the importance that the interpretation of Scripture played in this dispute.

Luther was vehemently opposed to the abuse of indulgences he perceived to be practiced in the Roman Catholic church of his time. Luther felt that these abuses occurred in opposition to the teaching of Scripture. In his “Ninety-five Theses” Luther refers to the lack of support in Scripture for the sale of indulgences, especially concerning how they were being abused. He notes: “Nor does it seem to be proved by any reasoning or any scriptures, that they are outside of the state of merit or of the increase of charity,”¹⁰² and “Wrong is done to the word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or longer time is spent on pardons than on it.”¹⁰³ Regardless of Luther’s hermeneutical approach, what is clear is that he felt the teaching on indulgences, and the focus on pardon that was thought to be endowed through them was offered in contradiction to, or in ignorance of Scripture. Yet Luther was able to recognize that his theological opponents were not simply fabricating their own views out of thin air; Luther was well aware that Roman Catholic self-defense was made with Scripture.

Keeping his contentions with the Roman Catholic understanding of the Lord’s supper in mind, Luther states, “But those who rest upon the Scriptures in arguing against us, must be refuted by

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¹⁰³ Ibid., thesis 54.
the Scriptures.” Scripture played a role on both sides of the Reformation debate. In fact, both Luther and the Pope accused each other of being unfaithful to the teaching of Scripture. D. H. Williams explains, “...when the same pope formally condemned Luther’s views... it was stated that the latter taught a doctrine of repentance and salvation that was ‘not founded on Holy Scripture nor on the holy ancient Christian doctors.’ Luther’s offense was also his defense against such charges.” There was clearly some radical disparity in the interpretation of Scripture that was going on. The reality was more complex, though, as neither Luther nor his Catholic opponents were appealing solely to Scripture. Luther (along with other Reformers) was reading the Scripture according to certain rules in the same way the Roman Catholic church was, albeit different rules. In replying to the Reformers, the Council of Trent decrees:

Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant spirits, it decrees that no one, relying on his own skill, shall, in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, - wrestling the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy Mother Church - to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures - hath held and doth hold; or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers; even though such interpretations were never (intended)to be at any time published.

The Council of Trent is forthright and clear in outlining the particular perspective with which Roman Catholics are interpreting Scripture. The “holy Mother Church,” keeping with the “consent of the Fathers” grasps the true meaning of Scripture, in their view. It cannot be

grasped, according to Trent, by the individual using his or her own skill. Luther was not reacting against this perspectival approach simply because it was partial; he was not yearning for some objective method of reading. On the contrary, Luther was concerned with overthrowing the Roman Catholic tradition of reading because he felt as if it was cumbersome and wrong, not because it came from the Roman Catholic church. D. H. Williams comments on some of the action that was taking place during the Reformation:

Luther’s program for reform was both radical and conventional. It was radical in the sense that a great deal of medieval accretions that reconfigured sacramental life had to be sloughed off: ‘It is impossible to reform the church unless one uproots radically the canons, the decretals, scholastic theology, philosophy, logic, as they are taught today.’ In effect, ecclesiastical office alone was not a sufficient guarantee for securing an authoritative interpretation of the faith.\(^\text{107}\)

Luther was aware that corruption was tied to the ecclesiastical authorities of the Roman Catholic church, according to Williams, but more recently there has been a confusion amongst Protestants concerning what Luther was actually protesting.

Some have since characterized the Reformation as a breaking away from the corrupt traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, followed by a return to the pure teaching of Scripture. Though a Roman Catholic himself, John O’Malley explains the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* in this vein:

In view of Luther’s Scripture alone principle, the most fundamental question facing the council in this regard was whether or to what extent there were truths or practices

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essential to Christian belief and life not found in the New Testament. By Scripture alone Luther in the first instance meant to exclude “philosophy” or “reason,” that is, Aristotle’s *Ethics*, which taught that goodness was possible without faith and grace. But in Luther and especially in later polemics the principle soon extended to traditions and ceremonies. For the council the problem was complicated by the fact that the Fathers of the Church and even medieval theologians like Aquinas seemed in their up front statements to hold a Scripture alone principle, even though in reality their positions were generally more qualified.¹⁰⁸

O’Malley frames the discussion by noting that the Scripture alone principle was a challenge to Roman Catholics because this principle seemed to them to be operative in the writing of the Church Fathers and other Catholic theologians. Not everyone believes this Scripture alone principle to be understood in this way; many do not see this as a skewed interpretation of the principle. Williams offers some important discussion on this notion, clearing up some of the erroneous assumptions. He draws attention to the mistake that Protestants often make when invoking the principle of *sola scriptura*:

The point of the Protestant insistence on the sufficiency of Scripture reflects a historical tendency not to permit anything outside the Christian gospel to set norms for what is truly “Christian.” Whereas Scripture does indeed define the center of gravity of the true faith, it does not set the limits of its reading or knowledge. The Reformer’s appeal to scriptural sufficiency was crafted on the assumption that the Bible was the book of the church’s faith. That faith of the church, New Testament and patristic, was seen as

contiguous with the biblical narrative, so that the only proper way to read the Bible was within the framework of the church’s teaching and practice.\textsuperscript{109}

Williams is noting that even for Protestants there is some grammar that must govern the way in which Scripture ought to be read. He ends his discussion on \textit{sola scriptura} with this note:

In sum, \textit{sola scriptura} cannot be rightly and responsibly handled without reference to the historic Tradition of the church, and when it is, any heretical notion can arise taking sanction under a “back to the Bible” platform. The early church was only too well aware that a Scripture-only principle (no less than biblical inerrancy) is no guarantor of orthodox Christianity. And any search for a doctrine of \textit{sola scriptura} in the writings of the Fathers fails to grasp how the early church understood apostolic authority and the reciprocal relation that necessarily existed between Scripture, Tradition and the church.\textsuperscript{110}

According to Williams, the idea that Christians must read only the Bible is wrong. And I think he is right. Williams is pointing out the potential theological errors that groups can fall into when reading the Bible with the illusion that they have some sort of objective access to its teaching. This is especially revelatory in the discussion of ecumenism. There is, in fact, some grammar that governs the way each Christian and Christian group approaches the text of Scripture. Either Christians will recognize this grammar and strive toward an ecumenically sufficient approach that can be shared by all the faithful, or they will continue in their delusional state. If only the delusion of objective access to the teaching of Scripture was harmless. It is not, however; this delusion could very well be at the root of what is causing divisions across confessions with the Church.


\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 234.
The goal of the previous discussion was to historically frame the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* with specific attention given to the unavoidable rules that are applied to Scripture by all interpreters. Now, after having given an introduction to the historical scriptural understandings of the doctrine of justification that was the cause of division, we shall examine more closely the exegesis displayed in the *Joint Declaration*; specific attention will be given to Augustine’s rules as they present themselves along with other interpretive principles.

2 Zeroing in on the Exegesis in the *Joint Declaration*:

**Augustine’s Rules**

What exactly were the agreements concerning the biblical message of justification? What exegetical rules were employed to mutually come to the conclusions in the *Joint Declaration*?

My goal in looking at the exegesis that is present primarily in articles 8-12 in the *Joint Declaration* is to illustrate the effectiveness of Augustine’s rules in actual ecumenical practice. I should note that there are other discernible grammatical patterns and rules that are present in the *Joint Declaration* that have not been discussed; these rules are helpful as well, though a total survey of every element in the exegetical process would have been impossible, especially in such a short work.

Within the exegesis of the *Joint Declaration* there emerge several instances of Augustine’s rules as they were enumerated in the first chapter; a selection of these will be examined in more detail. More precisely, the rules concerning interpreting the obscure passages of Scripture by the clear, differentiating between figural and literal signs, and the metaprinciple of love will be examined.
I will conclude this section with a look at another rule that Augustine did not present but that is governing the way the biblical text has been read in the *Declaration*.

As the biblical message of justification is portrayed in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, a line can be traced beginning in the Old Testament, into the New (Gospels and Epistles) and culminating with a discussion on the theology of St. Paul.¹¹¹ It is interesting to note at this point the assumption present in the *Joint Declaration*, that Scripture does, in fact, have a unitive voice. There are not many messages of justification; there is only one message of justification in the Bible. Both the Old and the New Testaments are witnesses to this one message.

One particular passage, Isaiah 56:1, is interpreted by appealing to the rule Augustine asserted concerning interpreting the obscure passages of Scripture by the clear. Isaiah 56:1 is used to illustrate God’s righteousness as it is revealed in the Old Testament. The author of Isaiah proclaims, “Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.”¹¹² Now this passage is clear about the coming deliverance of the Lord, though it is not clear exactly what this deliverance will look like. Of course, there are many cases in Scripture where God accomplished deliverance for his people, mostly notably the exodus, but others as well. In the *Joint Declaration* this obscurity is dealt with by an allusion to what seems to be a clearer passage. Isaiah 56:1 is cross referenced with

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¹¹² All Scripture references will be taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless it is explicitly stated otherwise.
53:11; it notes, “Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.” While some ambiguity still remains, the interpretation of 56:1 is considerably restricted to refer to the servant of the Lord who will “make many righteous” and who will “bear their iniquities.” This obscurity is finally cleared up completely as the Joint Declaration moves to the New Testament, exposing the Christological ends of these texts. Isaiah 56:1, the text in question, is deemed to be a literal deliverance that God is undertaking, and this is directed to the fulfillment in Christ. In sum: An obscure text that could have been taken in numerous ways is brought to a clear interpretation vis-a-vis the application of a rule that was expressed by Augustine. There are further examples of Augustine’s rules in practice within the exegetical work of the Declaration.

Augustine’s rule about deciding between literal and figurative signs comes into play, especially in the allusion to Daniel 9:5f. Verses 5 and 6 reads as follows, “…we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.” This text is employed in the Joint Declaration to illustrate human sinfulness as it is expressed in the Old Testament. It is not difficult to see the human author of Daniel was referring not to humanity in general, but to Israel and her failure to take heed to God’s revelation given through the prophets. This text is not taken simply in its literal sense, but it is universalized to teach a general theological truth relevant to all humanity, including Christians. Of course, this more generalized rendering is not

114 Ibid., 1.8.
the only meaning of the text, as Augustine allowed for “all or almost all the deeds which are contained in the Old Testament are to be taken figuratively as well as literally…”115 In the Joint Declaration, Daniel 9:5f is appropriated in a figurative sense - taking what literally applied to a select group of people about their particular religious shortcomings and applying this in a general, figurative way to express a doctrinal position in Christian theology. The text is appropriated in keeping with Augustine’s notion that “whatever appears in the divine Word that does not literally pertain to virtuous behavior or to the truth of faith you must take to be figurative. Virtuous behavior pertains to the love of God’s and one’s neighbor; the rule of faith pertains to a knowledge of God and of one’s neighbor.”116 This leads to a third principle of Augustine’s that is embedded in the exegetical section of the Joint Declaration.

What is most striking is the metaprinciple of love, as expounded by Augustine, that is present in the exegesis within the Joint Declaration. This is immediately brought to the reader’s attention in the first section on the biblical message of justification with an allusion to John 3:16. John 3:16 is presented as the Gospel message; it is a message centered around God’s love for the world and the eternal life that comes through belief in Christ. It should be noted that a number of other texts could have been used as the centerpieces of this discussion on justification: Reference could have been made to Romans 3:21-23, for example, which is quoted later. This would indeed stress righteousness and faith in Christ, but the concept of love is not entirely clear in these verses. That “God so loved” is foundational to understanding all other talk in Scripture about sin, righteousness, peace, faith, etc. is not self evidently the only way that Scripture could

115 Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, 3.22.32.
be read. I think Augustine’s principle that all interpretation ought to lead to the love of God and one’s neighbour is typified in this elevation of John 3:16 for the discussion on justification.

The last salient principle for interpretation that I want to discuss is not one that is mentioned explicitly by Augustine in De Doctrina Christiana, but one that Lindbeck raises, and is evidently held in the exegesis that is carried out in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Namely, the principle I am referring to is that of justification by faith. To quote Lindbeck once again, he mentioned that “When Lutherans say, as they often do, that the doctrine of justification is not a doctrine among other doctrines, but is rather a criterion of all doctrines, they are in effect suggesting that it is what I have called a metatheological rule.”117 This metatheological rule of justification is akin in many ways to the Augustinian (though not exclusively Augustinian) principle of charity or rule of love. The rule of justification guides the discussion in the Joint Declaration as the Scripture texts selected are made to fit into a theory or doctrinal account of what justification is. The spiraling nature of exegesis is relevant here, too, as this theory of justification is the result of a close reading of various portions of Scripture. There is movement from the doctrine of justification, to the text, and back to the doctrine that is ongoing, tightening the doctrine’s formations as the space narrows between text and interpretation.

Having now discussed the rules for exegesis, first presented in De Doctrina Christiana, and now traced through the exegetical work in the first pages of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, I will now give attention to some more general realities that the use of these rules entail.

3 Broadening Horizons: General Remarks about the Rules Present in the *Joint Declaration*

As we turn our attention back to the *Joint Declaration* we become hopeful, for in some small way division has been overcome. When we look at modern statements about Scripture and the rules for how it ought to be interpreted we can see a progression toward unity within both Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches. This is a common recognition amongst both groups that Scripture is central, and also that it requires careful reading to ensure proper exegesis. For example, a more modern statement of Roman Catholic doctrine, *Dei Verbum*, expands further upon the interpretive work that is undertaken in reading Scripture:

> ...since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.\(^{118}\)

The text of *Dei Verbum* places the Church as the final arbitrator when it comes to scriptural interpretation. Yet, before this is stated, there is value placed on the interpretation of Scripture as

a whole, and the whole Church. There is a presumed unity in Scripture; this is important as interpretation is carried out.

A member of the Lutheran World Federation (the same group that was responsible for the *Joint Declaration*), The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America offers a description of their approach to Scripture made available to the public on their website:

> Simply stated, the Scriptures tell about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to present Jesus to all who listen to or read them. That is why Lutheran Christians say that the Scriptures are the “source and norm” of their teaching and practice. As the Gospel writer John wrote, “these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

Again there is a recognition of the centrality of Scripture, with a focus also on the christological thrust of the whole Bible. The ELCA goes further by taking into consideration the importance of interpretive skills; a method is provided to ensure that Scripture is understood correctly:

> Obviously, the Scriptures that are collected into a book or Bible describe and speak about many other things — everything from the creation of the world to the world’s end. Because these writings originate from a time period that spans about a thousand years and come to us in a variety of handwritten manuscripts and fragments, they have been studied carefully with all the tools of research that are available. This research continues to enrich understanding of the Scriptures and their message.

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120 Ibid.
What the previous discussion on the more up to date statements from both Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches reveals is an agreement on the teaching of Scripture, and an agreement on the necessity of certain interpretive rules. More specifically, among these rules are some of those propagated by Augustine: the principle that would understand the obscure by the clear, the rule concerning differentiating between figurative and literal signs, and the metarule of love. These statements about Scripture and the way it should be read, I would suggest, are the more fundamental agreements that needed to take place before some consensus could ever be reached on the specific doctrine of justification. Now in the Joint Declaration, former condemnations that were hurled at one another are dropped, or they no longer refer. There is an agreement that Scripture teaches a certain kind of justification. The Joint Declaration puts it this way:

The Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church have listened to the good news proclaimed in Holy Scripture. The common listening, together with the theological conversations of recent years, has led to a shared understanding of justification. This encompasses a consensus in the basic truths; the differing explications in particular statements are compatible with it.\footnote{Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Edited by Lutheran World Federation. and Catholic Church. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2000), 3.14.}

There has been a common understanding, a consensus; and yet there is room for differences in explications. This brings to mind Lindbeck’s typology of cognitive-propositionalism, experiential-expressivism, and the third option of cultural-linguistic approach to religion. It is clear the agreement on justification is not simply the agreement on particular propositional statements of truth; there is more nuance and explication is versatile. Rather, the agreement exemplified in the Joint Declaration is an agreement on certain rules for reading Scripture.
The “consensus in the basic truths,” it seems to me, is not an agreement on some set of propositions, (though there is that). Nor is it an agreement of some experience. Rather, what is agreed upon is an acceptable method for reading Scripture, including particular rules for interpretation. Further, what is agreed upon is a particular way of speaking about these basic truths as they become clear within Scripture by particular readings. In short: there may not be some second-order articulations of justification, but rather a first-order way of speaking about the doctrine that has drawn consensus. There is, of course, even a wide disparity in how justification by faith is formulated amongst Roman Catholics and Lutherans. Also there is not recognizably an appeal to some universal experience wherein the description of this experience is secondary.

Anthony N.S. Lane, wanting to divert attention from the cognitive-propositional model, comments on the doctrine of justification, specifically on how it ought to be approached:

In the light of these observations we should compare our theologies not with mathematical or scientific formulae but with models or maps of reality. Even in science there is sometimes the need for apparently contradictory models to be held in tension, as with viewing light both as particles and as waves. The Bible teaches much about the doctrine of justification but not in a systematic form and not using technical language.122

Lane’s description sheds light on one significant facet of this cultural-linguistic approach to religion. This agreement is akin to a map - charting territory - and less akin to propositional statements. In the same way a map governs or regulates travel in certain areas and is primarily descriptive of the territory within its scope, so too the agreed upon understanding of justification comes from seeing Scripture as regulative and descriptive. I think it should now suffice to make

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122 Anthony N. S. Lane, Justification by Faith : In Catholic-Protestant Diaglogue, an Evangelical Assessment. (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 159.
some further observations about the changes that took place in the Roman Catholic-Lutheran relations that allowed for unity in the doctrine of justification.

In the agreement that was reached between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, it was not a total and final agreement on specific propositions, but a sort of recognition that the “grammar” of the other was sufficient, or true to some extent. Now this grammar has not been identified in its totality or some systematic fashion. What I have tried to show is that part of its constitution is common to that grammar that was presented by Augustine; I also tried to draw attention to a further rule, the principle of justification. It is this grammar then, made up partially of the specific rules I pointed out that allowed for ecumenical understanding of the message of Scripture. More generally, there was an agreed upon way of reading - a set of rules - even if I have not identified every one. When we look at the previous example through a postliberal cultural-linguistic lens, we must identify what exactly constitutes the vocabulary or message for Roman Catholics and Lutherans; we also need to identify their grammatical frameworks within which this vocabulary is used.

In the example of justification above, Lutherans and Catholics are already dealing with the same vocabulary or message - Scripture - yet their approach to it is quite different. It seems to me that they were able to agree on a grammar very similar to Augustine’s though they have articulated their beliefs in a different fashion. More generally, both Augustine and the authors of the Joint Declaration share certain rules; they even use some that are the same. The significance is not that Catholics and Lutherans were able to make identical articulations with the Joint Declaration but that they were able to allow for respectively different descriptions of one truth. This means that they were able to agree on a grammar. Further, Lutherans and Catholics are sharing many of
the constituents of the same cultural-linguistic system; they share common scriptural imagery, creedal language, etc. To hold the linguistic metaphor, they are not so far from one another to be said to be speaking two distinct languages. Still, it is not quite right to suggest that they are speaking exactly the same language in exactly the same way. If we extend the linguistic metaphor, the best descriptor is probably that of different dialects. Both Lutherans and Roman Catholics largely share a basic vocabulary or message (Scripture, Christian tradition, history, etc.) and they even share a grammar to a certain extent (ex. both groups interpret the unclear passages of Scripture by the clear).

In the words of Lindbeck, there was “reconciliation without capitulation” between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. There was a recognition of a common vocabulary, and further a recognition of different grammatical rules, or linguistic approaches that were being used. The impossibility of formulating doctrine in the same way was noted, but respect for difference was allowed. Commenting on the goal of ecumenical dialogue, G.R. Evans notes the following:

If Christians are followers of one Christ, the object of the ecumenical common enquiry must be to know him in one faith, but that faith need not necessarily be expressed everywhere in identical terms. There are all sorts of difficulties about the relationships of diversity and variety of expression to unanimity.... But I want to put forward at the outset the proposition that we are in search of a single Christian truth.\textsuperscript{123}

There is a single truth at stake, in a way. More accurately, there is a Christian way of speaking that is true - a grammar - that is at stake. It is not only a true way of speaking, but a truly Christian way of speaking; exactingly, particularly, Christian. This must not be confused with

either the cognitive-propositionalist or experiential-expressivist approaches to doctrine; we are not dealing with a propositional truth or some universal reality. There is no truth outside of Christian language, no objective truth that needs to be reckoned external to specific Christian identities. There is a fine line between cognitive-propositionalism on the one hand and experiential-expressivism on the other. Neither of these approaches to unity amongst differing Christian bodies are ultimately helpful. The key is to think linguistically.

We are in pursuit of a common Christian language to explicate Scripture. A shared second-order doctrinal language may not be possible among Christians; I want to suggest a move toward a first-order language that is less precise when it comes to doctrinal formulations, but the logic of which is fundamental to all second-order theological language. More specifically, I see this commitment to a first-order set of interpretive techniques when approaching Scripture as necessary, even if there cannot be an agreement on less fundamental, secondary interpretive approaches. The answer, therefore, to Christian division is not to find some external reality in which to express truth, but rather to come to a common language.

In the case of Lutherans and Roman Catholics, they appear to have remained faithful to their respective traditions, which Rahner describes to be by nature “...always interpretation, [they do] not exist independently, but only as an exposition, interpretation ‘according to the scriptures.’” Where, then, was the compromise? What allowed unity in the midst of these two very diverse traditions? I will argue that the locus for unity, is a common first-order meta-language - grammatical rules for interpreting Scripture - that transcend the boundaries of each second-order theological language. It is of the greatest significance to note that these are also traditioned
grammatical rules; they are not some neutral, objective reality. Further, they are specific and concrete - not simply some unexplained phenomenon. It is these rules that allowed for unity.

4 A General Word on the Role of Scripture in Ecumenism

All of the work that has been done so far has revolved around interpreting Scripture, and the rules or grammar that shape how it is read. What does this have to do with ecumenism, exactly? The answer to this questions is complex, so it may be best to note two significant points. First, the diverging interpretations of Scripture are not the only factors causing division between churches. It is true that some may see interpretive questions as central to disunity - though others might find what Scripture teaches to be peripheral to much larger political, ecclesiastical or other concerns. As we move forward we need to be aware of these issues, but this project will focus on something more specific in an attempt to begin to sort out only one of the many causes of disunity. In any case, whether or not it is of central importance, Scripture, particularly how it is to be interpreted rightly, is a necessary object of enquiry in ecumenical discussion.

This leads to second question: How specifically is Scripture to be used? There is probably greater divergence within interpretive endeavors than even in opinion over what counts as Scripture. Even after having come to some agreement on the latter, groups that can affirm the same texts and canon hold a plethora of divergent ideas concerning how Scripture ought to be read and interpreted rightly. Hans-Ruedi Weber anticipates the tumult that will arise along with interpretive questions; he writes:

To speak first about the Bible is usually divisive. Nevertheless, sooner or later Christians from different confessions and cultures must also face persisting disagreements about the
nature of scripture, critically examining the variety of hermeneutics in use. This requires honest investigation of the way in which methods of interpretation are conditioned dogmatically and philosophically as well as socio-economically and culturally.\textsuperscript{124}

I suspect that Weber is right about the divisive nature of Scripture, though I would think his solution to the problem is partial at best. He suggests, “letting the biblical witness speak to us, even if we do not yet agree on what we think about the Bible and how we should approach it, is the primary task. Such study becomes converting and uniting.”\textsuperscript{125} The humble, receptive attitude that Weber alludes to is imperative, but even “honest investigation” about the conditioned nature of some hermeneutic will not pave the way for a common understanding, in my opinion. This may facilitate a promising beginning, but more work must be done; good intentions are not ends in themselves.

Having located our topic with the interpretation of Scripture in the midst of ecumenical discussion, more needs to be said about the particular role that Scripture plays in said discussion. I want to suggest that Scripture functions as a sort of “vocabulary” or “message” that is shared by all Christians involved in ecumenical discussion. This is in keeping with the Lindbeckian-turned-Augustinian grammar that I have presented in the previous two chapters. For Lindbeck doctrine was that which functioned regulatively in the Christian world. Augustine, also referring to doctrine as regulative, drew connections between certain regulative principles that come into play when interpreting Scripture. With carrying forward these doctrines, and more importantly, Augustine’s principles for exegesis, we have a grammar that works with the vocabulary or message of Scripture.


\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
If Scripture is the common vocabulary or message shared by all in ecumenical dialogue, what is the cause of disagreement about its teaching? I would venture to suggest the “grammar” that governs the reading of Scripture is a significant part of what is causing division in this area. In other words, though Scripture is a sort of “vocabulary” or “message” that all sides of an ecumenical discussion share, they often fundamentally miss each other, because, though the vocabulary of Scripture is consistent in each tradition, the way each approaches the text differs grammatically. It will be helpful here to bring in Lindbeck’s typology between cognitive-propositionalist and experiential-expressivist approaches to religion once again. I argue that these two approaches to religion can be more particularly viewed as two common approaches to the interpretation of Scripture. These two ways of reading Scripture may be part of what is at the bottom of radically different positions on issues within the Christian faith. I argue that cognitivist-propositionalist approaches to Scripture which treat passages as factual statements will necessarily be in conflict with experiential-expressivist approaches which deal with Scripture as simply one symbol among others to represent a transcendent reality. The conflict lies not in disagreement over how one particular piece of data should be read, but rather disagreements over what actually counts as data. I would suggest that both of these approaches to the interpretation of Scripture in the context of ecumenical discussions are deficient. My alternative will be to point to Augustine’s method as exemplary of a third approach to interpretation which can best be understood through Lindbeck’s postliberal cultural-linguistic perspective. This alternative, or third way, is to view Scripture as a twofold entity. First, Scripture is neither a set of propositions, nor some set of symbols for a transcendent reality, but instead primarily a regulative tool for the life of the Church. On a second level, Scripture also
forms the vocabulary or message that itself, in part, regulates. This linguistic turn toward Scripture can be traced to Lindbeck, but also to Augustine.

5 Enter Augustine and Lindbeck

I have attempted to suggest a common meta-language that is accessible to all Christians, that stands before their particular traditions, strengthening them each, at times colliding with them. I suggest that an adherence to these principles for interpreting Scripture will provide the grounds for further ecumenical development. I am locating these principles with those put forth by Augustine and having been viewed through a postliberal, cultural-linguistic lens. I am not suggesting this to be the exactly same grammar that was at work in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, though I think it is sufficiently similar to allow for greater ecumenical growth despite any impasses that may have been obstructive due to differing interpretations of Scripture. Further, I will suggest that this Augustinian-Lindbeckian grammar is superior for a number of reasons.

The question is then raised how one is to determine which grammar functions best if there are others at play. Is it even appropriate to speak of grammars that are “better” than others? If so, what makes Augustine’s method “better” than another? I suppose one cannot say one grammar is better than another in general, but one can indeed show that certain grammars are most useful in particular circumstances. That is, some grammars ensoul the needed structure and depth to articulate certain truths better than other grammars do. In other words, some grammars are more pragmatic for specific tasks.
For example, with the grammar of science, scientific discourse becomes easier than if one were to apply the grammar of economics or of some other field. I realize that these are not two completely distinct languages, but they do have their own peculiar forms of speech that are useful in their respective fields. In the same way, Augustine’s grammar is useful for ecumenical discussions in that it allows for healing without forcing parties to abandon their conceptions of truth unless these are in direct, formal opposition to one another. What privileges Augustine’s method? There are several points to consider. First, when the end of ecumenism is kept in mind, the importance of Scripture (and how it is interpreted) cannot be understated. Augustine draws attention to this specifically. Augustine is of further importance because he is a relatively universally accepted figure. More specifically, Augustine is held in high regard by both Protestants and Catholics, conservatives and liberals. Also, Augustine’s rules (or rules similar to them) were practically useful in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue as discussed; I think they were, in fact, instrumental in bringing confluence to two different streams of thought represented by Lutherans and Roman Catholics respectively. His reverence toward Church teaching (ex. his learning from Bishop Ambrose, and his regard for the regula fidei) sits well with the Roman Catholic tradition, while Augustine’s robust appeals to interpret Scripture by itself (ex. the obscure passages by the clear) draw Protestants in as well. Finally, while the ends never justify the means in any endeavor, the reality is that Augustine’s reading viewed as a postliberal grammar leads to unique possibilities for a creative unity. It leads to unique, creative possibilities because it leaves room for ambiguity and plurality in scriptural interpretation. It

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126 This may seem to be an issue for much Christian division - that there is direct, formal contradiction between two beliefs. In the case of Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue this was thought to be the case about justification, but there has been reconciliation. Also, Lindbeck suggests possibilities for understanding divisive issues such as papal infallibility that would allow both Protestants and Catholics a way out of direct contradiction. See: George Lindbeck, “Infallibility,” Church in a Postliberal Age, Edited by James Joseph Buckley. (London: SCM, 2002), 120-144.
leads to unity because the ends to reading Scripture are the same for all, specifically love, truth, etc.

There are, of course, some who would object to using this proposed Augustian-Lindbeckian grammatical approach to Scripture. Not every Christian or group of Christians “buy” that ecumenical discussion, or the goal of visible unity, are important in the first place. What is more, not every Christian tradition feels that Augustine is an authoritative or faithful teacher. Vast groups of classical Pentecostals, for example, might not even know of his existence. The same goes for Lindbeck, only he is even more dispensable to many; his work is controversial to say the least. In full view of these challenges to my suggested approach, I still believe it to be a viable way forward. This is especially the case for Christians who are in pursuit of Christian unity and want to be reconciled to one another but find they are unable to do so because of interpretive conclusions that do not mesh with the conclusions of others.

The strength of my proposed shared grammar lies chiefly in its fundamental nature. Agreement on specific interpretations of Scripture is difficult and thorny. All of the hard edges of competing claims to truth are present and necessarily conflict with opposing claims. If we are to take a step back, to momentarily set aside these disagreements over conclusions, and to search for a common way of speaking about them, I believe further progress is possible, specifically with regard to differing interpretations of the same texts of Scripture. To agree, for example, that obscure passages must be interpreted by the clear, or that there can be a plurality of meaning for each passage is not nearly as controversial as competing claims about the reliability of the scriptural foundation of apostolic succession. If there is an interpretive disagreement first,
reconciliation is difficult partly because two groups of Christians may be arriving at diverging interpretations; this is because they are reading the text differently, by a different grammar. The hope is to avoid these interpretive differences before they begin by adopting a pre-interpretive grammar as presented in the previous chapters.

Is this suggestion a superficial fix to an inevitable problem? Perhaps. Given that my aim is to focus only on disunity caused by differing interpretations of Scripture, the scope does not seem to be too broad. Agreement on this grammar is limited to those who would accept the work of Augustine and Lindbeck as useful, and who would also desire Christian unity. Even within this group, if an agreement is accomplished with a grammar for interpreting Scripture, will not the same problems arrive when concrete interpretations are made, even by these rules? I think there will be conflict that remains in differing interpretations. The difference this proposed grammar makes is an allowance for diversity within what is considered to be orthodoxy among different groups of Christians. Exact agreement is not necessary. There is still refining work to be done; for example, a definition of “charity” needs to be fleshed out before Augustine’s meta-rule is able to bear the most fruit. These clarifications can be made as theory is put into practice. This work is only meant to be a first suggestion in a direction that can be further detailed as it is useful. We now turn to a short concluding chapter.
Chapter 5 - A Conclusion: Future Implications and Uses of an Augustinian Grammar

There has been some impressive growth toward unity through the use of official ecumenical dialogues in the past half century. While I recognize the importance of official ecumenical dialogues such as that shared by Lutherans and Roman Catholics, I do not think this is the only avenue of ecumenical progress. I hope my thesis will contribute in some small way in helping others understand official ecumenical dialogue by offering a unique approach to it. Beyond this, I hope that my work is accessible to all kinds of Christians and that my offerings with regards to a postliberal approach to Augustine’s exegesis will find an application in the everyday life of the Church. This is all to say that along with seeing the value in official ecumenical work, I see the importance of the change of heart that is required of every Christian in viewing their neighbour (and their neighbour’s perspectives) with an open heart. I think the postliberal, grammatical rules for interpretation foster this tenderness toward the other, as they make room for plurality, and shed light on why disagreement is occurring in the first place. Going back to Augustine is significant as well, because his exegetical principles, while leading to an understanding of the truth of Scripture, also create a place for difference and acceptance. Specifically, I have in mind Augustine’s rule that a variety of interpretations of the same text of Scripture can be true as long as they meet certain criteria (ex. they are edifying, lead to love etc.). This allows for different groups to staunchly defend their own interpretations of texts as correct while encouraging these same groups to recognize that others need not subscribe to their beliefs.

It is with the whole Christian body in mind - from ordained officials to common lay people - that I present this grammar, hoping it may take root. It may look something like a change in mood. We’ve already noticed this sort of shift in the pluralization of some Western countries such as
Canada - whether or not this is a good or bad thing. I hope that these grammatical rules may become second nature, that Scripture would be interpreted so that it builds up love of God and each other - that this would be our test for truth. Further, I wish the perspicuity of Scripture to become associated with pragmatism; the clarity of each particular passage should lead to the building up of virtue. I hope my work nudges us forward in this direction.
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