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Augustine and the Catechumenate

William Harmless SJ

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St. Augustine is best known as a theologian whose views and controversies powerfully shaped the course of Christianity in the West. But he was also a struggling North African pastor who had a flair for teaching and who meditated deeply on the complexities of the human heart. This study examines a little-known side of Augustine: his work as a teacher of candidates for baptism. It reconstructs in vivid detail the experience of the ancient catechumenate for the better clarification and implementation of the present process.

Beginning with a look at the present rite - what it says and does not say about catechesis and the catechumenate - Father Harmless uses Augustine as a case study." Augustine's treatises on the subject and his numerous sermons to candidates, catechumens, and neophytes form the basis of a portrait of the initiation process from a *pastoral* as well as a *theological* perspective. The portrait's structure parallels the four periods of the initiation process. This portrait will be of interest and relevance to al those involved with the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults: pastors, DREs, catechists, and liturgists.

William Harmless, SJ, has focused his teaching on the history and theology of the early Church. He completed his doctorate at Boston College in 1990 and teaches at Spring Hill College in Mobile.

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