

Let in the Light

Learning to Read St. Augustine's Confessions

James Boyd White

St. Augustine's *Confessions* is heralded as a classic of Western culture. Yet when James Boyd White first tried to read it in translation, it seemed utterly dull. Its ideas struck him as platitudinous and its prose felt drab. It was only when he started to read the text in Latin that he began to see the originality and depth of Augustine's work.

In *Let in the Light*, White invites readers to join him in a close and engaged encounter with the *Confessions* in which they will come to share his experience of the book's power and profundity by reading at least some of it in Augustine's own language. He offers an accessible guide to reading the text in Latin, line by line—even for those who have never studied the language.

Equally attuned to the resonances of individual words and the deeper currents of Augustine's culture, *Let in the Light* considers how the form and nuances of the Latin text allow greater insight into the work and its author. White shows how to read Augustine's prose with care and imagination, rewarding sustained attention and broader reflection.

Let in the Light brings new life to a classic work, guiding readers to experience the immediacy, urgency, and vitality of Augustine's *Confessions*.

JAMES BOYD WHITE is the L. Hart Wright Professor of Law Emeritus and professor of English emeritus at the University of Michigan and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His many books include *The Legal Imagination: Studies in the Nature of Legal Thought and Expression* (1973) and, most recently, *Keep Law Alive* (2019). He is considered the founder of the law and literature movement.

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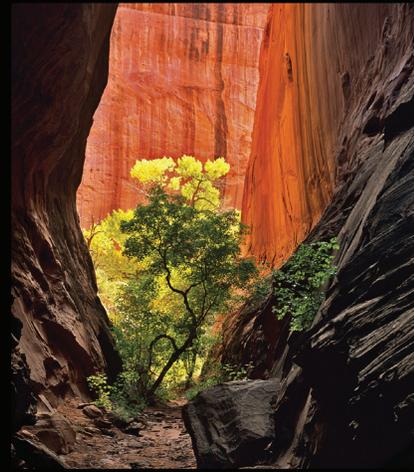
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LET IN THE LIGHT

**Learning to Read
St. Augustine's Confessions**



JAMES BOYD WHITE

"I've spent fifty years translating Sanskrit texts, but only now has this book taught me how to read a text in a foreign language and how to read (and write) a translation. It is also a brilliant book about Latin, Augustine, God, and the meaning of life."

—Wendy Doniger, author of *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*

"Such careful, loving reading as we find in James Boyd White's book is as rare as it is precious. This is a book to be read slowly, allowing Augustine's Latin to resonate—to be felt even when little understood. For words are living things, and we here come to know that Augustine's *Confessions* is a work that is alive in words with all their human complexity—but above all with love."

—David Jasper, author of *Heaven in Ordinary: Religion and Poetry in a Secular Age*

"*Let in the Light* offers a better way to read a work of literature of enormous and enduring importance. White argues that our easy familiarity with the English language and the inevitable distance and distortions associated with any translation create a barrier between Augustine and his readers. He is a lively, clear, and engaging writer, and the book is extremely sophisticated about literary criticism but wears its sophistication lightly."

—M. Cathleen Kaveny, author of *Ethics at the Edges of Law: Christian Moralists and American Legal Thought*