

Faith and Learning Scholar Community



Dialogue Dinner 1

September 12, 20, & 28 2023

TEXT | *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's Confessions* Margaret R. Miles
Chapter 2: Textual Pleasure "Where Can I Find the Books?" (Confessions VI 11)

Agenda and Leading Questions

(Remember there is no leader at your table so begin the dialogue as a community of friends!)

- "Augustine expected reading to be a powerful, life-changing experience." Miles p.40
- Augustine believed that reading can transform life ..." but where can I find the books"? (Confessions VI 11)
- Some of us have read *Confessions* and others have not. All of the Scholars have studied *Confessions* in ACS first semester first year of college! As we begin this year let us talk about Augustine's search in his journey of faith and learning!

Introductions

Go around your table and introduce yourself:

- I am_____. I learned something new about myself today as a Faculty Mentor/Student Scholar that made me think differently and I want to share it with you_____ (take the time to share, giving each person an opportunity.
- Go around your table again and share a book/ article/poem/ you have read this summer or in the beginning of this semester that has the potential to be life changing. Name it and share why you chose it to share with the community.
- Go around the table again and share your response to the text and point out a particular section/concept that you would like to explore in the dialogue this evening.

Confessions as a book of Pleasure?

Margaret R. Miles presents *Confessions* as a book of Pleasure?

- Explore and share your experience of "the pleasure of the text." "Complex pleasure of strong feelings—sometimes violent disagreements, frustration, ...pleasure of resistance
- and sometimes near-ecstatic recognition of the great beauty, so old and so new (X.27) (pp.)
- "What if knowledge itself were delicious?"

Personal Growth Intertwined with Hearing & Reading

Augustine's personal growth in Faith and Learning is intertwined with hearing and reading.

- He used many strategies to enhance his readers "vigorous engagement with the text." (pp. 40-43)
- Explore Augustine's growth and changes in his faith journey based on his observation and openness to read differently after he and his mother Monica observe Ambrose, who read silently and not out loud. (pp. 44-46)
- Reading for Augustine was to swallow, assimilate, to digest, to incorporate, to eat the text. Augustine conversion was a continuous...Take up and eat! Take up and read! *Tolle Lege*

Texts for Growth

Texts for growth in the journey of faith and learning can be challenging so we cannot confuse pleasure with ease.

- A pleasurable read of the *Confessions*...is not an easy read. It maintains unresolved contradictions that disturb a reader, keeping her/him awake, irritated, engaged (pp.49-54). Augustine holds in suspension several different audiences (God, people, and himself—self talk...and references to his eavesdroppers).
- Contradictions generate a textual instability that creates discomfort, and therefore attention in the reader.
- Explore practices that you have that help you grow and understand difficult texts.

Image of God

Augustine's challenges (pp. 56ff)

- Augustine's images of God...are in conflict...a changeable God intolerable. He finds them mutually corrective and thus necessary to sustain in suspension. Augustine experienced and understood this God through an experience of being ravished by God's beauty.
- Explore Augustine's question: Is sensible beauty the starting point in a search for God so that the seeker must look more deeply into bodies in order to learn something about the God who created them? Or are all bodies and objects to be dismissed, excluded from a search for God that begins with the human mind but must necessarily transcend the mind's changeableness if it is to achieve even a 'trembling glance' of that which is?" (58)
- God be found in the created world....in beauty...or must one shut out created beauty to search for a God accessible only to the mind?
- Who is God for Augustine...he wrestled with this as well as all do...Who is God for you?
- Augustine is content to come to an understanding of Christ as mediator, the method or road to God. He understands Christ's human and divine nature as logical contradictions that are nevertheless necessary; ...in discovering humility to hold them together to identify the road to God. (61)

Augustine, Unresolved Contradictions ...

Hold them in suspension for growth!

- Unresolved contradictions in a text create a pleasurable tension; they function to invite the reader into the text as conversation partner, opponent, supporter, and co-author.
- Augustine was acutely aware of the role of dis-ease, disequilibrium, and tensions in producing pleasure. ...what it is that makes it take more pleasure in the finding or recovery of things it loves than in the continual possession of them? VIII.3 (64).
- Unresolved contradictions in our journey of faith and learning...how do we live it faithfully and creatively?

Guidelines for Conversation

All gathered have wisdom to share from reading the text and from their lived faith journey. Guidelines for dialogue will enhance our conversations.

- BE fully PRESENT, we begin promptly at 6PM.
- Be prepared with your thoughts from the text with what you would like to talk about at dinner.
- There is no appointed "facilitator." All the members at the table are responsible for the dinner dialogue.

- Leading questions are found on your table to begin the dialogue. These prompts are an invitation for everyone to share a few times before entering the dialogue based on the text.
- We gather in the spirit of Augustine: we learn and grow from each other's questions and insights: both Faculty Mentors and Student Scholars are learning from each other. Faculty Mentors are not formal teachers at the dinner table and Student Scholars are not formal "listeners" at the table.

In Augustine's words

"All kinds of things rejoiced my soul in their company, to talk and laugh, to do other kindnesses, to read pleasant books together, to pass from lightest jesting to talk of deepest things and back again, to differ without rancor, to teach each other and to learn from each other. These and such things kindled a flame that fused our very souls together and made us one out of many."

—St. Augustine, Confessions 4.8

Let everyone speak. Gently invite people who have not spoken to share their insights, questions and/or thoughts.