

***Threads to be Woven:  
Characteristics of Augustinian Pedagogy***

***by***

***Gary N. McCloskey O.S.A.\****

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*Rev. Gary N. McCloskey, O.S.A., is Chaired Professor of Augustinian Pedagogy and Dean of the College at Merrimack College, North Andover, Massachusetts. In these positions Dr. McCloskey directs the Saint Augustine Institute for Learning and Teaching as part of the college's efforts to enhance its Augustinian distinctive competence. In addition to Augustinian pedagogy he has written on developing pedagogy and school curriculums, the social forces impacting pedagogy and curriculums as well as teaching with technology as a pedagogical development.*

If anyone told me five years ago that I would be here speaking on the characteristics of Augustinian Pedagogy I would have been more than surprised. At the time I was coming to Merrimack College from 10 years of working outside Augustinian schools. Through my work on instructional technology, faculty development and Catholic identity in an Archdiocesan-sponsored university I had become an attractive candidate for Vice President for Academic Affairs at Merrimack. I had done basic study in Augustine, but no real work on his direction toward pedagogy.

While people were most welcoming to me, it was not yet a hospitable atmosphere for Augustinian pedagogical values and directions. In fact 10 years ago, when it was expected that the President of Merrimack would be a layperson, some faculty wondered if it was the beginning of a post-Augustinian and even post-Catholic era for the College. Some even wondered why the President needed to be Catholic. The new lay President, whose work had been in the marketing directions of business organizations, saw that the Augustinian character of Merrimack was essential to any future success of the college. Through his leadership funds were secured from the Villanova Province of the Augustinians to start the Center for Augustinian Study and Legacy. Through its various programs, particularly faculty development and our Pellegrinaggio, there has been a tremendous transformation. Last year, our Faculty Senate unanimously accepted an Augustinian Values Statement which was developed largely through the work of participants in Center programs.

This time has not only been a transforming experience for the college but also such an experience for me. In recruiting me, the leadership of the college relied on my more than 20 years of study and practice in pedagogy and curriculum. In leading faculty

pedagogy discussions, I soon found that such a base was not enough. I searched for sources on Augustinian Pedagogy in English. I found much in the work of Burt,<sup>1</sup> Tack<sup>2</sup> and Esmerelda,<sup>3</sup> but their work was more spiritually directed than pedagogically directed. In Spanish, I found much more. The work of Rubio Bardon,<sup>4</sup> Insunza Seco<sup>5</sup> and Galindo Rodrigo<sup>6</sup> has guided me in understanding of Augustine and his pedagogical interpreters. From what I have found Augustine does not provide us with a detailed methodology in the way Montessori does. Rather the principles are threads woven into the fabric of his writings and his life. From his counsel to his followers, it is clear that Augustine wants each learner and each learning community to weave these threads into their own learning journeys. In the studies done by others I have found many values ranging from humility to diligence. In my formulation of characteristics of Augustinian pedagogy, I have tried to find ways to connect these values so that they become principles for guiding both the development of Augustinian educational programs as well as the evaluation of program effectiveness. I have discerned four major threads which I hope will serve as criteria to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of my work in Merrimack's Saint Augustine

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<sup>1</sup> In particular, D.X. Burt, *Reflections on a dying life*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004; D.X. Burt, "Let me know you..." *Reflections on Augustine's search for God*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003; and D.X. Burt, "Let me know myself..." *Reflections on the prayer of Augustine*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003;

<sup>2</sup> In particular, T.E. Tack, *As one struggling Christian to another: Augustine's Christian ideal for today*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001; and T. Tack, *If Augustine were alive today: Augustine's religious ideal for today*. Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> A. Esmerelda, Augustinian Values An article. Privately published, n.d.

<sup>4</sup> P. Rubio Bardon, *Educación estilo agustiniano*. Madrid: Publicaciones Federación Agustiniano Española, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> S. M. Insunza Seco, Una lectura pedagógica de la interioridad agustiniana. In *Valores agustinianos: Pensando en la educación*. M.P. Martin de la Mata and S.M. Insunza Seco (eds.) Publicaciones Federación Agustiniano Española, 1994, 113-124 and S. M. Insunza Seco, El ideario o caracter propia de un centro educativo agustiniano. In *Notas para una educación agustiniana*. M.P. Martin de la Mata and S.M. Insunza Seco (eds.) Publicaciones Federación Agustiniano Española, 1994, 147-167.

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Galindo Rodrigo Valores que caracterizan a la educación agustiniana. In *Valores agustinianos: Pensando en la educación*. M.P. Martin de la Mata and S.M. Insunza Seco (eds.) Publicaciones Federación Agustiniano Española, 1994, 7-29 and J.A. Galindo Rodrigo, Lineas básicas de la pedagogía de San Agustín. In *Notas para una educación agustiniana*. M.P. Martin de la Mata and S.M. Insunza Seco (eds.) Publicaciones Federación Agustiniano Española, 1994, 25-52.

Institute for Learning and Teaching. The threads which I would like to share with you are: 1) A learner-centered thread of Learning through Transforming Experiences, 2) A knowledge-centered thread of Learning to Search for Truth, 3) A commitment-centered thread of Learning Wholeheartedness for Learning, and 4) A community-centered thread of Learning to Dialogue in Unity amid Division.

### **Augustinian Pedagogy Thread 1: Learning through Transforming Experiences**

From what I have said thus far starting with Learning through Transforming Experiences may seem like I am reading my recent life into Augustine. On the contrary, it was in reading Augustine that the insight of transformation came to me. To demonstrate the presence of this thread woven throughout Augustine, let me identify it in several of his specific works and then its overall presence in genres of his writings.

Despite its title, *The Teacher*<sup>7</sup> does not provide a pedagogical manifesto. Rather, one finds in it a presentation of the use of dialogue as a practice of teaching in which the learner's experience becomes a means for understanding. Augustine uses Adeodatus' experience to aid his son in arriving at the understanding of abstract concepts such as signs and symbolic speech. Demonstrating the need for experience to undergo transformation, Augustine introduces in this work the role of the Inner Teacher.

While not a treatise on epistemology, *The Trinity*<sup>8</sup> contains within it much of Augustine's theory of how learners acquire knowledge. Primarily a work reflecting Augustine's theological understanding of his experience of the Trinitarian love of God in his life, *The Trinity* also presents ways in which he sees each human being as the Image of God. From a knowing and learning perspective this appears as the trinity of memory,

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<sup>7</sup> *De magistro*

<sup>8</sup> *De trinitate*

understanding and will. Just as our trinitarian God has a communal life, so the parts of our learning work together communally when will “joins the child (understanding) to its parent (memory) and is in a way common to both of them.”<sup>9</sup>

*Teaching Christianity*<sup>10</sup> gives a presentation of a curriculum of Christian teaching with a guarded use of non-Christian learning. Beyond a basic set of teachings it provides a core of instruction on how to interpret scripture. This reveals a supposition that teaching is not just received but also is interpreted in the experience of the learner. As a guide for the learner Augustine provides solid principles to follow in interpretation. At the end there is a homiletic presentation. This also reveals a care for the learner finding transforming experiences, since here Augustine gives an example of how the learner should hear the presentation of teachings and interpretations.

*Instructing Beginners in the Faith*<sup>11</sup> is truly a work connected to transforming experiences. It is a response to the Carthaginian deacon, Deogratias, who had much experience in teaching people seeking entry to the Church. Yet, he felt he needed help in moving them to conversion (transformation). He appealed to Augustine for instruction on dealing specifically with beginners, those seekers who were not yet catechumens. Augustine starts with the attitudes of both the preacher and the hearer which color any understanding of experience. From attitudes Augustine moves to content. The two presentations are guided by ages of history with which an average learner of the time might have had some familiarity. From these he moves to more spiritual understandings. The two presentations differ in length to aid in adaptation to the understanding and experience of the learner.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Trinity*, XIV, 10.

<sup>10</sup> *De doctrina christiana*

<sup>11</sup> *De catechizandis rudibus*

Beyond these specific works that have pedagogical directions the writings that come out of Augustine's own life and ministry provide further evidence of how transforming experiences are fundamental to learning. Pegis underscored this more than 60 years ago when he observed:

To attempt to portray the unity of a heart and a mind which lives as deeply and intensely as did Augustine is always a rash undertaking. How can the historian reproduce the *life* of a man? As it has well been said, we can only follow after Augustine – and it does not even lie within the power of man [*sic*] to do so. This may be a worrisome paradox, but it is the lesson of Augustine's life and thought, and it is the lesson that is inscribed at the very center of his teaching. He is eminently the disciple of the love of God. But this love is not a doctrine but a life, not an abstract analysis but a journey, not a theory but an experience. Now precisely, how is an *experience* communicated? It can be possessed only by those who live it, and it is uniquely *theirs* as their own being. The greatest work that Augustine has produced is his own life: how shall we *read* that?<sup>12</sup>

Essential to understanding the life of Augustine is his Confessions.<sup>13</sup> Many, greater than I, have analyzed this work. From a pedagogical vantage one can see it as Augustine presenting his learning experiences as transformational. We find in it his trinity of memory, understanding and will. Often, his transformations have been termed conversions. Early childhood learning culminates in a philosophical conversion. Moving forward through Manichaeism and Skepticism he arrives at an intellectual conversion to

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<sup>12</sup> Anton C. Pegis, "The Mind of Saint Augustine." *Medieval Studies* 6 (1944), 8.

<sup>13</sup> *Confessiones*

Christianity expanded by a moral conversion. All of this evidences a progressive development of his dialogues with the Inner Teacher. Through the period after these conversions including the death of his mother, Augustine demonstrates how the development of the dialogue with the Inner Teacher goes on and must be sustained. In the end he presents the Scriptures as a source for guiding the ongoing dialogues.

Since Scriptures are so essential for Augustine, it is not surprising that clear directions for sustaining transformations through dialoguing with the Inner Teacher can be found throughout Augustine’s Sermons and Letters. A major affirmation of this finding can be seen in the extensive use of material from Augustine’s Sermons in the works published by Spanish Augustinian Federation (F.A.E.). While various sermons present moments of insights, the exegetical works Expositions on the Psalms<sup>14</sup> and Tractates on John<sup>15</sup> provide more extended development of such insights.

In today’s world which often privileges individualism, Augustine provides a place for community pedagogy. Learning that sees community as an important support and even a source for the dialoguing with the Inner Teacher can be found in City of God,<sup>16</sup> The Rule<sup>17</sup> and The Work of Monks.<sup>18</sup>

As a pedagogical direction dialoguing with the Inner Teacher is fundamentally learner centered. In Augustine’s words, “Consider this great puzzle. The sounds of my words strike the ears but the Teacher is within. Do not think that any human teaches another. The sound of our voice can admonish, but the one who teaches is on the inside.

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<sup>14</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos*

<sup>15</sup> *In Johannis evangelium tractatus*

<sup>16</sup> *De civitate Dei*

<sup>17</sup> *De regula*

<sup>18</sup> *De opera monachorum*

The sound we make is useless.”<sup>19</sup> While learner centered it is transformational. Miguel Angel Keller sees dialoguing with the Inner teacher as part of Augustinian interiority whose transformational “value needs to be ransomed.”<sup>20</sup> For him this dialogue is a spiritual process or dynamic consisting of four inseparable steps. These can be summarized in this way:

1. Return to yourself, i.e., go from outer life to inner life.
2. Go beyond yourself, i.e., go from inner life to the truths of reason.
3. Transcend truths, i.e., go from the varied truths of reason to ultimate Truth.
4. Experience Enlightenment, i.e., return to the outer life with a truer vision of self and reality.<sup>21</sup>

To ensure that learners do not stay within themselves and that inner dialogues of learners are transformational, we need to evaluate the effectiveness of our programs and our own pedagogy. As evaluation criteria, we might use the three dispositions which Keller<sup>22</sup> derives from Augustinian interiority, i.e.,

1. Desire for Authenticity (To be aware of who I am – where I am – where I am going and what goals I am orienting my life toward).
2. Capacity for Discernment (Sound self-criticism, Critical judgment in the light of truth, Consistent commitments).
3. Sense of Transcendence (Preventing myself from being wrapped up in the sensate, in myself, in my own culture, in what is merely human).

As these learner centered criteria evidence the impact of transformational experiences on

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<sup>19</sup> *Tractate on I John III*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> See M.A. Keller, Human formation and Augustinian Anthropology in *Elements of an Augustinian formation*. Rome: Pubblicazione Agostiniane, 2001, 208.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, 210.

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.*, 210-211.

learning, they also have a knowledge centered thread woven into them. That weaving moves us to a second Augustinian thread, Learning to Search for Truth.

### **Augustinian Pedagogy Thread 2: Learning to Search for Truth**

Augustine prayed, *Search in ways by which we can make discoveries, and discover in ways by which we can keep on searching.*<sup>23</sup> With these words, Augustine has given us a mandate to search for truth that is relevant even in our postmodern time and all the questioning of “truth” claims we face. He reminds us that the human relation to truth is the search (restless journey) rather than the attainment of it here and now. According to Augustine our movement toward the Inner Teacher is knowledge-centered, because it is “through knowledge to wisdom.”<sup>24</sup> For him this search is but another name for the experience of always continuing as a student in the school of the Inner Teacher. Searching for rather than attaining truth constantly reminds us of our continual need to be good learners.<sup>25</sup>

If we are always learners, how do we teach students to search for the truth in effective ways? Augustine described dialectic/discussion as the best method. It is a way in both teacher and student should have no shame in learning from mistakes. As he says,

This is why we chose this method of discussion. There is no better way of seeking truth than through the method of question and answer. But rare is the person who is not ashamed of being proved wrong. As a result, a good discussion is often spoiled by some hard-headed outburst with its frayed tempers, generally hidden but sometimes evident. We planned to proceed

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<sup>23</sup> *The Trinity*, IX, 1, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII, 24.

<sup>25</sup> See *Sermon 16A*, 1.

peaceably and agreeably in our search for truth. I would ask the questions and you would answer. If you find yourself in difficulties, do not be afraid to go back and try again.<sup>26</sup>

Since dialoguing through knowledge to wisdom involves stumbling and falling, Augustine’s pedagogy is one for cracked pots. No matter how much Augustinian educators prepare and rely on tried and true understanding, we “go into the furnace and come out cracked.”<sup>27</sup> As cracked pots learners we are sure to encounter confusion. Augustine calls attention to the multitude of resources teachers can use to ensure their presentations aid learners in their search. In his words,

At times, even when everything is rightly and correctly presented, the listener may be offended or disturbed by something that is misunderstood or is so novel it is difficult to understand because it contradicts belief or practice coming from a long-standing error. When this becomes evident or appears curable, the teacher should cure the listener without delay through an exposure to an abundance of authorities and reasons.<sup>28</sup>

With all that can distract learners as they dialogue in the search for truth, what is the source for the authority to teach? Even Augustine wondered about this when he asked, “What foolish oddity could ever lead someone to send a child to school so that he can learn what the teacher thinks?”<sup>29</sup> His answer to this recurring question was, “After teachers have used words to explain all the branches of learning that they claim to teach,

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<sup>26</sup> *Soliloquies*, II, 7, 14

<sup>27</sup> *Expositions on the Psalms* 99, 11. The use of the concept “cracked” extends work on Augustine and the cracked self in Donald X. Burt, “*Let Me Know Myself...*” *Reflections on the Prayer of Saint Augustine*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> *Instructing Beginners in the Faith*, I, 11, 16.

<sup>29</sup> *The Teacher*, 45.

including those dealing with virtue and wisdom, students ponder interiorly if what has been said is true, that is, they contemplate on the inner truth according to their capacity.”<sup>30</sup> In this answer, Augustine does not build a case for relativism, but rather values, once again, the dialogue of the learner with the Inner Teacher. Here the authority of the teacher lies in what the teacher points the student toward. Jacobs describes this as a move away “from the truth of authority communicated externally to the authority of truth discovered internally.”<sup>31</sup>

As a help to understanding the authority of truth in teaching the search for truth, Augustine provides two teachers in his own life. Prior to becoming a Christian, Augustine waited for Faustus, the great Manichean teacher. When Faustus came, he spoke with the rhetorical form of an external authority, but Augustine found him lacking in the inner substance of insight and truth. On the other hand, when he heard Bishop Ambrose preach in Milan, Augustine found the insight and truth he conveyed carrying an inner authority. It was truly enlightening, even though, according to Baldwin’s observation, “Ambrose is — to say the least — hardly the model of an enthusiastic teacher at the heart of a learning community. His students, bewilderingly ignored as they sit silently around him waiting to be taught, are literally and figuratively peripheral to Ambrose’s activity.”<sup>32</sup>

Augustine’s religious sense of the search for truth is clear. Yet, what he identifies as “illumination” does not eliminate an essential role for human reasoning in searching

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> R. M. Jacobs, O.S.A. Augustine’s Pedagogy of Intellectual Liberation: Turning Students from the “Truth of Authority” to the “Authority of Truth” in K. Paffenroth and K. L. Hughes, *Augustine and Liberal Education*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000, 117.

<sup>32</sup> D. R. Baldwin. Models of Teaching and Models of Learning in the *Confessions* in K. Paffenroth and K. L. Hughes, *Op. cit.*, 21.

for truth. For Augustine, without reason we will never find the truth (the knowledge and wisdom) we seek. In his description, “Just as the sun is shown to the eyes, reason pledges to make God known to your mind when it speaks with you.... While God Himself does the illuminating, reason functions in the mind like the act of looking occurs in the eyes.”<sup>33</sup> For Pelikan, there is a somewhat Divine pedagogy informing Augustine’s own pedagogy, i.e., “Not cycles, but sequence; not fate, but providence; not chaos, but order; not caprice, but pedagogy — this was, for Augustine, the meaning of the mystery of historical continuity, by means of which God was carrying out ‘the education of the human race.’<sup>34,35</sup> Going further, Augustine places reason alongside the authority of truth when he comments,

It is without question that two things bring us to learning -- authority and reason. Since I find nothing stronger, I am certain that I shall never depart from the authority of Christ. But, my search must continue through subtle reasoning because I am convinced that what I want most is to grasp the truth, not just by faith alone but also by understanding.<sup>36</sup>

To be a good teacher, then, is about helping people in their search for truth and understanding through the authority of truth and through reason. We can see this relationship in Augustine’s words,

“Starting from one truth which learners already accept, they are compelled to give their assent to other truths, which they had previously rejected.

Beginning by dismissing a true idea as false, but finding that it in harmony

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<sup>33</sup> *Soliloquies*, I, 6, 12.

<sup>34</sup> *City of God*, X, 14.

<sup>35</sup> J. Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time, History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of Saint Augustine*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1986, 50.

<sup>36</sup> *Answer to the Sceptics*, III, 20.

with something they already accept as true, they make a clear distinction between the true idea and what is false.”<sup>37</sup>

In this relationship the teacher does not provide truth but facilitates the search. As Augustine describes his own teaching, “I have simply put a mirror in front of you for you to look at yourselves. I am the mirror’s reflective power showing those who look into the mirror their faces. Note that the faces I am talking about now are the ones that are inside of us.”<sup>38</sup>

As a good facilitator in an Augustinian-style of teaching careful attention must be paid to what the learner understands. For Augustine, great preparation and attention to reasoning processes are not worth much if the learner does not arrive at some understanding. For him, “Speaking has no purpose when those, for whose benefit we speak, do not understand what we are saying.”<sup>39</sup> It also means teachers have to pay attention to their own search for truth. We find this in Augustine when he describes his own writing “Even I find what I am seeking when I try to answer the questions of others.”<sup>40</sup>

In Augustine’s pedagogical practice of the search for truth the Liberal Arts (in contemporary terms - secular learning) can have a special place. As he shared with a companion in his dialogues, “Study of the liberal arts, when moderate and within bounds, makes students more alert, more persevering and better equipped to embrace truth. As a result, they desire truth more enthusiastically, pursue it more firmly and in the end rest in

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<sup>37</sup> *Answer to Cresconius*, I, 19.

<sup>38</sup> *Sermon 306B*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Teaching Christianity*, IV, 10, 24.

<sup>40</sup> *The Trinity*, I, 8.

it more satisfyingly.”<sup>41</sup> Augustine knew that truth will never be fully at hand in this life. Thus he also cautioned about the study of the liberal arts with this advice, “While many holy people have not studied them at all, many who have studied them are not holy.”<sup>42</sup> As a result, in Augustinian pedagogy liberal education always needs to be critiqued to ensure that it is aiding in the liberating search for truth and not enslaving students in a privileged form of training. Augustine’s caution may come from his dual experience of liberal education. Liberal education aided him on his search for truth and it supported his straying from that search.

From all this we can gain principles for determining the choice and effectiveness of the knowledge base for an Augustinian pedagogy and curriculum. They include dialogue with the Inner Teacher, the pairing of the authority of truth and processes of reasoning and a well-developed liberal education. Alongside these principles there is a need for some room for doubt, development and change. Even though it may be an obstacle to learning, according to Howie, “Augustine regards the condition of doubt in positive terms as implying a desire to learn, i.e., a readiness for learning.”<sup>43</sup> As Augustine observes doubt can provide a source of knowledge, “Anyone, knowing that he doubts, knows with certainty something true, namely that he doubts. In this, he is sure about a truth. As a result, anyone doubting that there is such a thing as the truth has at least one truth limiting doubt.”<sup>44</sup>

The problem is not doubt but surety when one is in error and refusing to change. For Augustine, developing and changing understanding is the active exercise of good

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<sup>41</sup> *On Order*, I, 8, 24.

<sup>42</sup> *Retractations*, I, 3, 2.

<sup>43</sup> G. Howie, *Educational Theory and Practice in St. Augustine*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, 148.

<sup>44</sup> *True Religion*, 39, 73.

reasoning. As he framed it, “When time and circumstances change, right reason demands a change in what was seen as right at some earlier time. In such situations, when objectors say it is not right to change, truth shouts the answer that it is not right if we do not change.”<sup>45</sup>

Where does all this bring us to in developing pedagogical practice that will help us in the search for truth? Reflecting on Augustine’s teachings Chadwick observed that the “unity of truth may lie beyond the various subjects of human knowledge with their different methods of investigation.”<sup>46</sup> Assuming that Chadwick’s reflection is correct, then our curriculums while knowledge-based must reflect their limitations with respect to truth claims. Like Augustine, we (teacher and student) are vulnerable learners struggling as we find our way on our journey in the search for truth. That journey moves forward through our dialogue with the Inner Teacher where we find the authority of truth, aided by reasoning, a well-developed liberal education and even doubt. Learning as a search for truth reminds us that even a knowledge-centered pedagogy and curriculum navigates through knowledge to wisdom. In Augustinian learning communities where we learn through a search for truth we know that such searching involves more than a good mind it also demands a committed heart. Such a committed heart is the essence of the third Augustinian thread in our weaving – Learning Wholeheartedness for Learning.

### **Augustinian Pedagogy Thread 3: Learning Wholeheartedness for Learning**

*Caritas* the Latin expression for a committed heart is often translated in English as “charity.” Yet, that translation can convey the mistaken understanding of a gift to the poor which treats the poor as being of lesser value than the giver. To convey the depth

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<sup>45</sup> *Letter 138*, 4.

<sup>46</sup> H. Chadwick. *Augustine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 34.

and fullness of *caritas*, I translate it as wholeheartedness.<sup>47</sup> While Augustine’s struggles and vulnerability in his life experiences and search for truth can be realities that learners can identify with, we should also emulate Augustine and integrate our experiences into cohesive actions employing our wills. Augustinian pedagogy should model Augustine’s own learning wholeheartedness for learning.

Augustine sees the involvement of the will in learning as advancing what we know,

Since a person’s character is deemed praiseworthy by how good and how learned it is, we take note of what he wills in addition to what he remembers and understands. We do not start with the strength of his will.

Rather, we begin with what he wills, and then move to how strong his will is.<sup>48</sup>

This will, when we learn wholeheartedness for learning, does not draw its power only from the learner’s dialoguing with the Inner Teacher. Augustine reminds us that as we dialogue through reasoning, “Do not forget that when you climb above yourself, you are lifting yourself above your soul, which has the gift of reason. Step, therefore, to where the light of reason is lit.”<sup>49</sup> Augustine makes this recommendation understanding that teaching and learning flow not only inward but also upward and involves the will to transcend what we know through our reasoning.

Transcendence may be seen as a purely religious experience. But in its most

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<sup>47</sup> The utilization of this translation is informed by its use in J. Wetzel, Snares of Truth: Augustine on Free Will and Predestination, in R. Dorado and G. Lawless, *Augustine and His Critics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 124-141 as well as in M.T. Clark, Introduction, in *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings, Translation and Introduction by M.T. Clark* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984) 14.

<sup>48</sup> *The Trinity*, X, 17.

<sup>49</sup> *True Religion*, 39, 72.

basic form, transcendence is a deep and continual desire to search out the unknown. It is for Augustine, “The whole love of the mind that desires to know what it does not know. That is not the love of what it does not know. Rather, it is the love of what it does know, because the desire to know what is not known arises out of what is known.”<sup>50</sup> This desire, wholeheartedness (*caritas*) for learning, may also be seen as courage (brave heart<sup>51</sup>) to know the unknown.

Transcendence requires a very practical act of bravery in overcoming a fear of the unknown. For Augustine it is a brave act because it involves overcoming his experience of the will as divided. For him the will acting well evidences *caritas*. The will acting wrongly evidences *cupiditas*. As Arendt interprets Augustine, “The sign of *caritas* on earth is fearlessness, whereas the curse of *cupiditas* is fear — fear of not obtaining what is desired and fear of losing it once it is obtained.”<sup>52</sup> This fearlessness derives from Augustine’s understanding of the biblical concept, “Love casts out fear.”<sup>53</sup>

Often people see the development of a person’s will as something personal. Augustine, understanding his own failures, finds a role for teachers and schools in overcoming fear and building wholeheartedness for learning through the development of a confident will to move upward and into the unknown. He gave other teachers dealing with a timid student this advice,

We should in our presentation try everything to succeed in rousing him to bring him out of a hiding place. Through gentle encouragement we should overcome any excessive timidity. We ought to temper any shyness

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<sup>50</sup> *The Trinity*, X, 3

<sup>51</sup> The use of the concept “brave hearts” extends work on Augustine and fortitude, in D. X. Burt, “*Let Me Know Myself...*” *Reflections on Augustine’s Search for God*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003.

<sup>52</sup> H. Arendt. *Love and Saint Augustine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 35.

<sup>53</sup> *1 John* 4:18.

through the introduction of the idea of brotherly concern. Through questioning we should discover whether or not he understands and give him the confidence to put before us freely any objection that comes to mind.<sup>54</sup>

This advice assumes the care of a teacher for a student is often the crucial element for learners as they build wholeheartedness for learning. This care is primarily demonstrated by the teacher helping the learner to sharpen mental powers. This honing of understanding may come through teachers' learning from reasoning in ways similar to how Augustine heard Reason teach him when it told him, "In all these round-about argumentations we have simply been exercising your abilities in order for you to become fit."<sup>55</sup> Such caring assistance can enable learners to build chains of reasoning through which they learn wholeheartedness for overcoming fear of the unknown by establishing a foundation among things that are already known.

Augustine also cautions that a teacher exercising reason in becoming fit can unfortunately become an obstacle to student learning. Augustine describes an impatient teacher in this way,

A person studies the precepts of God, drinking them in peacefully from a peaceful source. Then someone approaches him wanting to learn something from him. He storms and rants, accusing the learner of being too slow in learning. In this way, the teacher throws the learner into confusion and as a result the learner understands in a lesser way what the

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<sup>54</sup> *Instructing Beginners in the Faith*, I, 13, 18.

<sup>55</sup> *Soliloquies*, II, 20, 34. There are also discussions of honing mental abilities in *The Teacher*, 21, *On Order*, I, 8, 25 and II, 5, 17 as well as *The Greatness of the Soul*, 25.

teacher himself had the opportunity to listen to in a calmer circumstance.<sup>56</sup>

Building fitness and a foundation are for Augustine always an ongoing project. Thus, learning wholeheartedness for learning continues to build without ever arriving at completion. Trying to foster this ongoing aspect of learning, Augustine instructed fellow learners to, “Use knowledge as a kind of scaffolding to help build the structure of love and understanding, which will last forever even after knowledge destroys itself. Knowledge is useful when it is used to promote love. But it becomes useless, even harmful in itself, if separated from such an end.”<sup>57</sup>

Beyond the metaphor of scaffolding, Augustine saw this development of wholeheartedness (courage to overcome fear and to know the unknown) as scaling a ladder. In his words, “To reach a high spot you need a ladder. To get to the height of greatness, use the ladder of humility.”<sup>58</sup> Humility can be demonstrated through teachers modeling the development of their own wills. Using their experience of confronting fear of the unknown may provide students insights into building a chain of reasoning, using scaffolding or how to scale the ladder of learning.

In describing how a teacher’s care can help a learner, Augustine points to apathy and boredom as at least two more obstacles to wholeheartedness for learning. In dealing with apathy Augustine clearly understands that it is difficult for teachers to interpret the specific source of the apathy for an individual learner because all that any teacher sees is an “unmoved hearer.”<sup>59</sup> A teacher must discern the difference among timid students and confused students described above and those who are truly apathetic – those who find no

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<sup>56</sup> *Sermon 47, 9.*

<sup>57</sup> *Letter 55, 33.*

<sup>58</sup> *Sermon 96, 3.*

<sup>59</sup> *Instructing Beginners in the Faith, I, 13, 18.*

value in what is being taught. Finding something of value to lead the will of an apathetic student to learning is probably among the most difficult tasks for a teacher.

Boredom differs from apathy because the source of the learning obstacle in boredom is familiarity, or perceived familiarity, with what the teacher presents. In describing ways a teacher can engage learners who may already be familiar with some or all of what a teacher is presenting, Augustine suggests,

With them, we ought to be brief and not go on at length in a boring way concerning what they already know. We should touch lightly on these things noting that we believe they are familiar with this thing or that which we are reviewing as things that should be brought to the attention of those who have not learned or are ignorant of them.<sup>60</sup>

Wholeheartedness for learning, learned through chains of reasoning, scaffolding or scaling learning ladders as well as overcoming apathy and boredom, can easily be seen as advancing knowledge discovered in an Augustinian-style Search for Truth. When focused on building a transcendent attitude, developing the courage to overcome fear and learn the unknown as well as fostering caring attitudes, wholeheartedness for learning advances two of the dispositions Keller<sup>61</sup> derives from Augustinian interiority, namely the Capacity for Discernment (the will acting consistently in making and keeping commitments) and Sense of Transcendence (moving beyond the sensate, myself, my own culture and what is merely human). In these dispositions it connects to an Augustinian Learning through Transforming Experiences.

While advancing what has been described thus far, an Augustinian conception of

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 8, 12.

<sup>61</sup> See *Keller*, 210-211.

wholeheartedness for learning also pushes beyond individual learning to learning communities. Speaking about his community relations he observed, “I readily throw myself entirely upon their wholehearted love, when I grow weary from the scandals of the world. I rest in their wholehearted love without any anxiousness.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, the commitment-centered thread of wholeheartedness for learning when connected to right action leads us to the community-centered Augustinian thread of Learning to Dialogue in Unity amid Division.

#### **Augustinian Pedagogy Thread 4: Learning to Dialogue in Unity amid Division**

Followers of Augustine know well the admonition in the *Rule*, “Live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart.”<sup>63</sup> If we focus on the joy of that statement we could simplistically stop here. For in some sense it summarizes the three threads already presented. But, knowing the struggle and difficulties in forming communities, the *Rule* continues on in ways that connect to our fourth thread Learning to Dialogue in Unity amid Division. The *Rule* is basically hopeful document. But, the human limitations Augustine addresses in it reflect his sense of the tragic in the world – even displaying pessimism. Markus sees Augustine’s less than easy struggle to find a unity of truth as a liberating disenchantment. As he puts it,

There is, at any rate, nothing pessimistic about Augustine’s disillusion with the attainability of youthful hopes, or with the euphoric self-assurance of his contemporaries. “Disillusion,” “disenchantment” – the very words seem to suggest liberation: liberation from illusion, from the

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<sup>62</sup> *Letter 73*, 10.

<sup>63</sup> *Rule*, 1,2.

grip of a spell. And that, in the last years of his life, is precisely what disenchantment brought to Augustine.<sup>64</sup>

For Markus, the disenchantment results from Augustine's reflections on his conversions, in our sense his learning transformations. Disenchantment came not only from these transformations, but also from really difficult community experiences where he had trouble maintaining a will for good – a brave heart. His teaching, through writing, placed many annoying and distracting demands on him. At times it seemed everyone wanted him to deal with their problems.<sup>65</sup> When Augustine writes of being “weary from the scandals of the world,”<sup>66</sup> they are real scandals in his community at Hippo resulting from the failure of some of his community to give all they owned to the poor<sup>67</sup> as well as the destructive results from his role in Antoninus becoming Bishop of Fussala.<sup>68</sup>

Yet it was in struggling with these kinds of difficulties that Augustine also found hope as he learned insights into the truth through the unity he shared with others. Even though he can bemoan the demands of writing Augustine can also paradoxically observe, “In our writing we make progress. We are learning every day. We are engaged in research while we dictate, i.e., knocking at the door as we speak. When I can be useful to the community, both by writing and by speaking, I certainly will not keep quiet, if I can help it.”<sup>69</sup>

In his journey in the search for truth, Augustine even found in the different methodological ways we reason sources of unity. For him, “Both in analyzing and in

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<sup>64</sup> R.A. Markus. *Conversion and Disenchantment in Augustine's Spiritual Career* (Saint Augustine Lecture Series 1984). Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1989, 39.

<sup>65</sup> See, *Letter 23A\**, 4.

<sup>66</sup> *Letter 73*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> See *Sermons 355 and 356*.

<sup>68</sup> See *Letters 270 and 20\**

<sup>69</sup> *Sermon 162C*, 15 (Dolbeau 10).

synthesizing it is a unity that I seek, a unity that I love. But when I analyze, I seek a homogenous unit; when I synthesize, I look for an integral unit.”<sup>70</sup> Here a role for the teacher may be helping the learner to see an integrated understanding beyond different methods.

Presentation of ideas can often reflect differences in understanding. As Augustine notes,

A teacher’s presentation should appear as an expression of the mind that generates it. It will affect hearers in differing ways as their frames of mind vary. This is similar to the various ways that hearers affect one another by their simply being together.<sup>71</sup>

Teachers should help students not get caught up in such differences. They should see it as an opportunity to explore the knowledge underlying the presentations. As an example of such a need, Augustine describes finding the unity underlying differing interpretations of Scripture in these words,

When someone says “Moses meant what I say,” yet another responds, “No, he meant what I think,” I believe that I will be answering more religiously when I say, “Why not both, if both are true?” If a third or a fourth or more see additional different meanings, why would we not believe Moses saw all these meanings? For it was through Moses that the one God shaped Sacred Scriptures so that many minds would see different things in them — and all of it true.<sup>72</sup>

For Augustine, a teacher should labor with learners to build a structure of

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<sup>70</sup> *On Order*, II, 18, 48

<sup>71</sup> *Instructing Beginners in the Faith*, II, 23, 41.

<sup>72</sup> *Confessions*, XII, 31, 42.

cohesive interdependence (unity) among the elements in their knowledge. He describes such interdependence in this way,

If the beam and stones of the house were not fitted together by a definite order (if they were not connected to one another in peace, united in love by mutual cohesiveness) no one would ever dare enter this house. We know this because when you see a building in which the beams and stones are solidly joined together, you enter with confidence and do not fear its falling apart.<sup>73</sup>

Augustine also described a way for us to overcome confusion by developing a cohesive interdependence with co-learners when we encounter varying paces of learning in these words,

Let those quicker in understanding show that they walk along the road together with those who are slower. When one is faster than a companion, he has the power to let the slower one catch up, not vice versa. If the faster walks as fast as possible, the slower will not succeed in following. The faster one must slow the pace to avoid abandoning the slower companion.<sup>74</sup>

In this way interdependence can also involve “reciprocity” experienced in the very tension of different paces of learning. Augustine alerts the “faster” learner to ways to find new insights from walking with “slower” learners. According to him,

When repeating the things to beginners becomes boring, we should think of them affectionately like their brother, or mother or father. When we do

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<sup>73</sup> *Sermon 336, 1-2.*

<sup>74</sup> *Expositions on the Psalms 90, 2, 1*

this our empathy with their feelings will make what we say become new for us again. The impact of this sympathy will be so great that when we move listeners by our speaking, we enter into each other's reactions so that hearers speak in us, and we learn in them, what we are teaching.<sup>75</sup>

According to Schuld, Augustine's ability to see goodness and ways of uniting interdependently with others, even in the most tragic circumstances, comes from his understanding of the Christ's sacrifice on the cross. As she posits,

Because "sacrifice" creates these bonds of unity, Augustine declares, the solidarity it shapes through imitative acts of self-emptying love always interacts with another solidarity that binds all persons together, inside and outside of the church — the solidarity of Adam. The community should thus form (and continually "re-form") itself through sacrificial acts of compassion as an outwardly and not just inwardly looking body.<sup>76</sup>

In this way of thinking, the Inner Teacher thrusts us out from our inner life toward solidarity with others. Here there is a connection between Augustine's description of Christ as the Inner Teacher and his understanding of the Whole Christ (*Totus Christus*). In solidarity with others, Augustine learned a unity not of external structures or of just philosophical agreement, but rather of community (communion) with others struggling to learn.

For the teacher dialoguing in solidarity and communion with other learners the struggle is also a reminder that teaching is not status but service. In Augustine's understanding, "My attitude, as I teach you, is to remember and keep in mind my duties

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

<sup>76</sup> Schuld, *op. cit.*, 122.

as a servant. As a result, I speak not as a master but as a minister, not to pupils but to fellow pupils, not to servants but to fellow servants.”<sup>77</sup> He worried that the teacher and even the advanced learner could easily lose sight of this value of service. For him, “The more they think they are learned, the more unteachable they have become. They have become ashamed to learn, because that would mean admitting ignorance. They have none of the necessary humility, which is the one right thing God came to teach.”<sup>78</sup>

Further for Augustine, unity and solidarity come from wholeheartedness (*caritas*) in our service to others. As he says, “Wholeheartedness empowers us to support one another in carrying our burdens. When deer need to cross a river, each one carries on its rear the head of the one behind it while it rests its head on the rear of the one in front of it. Supporting and helping each other, they are thus able to cross wide rivers safely, until they reach the firmness of the land together.”<sup>79</sup>

Burt describes Augustine’s understanding of apparent inequality between teacher and student this way,

When some inequality is present, for example between teacher and pupil, the rule of the superior should be a loving rule. Though there is a real inequality in knowledge, friendship must flow from the equality and goodness shared by all members of the human race because of being equally images of God. The authority that is exercised in the context of such leveling love seeks to remedy the accidental inequality of the inferior and therefore is more a service to the ruled rather than a privilege of the ruler. Augustine believed that the teacher who wishes that the student

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<sup>77</sup> *Sermon 242*, 1.

<sup>78</sup> *Sermon 198*, 13.

<sup>79</sup> *Eighty-three Diverse Questions*, 71, 1.

remain always a learner and never achieve equality in knowledge is not truly a teacher.<sup>80</sup>

Augustine recognized his own work at being a true teacher when he described the change in his relationship with one of his students who became an intellectual friend. As he put it, “I could not restrain my joy in seeing this young man, the son of my very dear friend, becoming my son also. And, still more in seeing him growing and developing into a friend when I had despaired of being able to cultivate in him a taste even for the ordinary study of literature.”<sup>81</sup>

As vulnerable strugglers in learning we have a never ending basis for communion with other learners. For Augustine, our individual transforming experiences of dialoguing with the Inner Teacher are an impetus, a source, moving us beyond ourselves in our search for truth, uniting us with others in a community-centered dialogue despite our differences and, enabling us through wholehearted solidarity to overcome our common weakness as we learn together.

### **Patchwork Quilt: Augustinian Learners and Learning Communities**

I hope that in what I have presented you can see the threads I have outlined and ways that they can connect together. Yet, my presentation would not be true to Augustine if the threads were too tightly sewn together. Each learner and each learning community must weave them together in their own way. Weaving, for Augustine, is a work of necessity along with sowing, plowing, planting, sailing, milling and cooking.<sup>82</sup> Weaving can also have a spiritual importance because Augustine adds for the Christian

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<sup>80</sup> D. X. Burt, O.S.A. “*Let Me Know Myself...*” *Reflections on the Prayer of Saint Augustine.*, 74.

<sup>81</sup> *On Order*, I, 6, 16.

<sup>82</sup> See, *Sermon 84*, 1.

the works of mercy found in scripture to these works of necessity.<sup>83</sup>

When we weave the threads, the characteristics, of Augustinian pedagogy together what do we have? While tapestries are woven, such an image conveys a tightness of weaving or a singularity of design that is not true to the openness of Augustine's thoughts on learning. For me an image for this weaving is the American phenomenon of patchwork quilts. These are bed coverings, like blankets, that 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> women in rural America created. These women took available scraps of materials and made small patches of designs. They then wove these patches together into warm bed coverings for cold winters that are now considered works of art. In purpose and shape these quilts were the same. In design and variety of patches they reflected the individuality of a single creator or a group of creators in the way they gave careful attention to the placement of the colors to achieve an orderly and lively design. As they have been passed down from generation to generation they have been renewed and recreated.

To judge whether the weaving of the patchwork quilts we make of our pedagogy, our curriculums and our programs can be judged as Augustinian pedagogy, we need to evaluate their reflection of the values and threads that Augustine challenges us to embody. Even though there is no ideal model to compare our efforts with, there are clear questions that emanate out of the characteristics we derive from Augustine.

When we attempt to judge whether our work embodies a learner-centered thread of Learning through Transforming Experiences, we can ask ourselves questions such as: Does our work value the experience of learners? How does it teach them to learn from the transformations they experience? Are our efforts advancing each learner's dialogue

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<sup>83</sup> See, *Sermon 211A*, 1.

with the Inner Teacher? How are learners developing the dispositions of a desire for authenticity, a capacity for discernment and a sense of transcendence?

In trying to assess how much our work involves a knowledge-centered thread of Learning to Search for Truth, our questions can include: How does our pedagogy and curriculum move learners from depending on the truth of authority to the authority of truth? How are learners advancing in the development of their reasoning powers? How significant is liberal education in building the learner's knowledge base? In what ways is doubt used as an opportunity for learning?

As we investigate the strength of a commitment-centered thread of Learning Wholeheartedness for Learning in our work, we can ask: How effective are learners in overcoming their learning fears and in exploring the unknown? Have learners effectively built chains of reasoning, used scaffolding and/or scaled the ladder of humility in ways that enable them to advance their own learning? To what extent do our programs engage learners to overcome boredom and apathy? How committed to the learning community are our learners?

The ways we find the level of a community-centered thread of Learning to Dialogue in Unity amid Division may involve questions like: To what extent does our work lead learners to find connections among the things and ways they learn? Do learners work interdependently? How do learners demonstrate reciprocity in their learning? How effective are learners in developing a solidarity which enables them to overcome their individual difficulties? Does their learning foster solidarity with others beyond their learning community? As learners advance, how much are students able to move toward equality in learning with their teachers?

Answers to these and other related questions will yield much for Augustinian educators to ponder and to work on. Even if our own lives and our learning communities are truly woven from the threads (characteristics) of an Augustinian pedagogy, we will always find that answers to our questions will reveal a need for improvement. What we do will always have an Augustinian incompleteness. Yet, when the lack of achieving an ideal troubles us, like Augustine we should find this a liberating disenchantment. Freed from any perfectionism of other models of pedagogy, we should find hope in what we have accomplished and even in what is left to do. We should take seriously the advice of Augustine, “On earth we are always travelers, always on the go. Do not grow complacent with what you are. Where you have become pleased with yourself, there you get stuck. If you say ‘That’s enough,’ you are finished. Always add something more. Keep on walking. Always forge ahead.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Sermon 169*, 18.