



***Catholic and Augustinian Heritage
PART III: Educational Foundations***

***Cracked Pots and Brave Hearts:
Augustine on Teaching and Learning***

by

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With deepest gratitude to:

Joseph T. Kelley whose incredibly deep Augustinian sensibilities have invited me to discover Augustine the Learner for myself.

My parents William and Julia McCloskey who taught me the only real limitations to learning are the obstacles we ourselves create.

Catherine Quinn, P.B.V.M., who in my earliest schooling inspired in me what I have now come to know as an Augustinian desire for wholeheartedness in learning.

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This essay¹ intends to introduce a reader to the ideas of Saint Augustine of Hippo on teaching and learning (pedagogy). In his own life, Augustine used learned experience as a flame that ignited his teaching.² This overview attempts to give the reader a flavor of that experience so that the learner can apply it to his or her own life as well as to spur further reading in Augustine.

One can easily ask the relevance of Augustine's thought for 21st century learners and teachers. What can a 5th century Roman citizen from the province of North African have to offer for a contemporary understanding of how best to learn and/or teach? Anton Pegis, a scholar of Saint Augustine, struggled more than 50 years ago with the meaning of Augustine's thought for his audience. As he noted,



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?³

Pegis' ideas are about the whole of Augustine's thought. When applied to his thought about teaching and learning, Augustine can be seen as having a practical pedagogy or pedagogy of praxis. Such pedagogy strives to arrive at action through reflection on experience taking into account accumulated wisdom. Also in such pedagogy, human understanding of wisdom is an open rather than closed understanding and, experience is the starting point. Thus, this pedagogy is open to the possibility that what we now learn may become part of the accumulated wisdom that we will use in our future reflection.

To evoke experiences of Drucker's notion that for Augustine "teaching is best understood through a metaphor of pointing,"⁴ each section of this presentation contains an experiential reflection question in an effort to have this reading point to further development in the learning (and teaching) of the reader. To "point" toward envisioning implications of Augustine's thought, considerations are connected to visual depictions of Augustine teaching in the frescoes of Benozzo Gozzoli⁵. To add to the experiential character of this study, the use of Augustine's own words⁶ is an attempt to give the reader something of a first-hand hearing of Augustine's thought.

To understand this pedagogy of praxis with as much of our ways of understanding as possible, we will use, as an organizing framework for Augustine on teaching and learning, the three observations Pegis makes about Augustine's thought about the love of God, i.e., it is

... not a doctrine but a life,
not an abstract analysis but a journey,
not a theory but an experience⁷

... *Not a Doctrine but a Life*...

To begin we need to know that the core of Saint Augustine's understanding of learning (and teaching) is a deep appreciation of life

¹ This text is a revised version of a presentation at the January 2002 Cassiciacum Conference of the Center for Augustinian Study and Legacy at Merrimack College. Revisions derived from input given by conference participants, particularly from Professor Steven Scherwitzky on a literary reading of Augustine. Insights from the notion of literary reading enabled the development of a pedagogical reading. Other input came from students and faculty at Merrimack College as well as others working in education at other Augustinian institutions. Further detailed input came from Professors Donald X. Burt, O.S.A., and George P. Lawless, O.S.A. (on clarifying my understanding of Augustine) as well as Professor Gina Vega and Casey Coburn (on stylistics). Still, any problems of argumentation and/or presentation remain purely the responsibility of the author.

² *Confessions*, IV, 8, 13.

³ Anton C. Pegis, "The Mind of Saint Augustine." *Medieval Studies* 6 (1944), 8. The italics are from Pegis, but the three indentations are the work of this author.

⁴ J.P. Drucker, "Teaching as Pointing in 'The Teacher'." *Augustinian Studies* 28-2 (1997), 132.

⁵ The images here are from Benozzo Gozzoli's frescos found in Chiesa di Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano, Italy. These frescoes are among 21 European cycles of Augustine's life from the 14th and 15th century. "With unmatched emphasis, the[se] frescoes portray Augustine as teacher and scholar." (D.C. Ahl, *Benozzo Gozzoli*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, 122.

⁶ To make Saint Augustine's words more open to the hearing of the reader, quotes from Augustine are presented in italics rather than within the usual quotation marks. The phraseology and sentence structure is the author's attempt to render Augustine's thought in more accessible English rather than a close following of the sentence structure of the Latin.

⁷ Pegis, *op. cit.*, 8.

experience of ongoing personal struggle with transformation.⁸ While teachers may assist us, the transformation only becomes “real” learning when learners can integrate learning within themselves. From such a perspective, all education is a form of self-education. Augustine reflected on his struggle in his transformation when he wrote to Bishop Valerius, who believed Augustine was ready to teach as a priest. Augustine requested more time to learn: *It is true that I did not know earlier how greatly I was unfit for the arduous work which now upsets and crushes my spirit.... You think I am qualified, but I know myself better. Surely, I would not know myself if I had not learned through experience.*⁹ His understanding reflects his experience of learning as a struggle in transformation that is never completed in this world. As he observed, *Many people promise themselves that they will live a holy life. But, they fail because they go into the furnace and come out cracked.*¹⁰ In a sense, Augustine’s struggle is coming to terms with the reality of being a “cracked pot” always working at becoming better in his learning. By extension, all learners are “cracked pots” being always transformed by our ongoing learning.

Learning Transforms the Learner

If early education were the only predictor of direction one might later take toward teaching, then Augustine would not have become the great teacher pictured by Western Civilization. As he recounted in the *Confessions*, his education in North Africa in his hometown of Thagaste, as well as at Madaura and Carthage, was filled with bad experiences. He was educated as his middle-class father wanted. Augustine’s opinion was not part of the decision-making. At one point, because his family did not have the tuition, he had to stay out of school for a year until a patron provided him a scholarship. Augustine did not like all of his studies. In particular, he despised the study of Greek which he never fully mastered. He was even subjected to corporal punishment. As he tells us, *Being worthless, I could not see the use of the things I was sent to school to learn. But if I was lazy in learning, I was soundly beaten.... But the laziness of adults is called business, the laziness of boys, exactly like this, is punished by those same adults.*¹¹ In this corporal punishment Augustine experienced a teaching that

⁸ While the word conversion is often associated with Augustine in relation to his becoming a Christian, the terms transform and transformation are chosen here reflecting the pedagogical dimensions of this argumentation. Their use is a pedagogical parallel to their use by H. Richard Neibuhr in describing Augustine’s teachings in his classic work, *Christ and Culture*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1951.

⁹ Letter 21, 13.

¹⁰ *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.

¹¹ *Confessions* I, 9, 14-15.

“opposes itself to a student’s will, instead of educating that very will.”¹² As



Consider Positive and Negative Impacts Learning in School Had on Augustine

he put it, *The process of learning, with its punishments, is so painful that children often endure the punishments which are designed to compel their learning, rather than submit to the process of learning.*¹³

But not all was terrible. Augustine was a bright enough student. This enabled him to go beyond the education provided in his town. He was able to go on first to the larger town of Madaura and then to the city of Carthage. He had the

advantages of ability and opportunity to expand his possibilities of learning. In Book One of the *Confessions* Augustine describes how he could use ability and opportunity in the face of “two very different styles of teaching and two very different mechanisms of learning: fear-inspiring compulsion and free curiosity or desire.”¹⁴ This is not a distinction between the positive of curiosity and the negative of compulsion. Both are negative because for Augustine curiosity is always a vice.¹⁵ “If curiosity and desire, on the one hand, and fear and compulsion, on the other, are both mechanisms by which one can learn, Augustine also sets them in a social context which constitutes a third principle: imitation.”¹⁶ This is more than a social context. It is using ability and opportunity to take a more positive middle ground. While Augustine moved to the positive of imitation away from negatives, he was not unique in seeing imitation (mimesis) as a principle of learning in his education.¹⁷ “Perhaps what is most striking about Augustine’s account of his own teachers is the ever-present disjunctions between their activities and

¹² D. R. Baldwin. Models of Teaching and Models of Learning in the *Confessions* in K. Paffenroth and K. L. Hughes, *Augustine and Liberal Education*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000, 16.

¹³ *City of God* XXI, 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See J.J. O’Donnell, *Augustine Confessions II Commentary on Books 1-7*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, 150.

¹⁶ Baldwin, *op. cit.*, 18.

¹⁷ See, H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, translated by George Lamb. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956, 269-271.

his own complex path of learning.”¹⁸ Even though Augustine describes a talent for learning he does not describe any early teachers who stood out as clear models for the best way to learn.

Despite any shortcomings in his education, Augustine had positive learning experiences. In his reflection on the death of a friend, Augustine captured the happy moments he found in the intellectual friendships of his school days: *My soul found all manner of joy when I was in their company — to talk and to laugh and to be kind to each other — to read engaging books together, to go from the lightest joking to talk of the deepest things and back again — to differ without discord, as I might differ with myself, and when on the rarest occasion disagreement arose, to find it highlights the sweetness of our normal agreement — to teach or to learn from each other — to be impatient for those absent and welcome them with joy when they return — these and similar things, emanating from our hearts as we gave and received affection, shown in our faces, our voices, our eyes, and a thousand other gratifying ways, ignited a flame which fused our very souls together and made the many of us one.*¹⁹ With intellectual friends he found the joys of freedom and leisure in their learning on the way to adulthood. Even more, they spurred each other on in their spiritual development. As Hadot notes about the role of friendship in education at the time of Augustine,

Above all, friendship itself was, as it were, the spiritual exercise *par excellence*: “Each person was to tend towards creating the atmosphere in which hearts could flourish. The main goal was to be happy, and mutual affection and the confidence with which they relied upon each other contributed more than anything else to this happiness.”²⁰

Further, the support of these intellectual friends helped him find his way to the status his father and family expected. This was a status even he had grown to desire. The means to this status became the study of rhetoric as preparation for teaching and later the work of a rhetor.

In addition to intellectual friendship, Cicero’s book, *Hortensius*, became a crucial element in Augustine’s progress. He described the transformation it brought to his learning in these words: *That particular book is the Hortensius containing an exhortation to philosophy. It very definitely changed my ways of feeling, modified my prayers to You, O Lord, and gave me new purpose and ambition. All of a sudden I saw all the vanity*

¹⁸ Baldwin, *Op.Cit.*, 23.

¹⁹ *Confessions*, IV, 8, 13.

²⁰ P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited by A.I. Davidson, translated by M. Chase. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995, 89. The quotation Hadot cites is from A-J. Festugiere, *Epicure et ses dieux*, Paris, 1946, 69.

*I had hoped in as worthless, and I longed after everlasting wisdom with an incredibly intense desire. I started a journey upwards.*²¹ In this description Augustine showed that, in addition to his mind, the desire in his heart had become fully engaged in the work of learning. This experience at the age of eighteen can be seen as his first transformation in becoming the teacher that history remembers. Here Augustine began a sort of self-education by taking personal responsibility for his own learning. The *Hortensius* was not just a beautiful book for him. As Marrou notes, it “awakened in his soul that ardent love of wisdom (for he so loves to render the fair name of Philosophy by its root meaning) that search for truth which was to inspire the whole of his life.”²²

AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION QUESTION

Learning Transforms the Learner

*In the light of my own learning experience,
how do my learning experiences inspire me
to commit myself to learn?*

The Teacher Finds a Teacher

Through the *Hortensius*, Augustine began a “journey upwards.”²³ But it was not easy. As Marrou describes the journey, “Thirteen years were to pass, filled with the most complex adventures, moral, religious and intellectual, before Augustine was to submit, by baptism, to conforming his life to the ideal of asceticism which the thinker’s vocation implied for a man of the ancient world.”²⁴ Augustine was a needy scholar. With his father’s death he became head of his family. As time went on, he had a common law wife and a child to support as well. While philosophy “inspired” his mind, the need to earn a living created the need for securing a profession. His inspiration would be balanced by the “perspiration” of the work of teaching to make ends meet.

During his studies at Carthage, in addition to Cicero, Augustine became enamored of Manichaeism, a religious movement begun in Persia by the prophet Mani. This religion was attractive to Augustine because of its dualistic explanation of the relation between good and evil. While a religion in its own right, Manichaeism in Augustine’s time also had

²¹ *Confessions*, III, 4, 7.

²² H. Marrou, *Saint Augustine and His Influence through the Ages*, translated by P. Hepborne-Scott. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957, 18.

²³ *Confessions*, III, 4, 7.

²⁴ H. Marrou, *Saint Augustine and his Influence through the Ages*, 18.

connections to Christianity. This move to Manichaeism was one of the ways he sought further understanding. O'Connell sees Augustine's connection to Manichaeism as another aspect of his intellectual transformation -- "abandoning the 'superstitious' blind-faith religion he had encountered in North Africa's *Catholica*, and stepping upward to a type of Christianity which proclaimed, whatever be its other shortcomings, that faith was meant to lead onward to understanding."²⁵ In this way, taking up Manichaeism seems to be something of a logical extension of his intellectual conversion to the seeking of understanding emanating from his reading of the *Hortensius*. Augustine was trying to make sense of human nature with respect to understanding good and evil as well as rational thought and sexual drives. In the syncretism of Manichaeism, he found a means which seemed to enable him to connect conflicting insights.

Following the completion of his studies, Augustine put himself to work as a teacher, first in his hometown of Thagaste and then in Carthage, the city of his higher studies. In both places he experienced a difficult time teaching students uninterested in learning. Augustine later recalled the physical threats he experienced in Carthage from students who wanted results without putting in their own efforts. Hoping to find a better class of students who would want to learn from his teaching, Augustine used his Manichean contacts to move to Rome. The move enabled him to escape the physical threats of his students in Africa. However, the "better class" of Roman students left his classes just before the tuition was due. As a result, Augustine exchanged physical threats for the threat of poverty.

During his time as a Manichean, Augustine waited to meet a true teacher of this religion. His friends assured him that the teacher Faustus



Visualize the Struggles with Students Augustine Experienced as a Teacher

²⁵ R. J. O'Connell, S.J. *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's Confessions*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1996, 52.

was just the one to answer all his questions and doubts. After meeting Faustus, Augustine was mightily disappointed. While Faustus' form of presentation was impressive, his content lacked the substance Augustine sought. Continuing his search for wisdom, Augustine moved away from the Manicheans. Before he made a complete break, he was able to use his contacts to move first to Milan and then out of teaching to become the official Rhetor of the emperor. The Rhetor gave public orations extolling the virtues of the emperor and the good work of the imperial court. This was the major means of public political communication of the day. In assuming this position, Augustine became a part of the imperial court at Milan.



Imagine the Inner Struggle Augustine Had as He "Calmly" Picked Up Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans.

From outward appearances Augustine had found success. For a person from the distant provinces (with an accent to match) rather than a cultured offspring of the city of Rome, Augustine had gone pretty far. Yet, his questions and doubts remained. Drifting away from Manichaeism, he explored the philosophy of the Skeptics but found little satisfaction in it. Neo-Platonism also gave him some insights but not enough to answer all his questions. His health became affected by his questions, doubts and need for money. In all, he was foundering. At his mother's behest he went to hear Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, preach. In contrast to Faustus' presentation of Manichaeism with great form and little content, Ambrose's preaching of Christianity challenged Augustine's thinking even

though the presentation was not as elegant. The challenge led Augustine to give the Christianity of his youth another look. From Ambrose's presentations, Christianity seemed a more sophisticated way of thinking than Augustine had judged it to be.

His exploration of Christianity as part of his search for wisdom still left Augustine struggling with questions and doubts until one afternoon in the garden of a rented house in Milan. As he reported it, he was reflecting on Christian ideas when he heard children near the garden saying *Tolle Lege!*

Tolle Lege!, i.e., *Pick It Up and Read It! Pick It Up and Read It!* In that moment he took up the Letter of Paul to the Romans and experienced an illumination of understanding: *I seized it, opened it and read silently the passage that my eyes first saw: "Not in dissipation and drunkenness, nor in debauchery and lewdness, nor in arguing and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires." I had no wish to read further, and no need. In the instant that I ended the sentence, it was as if a light of utter certainty lit up my heart, and the darkness of doubt vanished.*²⁶

In taking up the Scriptures, Augustine found the teacher he had been searching for. Christ had become his preeminent teacher. This experience with the Scriptures brought Augustine to find the teacher working within him. He began to say to himself, as he would later encourage others, *Do not look outside. Return to yourself. Truth resides inside a person. When you discover that you can change, transcend yourself.... Go where the light of reason is illuminated.*²⁷ Enthused by this experience of illumination (enlightenment) Augustine sought to learn more and to throw himself into becoming a Christian. Augustine gladly did this by gathering with friends to prepare to become a Christian. They gathered at Cassiciacum, a villa in the countryside outside of Milan. Augustine described the change not only as intellectual but also as physical, in this way: *That summer, my lungs had begun to give way due to the strains of teaching. I breathed with difficulty. The pain in my chest showed how they were affected. They no longer let me talk with any strength for any length of time.... But when the full reason for taking the time to meditate on how You are the Lord came to me and I resolved to take it... [Vericundus] very generously offered his house since we were going to be in the country ... at Cassiciacum, where, away from the troubles of the world, we rested in You.... When we were baptized all anxiety about our past life went away.*²⁸ The experience led not only to baptism but to his official resignation from the post of Imperial Rhetor. This was difficult for Augustine because he had worked hard to achieve this position. Not only had he moved to be close to sources of power, he had also given up his common law wife. Unfortunately, she had not fit into the status his ambitions had led him in pursuing this Imperial rank.

The experience of his conversion in Milan and preparation at Cassiciacum for baptism became the second step in Augustine's transformation into a great teacher. According to O'Meara "The conversion of Augustine, of his intellect which could not resist the truth, and of his will

which could not resist the good, was accomplished."²⁹ He could not resist the Inner Teacher that he found in Christ.

AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION QUESTION
The Teacher Finds a Teacher
In the light of my own learning experience,
how do I transcend my desires and passions to find teachings
which bring lasting understanding?

Learning Transforms the Teacher

In this next phase of his life, Augustine became a teacher within a community setting of friends, relatives and two students whom he was tutoring. His writings like *The Teacher* and *The Happy Life* now reflected the community dialogues that emerged as his primary mode of teaching.



Think About the Ways Augustine Enjoyed Learning by Dialoguing with Ambrose

According to Kevane, these community dialogues arose out of "A common life of lay intellectuals, cultivating the new type of teaching program which Augustine has begun to draft in theory and to put into practice at the villa of Cassiciacum when he was preparing for his baptism."³⁰ After baptism, Augustine and his community of friends made their way back through the port of Rome at Ostia (where his mother died) to his hometown of Thagaste in North Africa. In Thagaste, Augustine and his friends established a lay Christian community under his leadership. Finding comfort in teaching through dialogue, Augustine was able to master both his doubts and his health problems.

He discovered an ease in this form of teaching that he could not find in his earlier teaching of rhetoric.

Teaching through community dialogue seemed to be emerging as the

²⁶ *Confessions*, VIII, 12, 29.
²⁷ *True Religion*, 39,72.
²⁸ *Confessions* IX, 2, 4; 3, 5 and 6, 14.

²⁹ J. J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine: The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind up to His Conversion*. 2nd edition. Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 2001, 183.
³⁰ E. Kevane, *Catechesis in Augustine*. Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1989, 8-9.

direction for Augustine's future. His reputation as a Christian teacher began to grow. Fearing he would be taken away from this pleasure, he avoided towns where Christians were searching for a bishop to lead them as chief teacher. He was able to avoid the call to be a bishop until he went to the city of Hippo Regius. There he planned to meet someone who might be encouraged to join the Thagaste community. Since Valerius was still active as Bishop of Hippo, Augustine thought it was safe to enter the cathedral there for the celebration of the Eucharist. However, that was the day Valerius chose to raise the question of succession. At that time in history, the local Christian community chose its own bishop. In response to Valerius' concern, the community seized Augustine as successor to Valerius. Augustine recalled the situation more than 30 years later in these words: *I feared the office of bishop so much that when my reputation became important among "servants of God," I avoided anywhere I knew they did not have a bishop. While I was on my guard...I came to this city to visit a friend, whom I thought I could bring to God in that he might join us in the monastery. Even though I felt safe, because the place already had a bishop, I was seized. I was made a priest...and from there, I became your bishop.*³¹

For the third time in his life Augustine was "seized." First, the beauty of the *Hortensius* seized his intellect to seek wisdom. The second time the Letter to the Romans seized his heart and mind to become a Christian. Third, the mob of Christians at Hippo seized him, against his will, to become a priest (in anticipation of becoming bishop). As the first two times changed Augustine's approach to teaching, the Christians at Hippo seizing him became the third step in Augustine's transformation toward teaching excellence. As Cary interprets this change,

After a few years writing philosophical dialogues and the occasional polemic against the Manichaeans, his usefulness to the Church was recognized and he was ordained priest against his will. Submitting his will to the will of the church, he henceforth put his talents and his restless pursuit of truth to work in the service of his neighbors in the church. He became a different kind of teacher — a bishop, a preacher of sermons to the illiterate and a writer of treatises and polemics for an audience of churchmen around the Mediterranean. And quite contrary to his original plans, he became the most important teacher in Western Christendom.³²

Even though he had concerns about being a teacher outside of the community dialogue, Augustine began to preach and teach as the

³¹ *Sermon 355*, 2.

³² P. Cary, *Study as Love: Augustinian Vision and Catholic Education* in K. Paffenroth and K. L. Hughes, *op. cit.*, 70.

community leader in more traditional ways. Yet, he was able to do it because his teaching was rooted in a community experience of dialogue with his co-learners through the "office" of bishop. Augustine reflected on this relation when he observed, *Despite my appearing to stand in a higher place than you, it is simply for the convenience of projecting my voice better. In fact you are in the higher place to pass judgment. It is I who am being judged. We bishops are called teachers, but in many things we ourselves seek a teacher. Surely we do not want to be regarded as master teachers.*³³

On the surface, Augustine's role as Christian teacher and author appeared to be a lone master teacher with followers at his feet. If that were so, it would have required a reversion to his earlier role as teacher and rhetor, where he sought status and renown. As Burt observes, "Augustine believed there was nothing wrong in accepting and even seeking such positions [of authority]. He believed those with the necessary talents had an obligation to seek higher office so they might be of service to others."³⁴ Augustine's description of the fear of a reversion to seeking status and renown demonstrated that he had been transformed. Augustine described the tension he experienced in moving into this leadership role as bishop-teacher: *My place as your head frightens me, but what I share with you comforts me. I am a bishop set over you, but together with you I am a Christian. The first is the title of the office I have assumed, the second is a grace; the first is a danger, the second is salvation. The office seems like a storm tossing us about in a raging sea. But when we remember who redeemed us by His blood, it seems we enter the safety of a harbor in the stillness of that thought. Even though this office is personally hard work, the common benefit gives us rest.*³⁵

In dealing with himself as a "cracked pot" called to teach, Augustine had become a teacher who shared his understandings with a community while still remaining a member who learned through the community in which he taught. At one point he even cautions his community to be careful about any trust they put in him. He talked about himself when he observed, *Augustine is a bishop in the Catholic Church. Having his own burden, he will have to give an account to God. If he is bad, he knows it. But if he is good he is not the foundation of all my hope. Above all I have learned in the Catholic Church not to set my hope on any human being. Since you do*

³³ *Sermon 23*, 1.

³⁴ D. X. Burt, *op. cit.*, 61. The italics are Burt's.

³⁵ *Sermon 340*, 1.

not set your hopes on human beings, it is understandable that you reproach us for our human faults.³⁶

Further, his writings testify to his change. Kevane reflects that after Augustine's ordination, "It is a fact that his writings manifest from this point a marked change of character. They are simply saturated with Scripture and show that mastery of the Bible in teaching, explaining and defending Christian doctrine which makes Augustine the greatest of the Fathers of the Church. The period of his philosophical dialogues and treatises is over. He has entered into that new kind of catechetical teaching to which his *De catechizandis rudibus* is the abiding witness among his works, and all his writing from this point on are distinctly pastoral and catechetical in character."³⁷ This is the teacher whose powerful voice has come down through history. It is this teacher that reflects the truest nature of Augustinian pedagogy.

AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION QUESTION

Learning Transforms the Teacher

In the light of my own learning experience,
how do my learning experiences empower me
to share what I have learned with others?

... Not an Abstract Analysis but a Journey ...

As Pegis goes beyond identifying Augustine's thought as "not a doctrine but a life,"³⁸ Augustine's life is more than a series of struggles through transformations in his learning. His struggles evidence a level of vulnerability in Augustine much of the study of his thought does not reflect. As a learner appreciative of the reality of being a "cracked pot" Augustine's analysis of his experiences is informed by the journey of his life. Through further reflection on the impact of Augustine's transformational experiences we will also be able to see his thought as "not an abstract analysis but a journey."³⁹

Learning as a Restless Journey

In our review of his life we have seen how Augustine was transformed. But, his life experience is not ours. What then can we glean from Augustine's experience that we can use to develop our own learning? First

³⁶ *Expositions on the Psalms* 36, 3, 20.

³⁷ Kevane, *op. cit.*, 13-14. The translation for *De catechizandis rudibus* is *Religious Instruction of the Uninstructed*.

³⁸ Pegis, *op. cit.*, 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

and foremost, Augustine's intellectual travels were for him a restless journey. He even began the *Confessions* with this thought when he wrote, *You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.*⁴⁰ Augustine knew keenly the difference between a journey toward meaning and understanding and a purposeless wandering. While everyone's learning journey is life-long, he saw that we need to be making steady progress rather than meandering. As he expressed it, *On earth we*



Consider How Augustine's Travels Helped Him Experience Learning as a Journey

*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.*⁴¹

For Augustine, a meaningful restless journey is a pilgrimage, a sacred action making an individual into the person he learns to become. The journey involves daily personal growth. Or as he

put it, *It is the daily work of Christians to make progress toward God, and to rejoice in God or his gifts always. The time of our pilgrimage, our wandering in exile, is very short, while in our home country time does not exist. After all, between eternity and time there is a considerable difference. Here you are required to show devotion; there you take rest. Thus, like good traders, let us note every day how well we have done, what profit we have made. Not only must we be attentive in listening, but also vigilant in action. This is a school in which God is the only teacher. It demands good students, those who are enthusiastic in attendance, not those who play hooky.*⁴²

While Augustine saw Christ as Teacher in his life of learning, the journey was not something imposed externally from on high. Rather it was journeying to find the Inner Teacher as the connection to ultimate Truth. In

⁴⁰ *Confessions*, I, 1, 1.

⁴¹ *Sermon 169*, 18.

⁴² *Sermon 16A*, 1.

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. The sound we make is useless.*⁴³ We may go from place to place, but the journeying outside is associated with the journey within. Keller sees this movement as part of Augustinian interiority whose "value needs to be ransomed."⁴⁴ For him this attention to inner life⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

To benefit most fully from this inner life journey with the Inner Teacher, Keller identifies three dispositions⁴⁷ the learner must cultivate:

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).

When we cultivate these learning dispositions in dialogue with the Inner Teacher, we have begun to apply Augustine's experience to our own.

AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION QUESTION

Learning as a Restless Journey

*In the light of my own learning experience,
how do I make significant progress on my learning journey?*

⁴³ Tractate on I John III, 12.

⁴⁴ See M.A. Keller, Human formation and Augustinian Anthropology in *Elements of an Augustinian formation*. Rome: Pubblicazione Agostiniane, 2001, 208.

⁴⁵ The term "inner life" rather than "interiority" is being used to convey the active notion of inner life/interiority. Sometimes interiority can be too easily connected to the secluded life of a hermit.

⁴⁶ See Keller, *op. cit.*, 210.

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, 210-211.

Learning as a Journey with Others

When correctly understood, Augustine's learning journey can never be



Discuss with Someone Else How Augustine Benefited From Learning with Others

viewed as a solitary experience. If Augustine had never been transformed beyond his love of wisdom (sparked by his reading of the *Hortensius*), a solitary journey might seem to be the true way. But the community aspects in the second and third steps in his transformations make clear that, in Augustinian pedagogy, learning involves working with others. In our learning journey we can help each other in our struggle to learn. As Augustine observed: *While we are walking, one walks more slowly and another walks with greater speed. But both continue walking. Those who are falling behind*

*should be rallied. Those who are turning to go back should be called to continue on. Those who go astray should be led back to the road. Slow walkers should be urged on. Fast walkers should be imitated. Those who are making no progress are stuck on the way. Those, who go from a better purpose back to a worse one they had abandoned, have turned and gone backward. Those who have abandoned the faith have strayed from the way totally. Let us walk with the slow ones behind those walking faster. But, still with those who are walking.*⁴⁸

Augustine also saw his journey with others as his own continuation in school with the Inner Teacher. As he put it, *I must tremble in the face of your judgments, Lord, because your truth is neither mine, nor his, nor hers. Rather, it belongs to everyone whom you call to share it in communion with you. Likewise, you give us the terrible warning not to take truth as personal property, for fear we will find ourselves deprived of it.*⁴⁹ Likewise he noted that, *Truth is the inheritance of all, and thus is not the particular property of anyone. What is in common belongs to everyone so that all who come to it may use it and be enlightened. It is equally distant and equally close to everyone.*⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Sermon 306B, 1.

⁴⁹ Confessions XII, 25, 34.

⁵⁰ Expositions on the Psalms, 75, 17.

Journeying with others enabled Augustine to travel the full circle: a flow from outward learning into the Inner Teacher and back out in learning to live and work with others in meaningful ways. In Augustine's conception, this social dimension of the journey demanded attention to order, not as a rigid imposition but rather as the discovery of a harmony that enabled one to journey toward more effective learning. His practice of going inward to the Inner Teacher led him to an understanding of the nature of society itself. As he described it, *Love is the highest human law. Human beings, who both desire and ought to live in harmony, best respect this law when they connect themselves in social relationships where no one monopolizes more than one relationship, and a common social life of the greatest number is best fostered by distributing, as widely as possible, many different relationships.*⁵¹ This social order was all the more profound for Augustine because he did not perceive our individual learning as radically changing the world. Rather, he saw it as changing how we view or understand the world together with others. For Augustine, in a world where good and evil do not exist in separate realms, true understanding is being able to see the two and to differentiate between them in a world where we confront them mixed together. The complexities of this confrontation can be understood through his images of the City of God and the City of Man. In a world where both cities coexist, we journey with others learning both right relationships and wrong relationships. It can be difficult sorting out the two by ourselves because *The temporal progress of these two cities mix together from beginning to end — both enjoy temporal goods or suffer temporal ills in similar ways. But differing in faith, hope and love, they will be separated at the final judgment where each will receive its end.*⁵²

AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION QUESTION

Learning as a Journey with Others

In the light of my own learning experience,

how can learning with others

help me to learn more than by learning alone?

Learning to Navigate through Knowledge toward Wisdom

Augustine viewed the learning journey as significant in his relation to God. This extended beyond the journey itself to the things he learned. As he expressed it, *Through him we move toward him, i.e., through knowledge toward wisdom, without ever turning aside from one and the same Christ,*

⁵¹ *City of God*, XV, 16.

⁵² *City of God*, XVIII, 54.

“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
(Colossians 2:3)⁵³

Despite the unity of its connection to God, knowledge in its many forms can often seem to us as being at odds with itself. The more one knows, the more confused one may become. Augustine understood this well. Making sense among the many things he learned and stored in



Reflect on Augustine's Navigation Through Various Forms of Knowledge Toward Wisdom

memory was difficult. Memories of things learned did not, at times, come together well on their own for him. As he described it, *I pass over the lawns and spacious structures of memory where treasures of all the images the senses have stored there.... Some things summoned from memory are instantly available while others require a longer search of recesses less penetrable. During such summoning jumbled memories flit out on their own, interrupting the search for what we want. It is like they are, pestering you, saying: “Aren't we what you were seeking?” My heart draws the strength to wave these interruptions off from my memory's gaze until the dim thing I sought arrives at last, from fresh depths.*

*Yet some things are brought up easily, in proper sequence, from beginning to end, and returned to memory in the same order. I experience recall at will whenever I recite a passage by heart.*⁵⁴

Navigation, travel and destination are not, for Augustine, simply problems among things learned (knowledge), but also among the different ways in which we recognize things learned. *It is in three things that an image is recognized, namely memory, understanding and will. In this I mean the understanding we have as we think, that is, when things are recalled that were available in memory but not being thought about. Our thought is formed from such images. The will, or love, or esteem I mean is the one that joins the child (understanding) to its parent (memory) and is in*

⁵³ *The Trinity*, XIII, 24.

⁵⁴ *Confessions*, X, 8, 12.

a way common to them both.⁵⁵ Augustine saw his navigation through various philosophies as tough sea travel. For him philosophers are seafarers⁵⁶ needing strong navigational skills because *God or nature or necessity or our own will or some mixture of these or even all of them together have cast us into this world as into a stormy sea, accidentally and indiscriminately, as it were.*⁵⁷

For Augustine, as we navigate through the stormy seas of learning, knowledge offers an understanding of the “experience of changeable, temporal things”⁵⁸ On the other hand wisdom offers “changeless and eternal truth.”⁵⁹ For him wisdom is not known directly but comes rather by seeing past (through) knowledge. In O’Connell’s words, the mind “must content itself with an ‘intel-ligence’ of the desired object, quite literally a ‘reading between’ the obstructing lines of the intervening veil: *inter-legere* in its exact etymological meaning.”⁶⁰ There is for Augustine a desire for an ongoing navigation through various forms and directions of knowledge toward wisdom. Very rarely is it a straight-line journey. Some knowledge can take us toward wisdom. Other knowledge can lead us to confusion and away from wisdom. Also, for Augustine, the journey through knowledge toward wisdom is one that involves more than a mental change. O’Daly sees Augustine understanding that “Every quest for knowledge is willed orientation of the mind towards the desired object.”⁶¹ It involves mind *and* heart. Augustine knew from experience that the heart brings the learning tools of will, motivation, passion and power to bear as the mind navigates among the varied trajectories of knowledge toward wisdom. This movement of the will toward understanding impels one to action. Bourke finds in Augustine’s thought that the “gaze of the mind discovers and judges the things and events in the bodily world. The result of this is knowledge, a less perfect type of understanding that enables humans to regulate their actions and lives. Augustinian wisdom is not only a cognitive quality of mind; it is also a volitional habit inclining its possessor to act rightly when faced with moral problems.”⁶² Such action is not automatic. It involves choice. As Augustine observed, *When I was considering serving the Lord my God, as I had long meant to do, it was I who willed to do it, I who refused. It was I. I neither fully willed nor fully refused. I struggled with*

⁵⁵ *The Trinity*, XIV, 10.

⁵⁶ *The Happy Life*, 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁸ *The Trinity*, XII,16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 8.

⁶⁰ R. J. O’Connell, S.J., *op. cit.*, 50.

⁶¹ Gerard O’Daly. *Augustine’s philosophy of mind*. London: Gerald Duckworth, 1987, 211.

⁶² Vernon J. Bourke. *Augustine’s love of wisdom: An introspective philosophy*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1992, 22.

*myself and was torn apart by myself. This was an experience I underwent although I did not want to. But it did not reveal the nature of some alien mind, but rather the punishment of my own mind.*⁶³ Kent reflecting on this description by Augustine of his struggles observed,

In analyzing the conflict he himself experienced, Augustine distinguished between his new will to follow God and his old will, which forged the very chains of habit (or custom: *consuetudo*) in which he had come to be trapped. Far from believing himself imprisoned by some Prince of Darkness, as Manichaeism suggested, Augustine emphasizes that his bondage is *self-created*. There were not two selves in him, nor was there one true (good) self at war with some alien (evil) force. The two wills are both expressions of a single self, however sorely divided.⁶⁴

Thus for Augustine, good or bad, “will is the central human characteristic”⁶⁵ and a good will *is our way to seek right and honorable living as well as to arrive at the highest wisdom.*⁶⁶ Despite a desire for wisdom through exercising a good will, Scott interprets Augustine knowing the limits of will as a tool for navigating toward wisdom when he notes, “Ignorance and folly may make it impossible for us always to do the right and honorable thing, and the attainment of wisdom may be beyond our power in this life.”⁶⁷ While recognizing himself as a “cracked pot” struggling toward wisdom, Augustine also knew that it took a good will to overcome fear. Rather than an act of the mind, the right will is an act of the heart. In the face of navigating stormy seas it needs to be a “brave heart.”⁶⁸

AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION QUESTION
Learning to Navigate through Knowledge toward Wisdom
In the light of my own learning experience,
how can I develop the will (brave heart) to navigate
through varied forms of knowledge to reach wisdom?

⁶³ *Confessions* VIII, 10, 22.

⁶⁴ B. Kent. Augustine’s Ethics in E. Stump and N. Kretzman (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 220.

⁶⁵ W. R. Stevenson, Jr. *Christian Love and Just War: Moral Paradox and Political Life in St. Augustine and His Modern Interpreters*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987, 78.

⁶⁶ *Free Choice of the Will*, I, 12, 83.

⁶⁷ T. K. Scott, *Augustine: His Thought in Context*. New York: Paulist Press, 1995, 161.

⁶⁸ The use of the concept “brave hearts” extends work on Augustine and fortitude, in Donald X. Burt, “*Let Me Know Myself...*” *Reflections on Augustine’s Search for God*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003.

Learning to Dialogue toward Wisdom

Learning wisdom is not just an internal personal journey of navigation. It is also a group endeavor because, for Augustine, learning must involve a dimension of dialogue or, more specifically, dialectic. For him, *The discipline of disciplines, which we call dialectic, teaches us both how to teach and how to learn. In dialectic reason displays itself, shows itself for what it is and evidences its aims and its powers. Through dialectic we know how to know. It alone has both the desire and the power to create knowledgeable people.*⁶⁹ Augustine's early intellectual transformation might have made his work on dialectic a personal endeavor of the mind. But his transformations as Christian and priest/bishop brought this form of teaching and learning into a communitarian/dialogic framework. From his transformations taken together, he understood the inner struggle of his divided will and his need for a brave heart as also something connected to social relations. Dialogue/dialectic, combined with the struggle of will, underlies his concept of "two cities." As Bourke notes, "As early as the year 400, he had described two cities, one of evil people and the other of the holy, now living together in one mixed society but differing in their wills and only to be separated at the last judgment of mankind."⁷⁰ In dialogue/dialectic and in the struggle to exercise the will rightly, learning and teaching require concerted effort.

While dialogue/dialectic may be complicated and time consuming, for Augustine, *there is no better way to truth*⁷¹ for both student and teacher. To the student of dialectic and in dialogue, he offered this encouragement: *Those who listen are luckier than those who speak. The learner is humble, but the teacher must work hard at not being proud.*⁷² Likewise, Augustine's conception of the dialogic nature of learning was evident in this advice to learners: *Through watching and listening to us when we are actually engaged in working, you will learn better than by reading what we write.*⁷³ For a teacher he had this additional advice on the dialogue: *Let anyone who has a better understanding teach me. I am the teacher -- but in such a way that I hope that I am not unteachable.*⁷⁴ Such outer dialogue does not always involve teachers and students progressing together, but can refer to teachers and students whose learning intersects. At times we can even learn from people who are not wholly intent upon their own learning. For

⁶⁹ *On Order II*, 13, 38.

⁷⁰ V. J. Bourke. *op. cit.*, 12.

⁷¹ *Soliloquies*, II, 7, 14.

⁷² *Expositions on the Psalms*, 50, 13.

⁷³ *Religious Instruction of the Uninstructed*, 23.

⁷⁴ *Sermon 244*, 2.

Augustine they are like milestones, pointing out the way for the traveler, even though they themselves stay fixed and are immovable.⁷⁵

Clearly, an outer dialogue cannot account for learning. Augustine's ideas, about the workings of the mind, frame his concept of the inner



Picture in Your Mind Dialogue as a Way to Learn in Augustine's Community

dialogue/dialogue. For him, as we have seen, there are three basic elements at work in the mind: memory, understanding and will. Accordingly, *It is usual to discuss with children these three things so that we can see what kind of promise the children show. The easier and stronger remembering things is for a child as well as the sharper his understanding and application to study, the more we admire his disposition.*⁷⁶ The outer expression of this inner mind of memory, understanding

and will not only appear in the dialogues among learners, but is also evident in the outer expressions of their wills by learners. As Augustine saw it, *When we discuss disposition, learning, practice in a person,*⁷⁷ *we judge the first by what he can do with his memory, his understanding, and his will. We figure the second by what he actually has in his memory and understanding as well as what he has done with his will to study. But, we find the third in the use his will makes of what he has in memory and what he understands either by referring to something else or taking delight in both memory and understanding as ends in themselves.*⁷⁸

The role of the will, i.e., the practice or use of our knowing and learning, is crucial to understanding Augustine's notion of dialogue/dialectic. He has been seen as the first writer in Western Civilization to use the concept of will as part of his notion of the development of philosophical thinking.⁷⁹ According to him, *To use something is to put it at the will's disposal. To enjoy it is to use it with an*

⁷⁵ *Sermon 199*, 2.

⁷⁶ *The Trinity*, X, 17.

⁷⁷ The exact words for Augustine are *ingenium* (natural disposition), *doctrina* (learning) and *usus* (practice).

⁷⁸ *The Trinity*, X, 17.

⁷⁹ See Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking and Willing. Willing (Volume 2)* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, 84.

actual, not merely anticipated, joy. Thus, everyone who enjoys a thing, uses it because the will uses that thing for enjoyment. But not everyone who uses a thing, enjoys it when he wants what he puts at the disposal of the will for the sake of something else and not for its own sake.⁸⁰ These emphases on use and enjoyment parallels Augustine's own practice in his both his learning and his teaching.

To follow Augustine as a learner and teacher one can ask: How do we practice, i.e., how do we use, well what we know? What aspects of practice should we explore to improve our learning? How do we exercise the will to learn? How do we develop a brave heart to use the will in the right way. Augustine's description (given above) contains ways to go forward, specifically,

1. What one can do with one's own memory, understanding, and will.
2. What one actually has in one's own memory and understanding, as well as what one has gotten out of using the will in learning.
3. What use the will makes of what memory and understanding hold.⁸¹

For Augustine, these three ways for advancing through learning and teaching connect to ends he exhorted co-learners to achieve, namely,

1. Unity (connecting memory, understanding and will)
2. Truth (how the use of the will in learning relates to what one has in memory and understanding)
3. Wholeheartedness⁸² (the good use the will (brave heart) makes of what memory and understanding hold).

Importantly, the aim of wholeheartedness holds a stronger place in this triad because it emphasizes the centrality of the will in learning more than either truth or unity does. When Augustine talks about these ends related to good living and eternal life he speaks about them this way, *When you want to be alive in the Holy Spirit, be wholehearted (caritas),⁸³ love truthfulness and long for unity to attain eternal life.*⁸⁴ Using this reordering, the practice of learning in an Augustinian framework can be reflected in three areas of learning and teaching practice, namely,

⁸⁰ *The Trinity*, X, 17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² The utilization of this term 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.

⁸³ In *City of God* XIV, 7 Augustine discusses his interchangeable use of the Latin terms for love including *caritas*. However, his usage always follows the ways he finds them used in Scripture.

⁸⁴ *Sermon 267*, 4.

1. Learning Wholeheartedness for Learning, i.e., How one uses the mind through the will (applies a brave heart)
2. Learning to Search for Truth, i.e., Where one gets to with the mind
3. Learning to Dialogue in Unity amid Division, i.e., What one can do with the elements of the mind to unify understanding as well as uniting one's own learning with the learning of others who see the world very differently.

We now shift to exploring these three areas of Augustinian learning and teaching practice.

AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION QUESTION

Learning to Dialogue toward Wisdom

In the light of my own learning experience,

how can I learn to dialogue well so that I can reach wisdom?

... Not a Theory but an Experience ...

As Pegis went beyond describing Augustine's thought a "not a doctrine but a life" and "not an abstract analysis but a journey,"⁸⁵ we must also go further. While Augustine's struggles and vulnerability in his life experiences and journey can be realities that learners can identify with, we should also emulate Augustine as we struggle to exercise a good will in understanding his thought as "not a theory but an experience."⁸⁶ Rather than having a theoretic understanding, we need to integrate our experiences into cohesive actions employing our wills. In philosophical and religious thinking the term "exercise(s)" would be used to express this idea of cohesive actions employing our wills in the way Hadot entitled the text *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. I am using the term "practice," which is the pedagogical equivalent of the philosophical and religious term "exercises." Conversely the pedagogical meaning of "exercise(s)" is akin to school homework or daily follow-up assignments. Pedagogical exercises carry the message of a lack of depth rather than the depth of experience implied by the philosophical term "exercise(s)." Following the triad of learning practices, identified above, we move to Learning Wholeheartedness for Learning.

⁸⁵ Pegis, *op. cit.*, 8.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Augustinian Learning (Teaching) Practice: Learning Wholeheartedness for Learning

Since Wholeheartedness for Learning reflects the Latin word *caritas*, it is a commitment to learning necessitating a deep involvement of one's will (brave heart). As Augustine phrased it, *when one asks about another's learning, we do not want to know how easily or strongly he remembers things or how sharply he understands, rather we want to know what he remembers and understands. Since a person's character (animus) 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. We praise a character for loving passionately only when what it loves deserves to be loved passionately.*⁸⁷ This wholeheartedness for learning does not draw its power from a person connecting to realities outside of himself. It starts within oneself. As Augustine recommended, *Do not stay outside yourself, but enter within since the truth dwells in the interior person. When you find*

*you can change your nature, transcend yourself. 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.*⁸⁸ Augustine makes this recommendation in accord with his belief that the true teacher is the Inner Teacher, and that teaching and learning flows from outward learning into the Inner Teacher and back out in learning to live and work with others in meaningful ways.

This flow, while centered on the self, requires wholeheartedness for learning achieved by transcending what one already knows. Transcendence may be seen as a purely religious experience, but, in its most basic form,



**Envision Augustine the Bishop
Teaching Others Wholeheartedness
(Having a Brave Heart)**

⁸⁷ *The Trinity*, X, 17.

⁸⁸ *True Religion*, 39, 72.

transcendence is a deep and continual desire to search out the unknown. In Augustine's words, *the whole love of the mind that desires to know what it does not know, is not the love of what it does not know but rather of what it does know since the desire to know what it does not know arises out of what it knows.*⁸⁹ This desire, wholeheartedness for learning, may also be seen as the courage (brave heart) to know the unknown. Transcendence has a very practical dimension in overcoming a fear of the unknown. While wholeheartedness is an act of the will, we have seen Augustine experience the will as divided. For him, a will acting well was evidencing *caritas*, while a will acting wrongly was evidencing *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."⁹⁰ This fearlessness derives from Augustine's understanding of the biblical concept, "Love casts out fear."⁹¹

Caritas is often translated as "charity." In the same way that wholeheartedness is used here, Cary interprets the Augustinian pedagogical implications of "charity" in this way:

Charity is the name for any act by which we willingly obey the twofold command for love of God and love of neighbor.... The pedagogical implication of this is that teachers should care for their studies first and their students second. How else shall they teach the most fundamental thing, which is love of truth? Since teachers teach by example, their most important obligation is to study, to love truth for its own sake, so that their students may learn to do likewise. To this extent every good teacher is a scholar first and a teacher second. This does not mean she must be a "productive" researcher in the careerist sense, it does mean that teaching will always to some extent pull her away from her first love.⁹²

Even though teachers should care for their own learning, Augustine points to at least two obstacles to wholeheartedness for learning, apathy and boredom, in discussing how a teacher's care can help a learner. In dealing with apathy Augustine suggests that teachers can demonstrate a caring attitude. He suggests this clearly understanding 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."⁹³ As he encourages other teachers when he says, *We should in our presentation try everything to succeed in rousing him to bring him out of a hiding place.*

⁸⁹ *The Trinity*, X, 3

⁹⁰ H. Arendt. *Love and Saint Augustine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 35.

⁹¹ *1 John* 4:18.

⁹² P. Cary, *op. cit.*, 69.

⁹³ *Religious Instruction of the Uninstructed*, 18.

Through gentle encouragement we should overcome any excessive timidity. We ought to temper any shyness through the introduction of the idea of brotherly fellowship. 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. We should also ask him if he has heard these things previously, since previously known and common sense things may fail to move him. We must then act according to his answer by speaking more clearly and simply, by refuting a contrary opinion, or by giving a brief summary rather than presenting at great length anything familiar to him.⁹⁴

This familiarity can also be a source of the learning obstacle of boredom. 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.*⁹⁵

In the end, however, nothing a teacher does will produce learning, unless the learner engages the will (brave heart) to learn. The care of a teacher can point out the love of the Inner Teacher for the learner. It can also be of assistance to the learner in building wholeheartedness for learning by sharpening mental powers. This honing of understanding may come through teachers' contact with their own reasoning in ways similar to how Augustine hears Reason teach him when it tells him, *In all these round-about argumentations we have simply been exercising your abilities in order for you to become fit.*⁹⁶ Such assistance can enable a learner to add to a chain of reasoning through which the learner builds wholeheartedness for learning by making connections among the things already known.

Beyond any learning or teaching practice of the chain of reasoning, caring, developing a transcendent attitude or having the courage (brave heart) to learn, wholeheartedness for learning grows through practices that reflect its unending nature. Our practice of learning should aim to generate wholeheartedness for learning that continues to build without ever arriving at completion. Trying to foster this aspect of learning, Augustine instructed a fellow learner this way, *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*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹⁶ *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.

promote love. But it becomes useless, even harmful in itself, if separated from such an end.⁹⁷ Beyond the metaphor of scaffolding, Augustine saw this development of wholeheartedness (courage 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.*⁹⁸

In building the “how” of learning, i.e., wholeheartedness for learning through courage, a transcendent attitude, caring, chain of reasoning, scaffolding or ladder, it is quite natural to ask, Where is this learning going? Such a question takes us to the next of the Augustinian learning and teaching practices.

AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION QUESTION
Learning Wholeheartedness for Learning
In the light of my own learning experience,
how can I learn a love of learning?

Augustinian Learning (Teaching) Practice: Learning to Search for Truth

In our postmodern time with all its questioning of “truth” claims, it may be surprising to focus on truth. In an Augustinian sense this, however, is the right time to do so because our relation to truth is the search (restless journey) rather than the attainment of it here and now. As Augustine prayed, *Search in ways by which we can make discoveries, and discover in ways by which we can keep on searching.*⁹⁹ Another way the lack of attaining truth is not so negative is that it results, for Augustine, in our continually being in school with the Inner Teacher. The search can be a constant reminder of our need to be good students.¹⁰⁰

A search for the truth demands that after discovering our wrong actions we work toward right action. Knowing this from his own struggles, Augustine described dialectic as a method for dialogue toward right action. *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 peaceably and agreeably in our search for truth. I would ask the questions*

⁹⁷ *Letter 55*, 33.

⁹⁸ *Sermon 96*, 3.

⁹⁹ *The Trinity*, IX, 1, 1.

¹⁰⁰ See *Sermon 16A*, 1.

and you would answer. If you find yourself in difficulties, do not be afraid to go back and try again.¹⁰¹ This conception of changing understanding as one gains more, or clearer, knowledge is not just a search. For Augustine, it is also the active exercise of good 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.*¹⁰²

One of the obstacles to our success in searching for truth is a lack of clarity within what we study and in the instruction earthly teachers provide us. Augustine calls attention to clarity by encouraging teachers to rely on a multitude of resources to make sure their presentations aid in continuing the search of the learner. As he suggests, *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.*¹⁰³

When clarity cannot be achieved, error and change can lead to doubt. While doubt may be another 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.”¹⁰⁴ Such readiness is also an opportunity for finding coherence among our understandings through the search for truth. Descartes is renowned for saying, “I think, therefore I am.”¹⁰⁵ But, Augustine’s certainty of his own existence came through another path. As he put it, *If I am deceived I exist.*¹⁰⁶ Where deception is such a part of life, there is strong ground for doubt even as one searches for the truth. Such doubt can be a way to coherent understanding and truth. As Augustine notes: *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 a truth limiting his doubt.*¹⁰⁷ Simon Harrison interprets this passage in this

¹⁰¹ *Soliloquies*, II, 7, 14

¹⁰² *Letter 138*, 4.

¹⁰³ *Religious Instruction of the Uninstructed*, I, 11, 16.

¹⁰⁴ G. Howie, *Educational Theory and Practice in St. Augustine*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, 148.

¹⁰⁵ R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, IV (1637).

¹⁰⁶ *City of God*, XI, 26. Other of Augustine’s discussions of doubt and limited certainty see also *Soliloquies*, II, 1, 1; *The Happy Life*, 7; *Answer to the Skeptics*, III, 9, 18-19; *Free Choice of the Will*, I, 7, 16; and II, 3, 7; *The Trinity*, XV, 11, 21; and *Teaching Christianity*, IV, 11, 26.

¹⁰⁷ *True Religion*, 39, 73.

way,

A way in to thinking about freedom and responsibility and their place in a systematic understanding of the universe – all this Augustine has achieved by taking the ordinary term “voluntas” and calling it into question. He has taken the possibility of doubting that I have a will seriously and shown it to be self-defeating. This is precisely the cogitologic argument adopted at *City of God* 11.26 and elsewhere to argue the security of my knowledge of my existence, and my being alive, and to use this knowledge as a starting point for further reflection.¹⁰⁸

Bourke places this doubt in the larger framework of knowing and understanding when he observes,

Among the things that Augustine finds in the treasure-house (*thesaurus*) of his memory are the eternal principles (*rationes aeternae*) that the divinely enlightened mind discovers at the peak of its consciousness (*Trin* 10.10.14) here he makes a discovery (*inventio*, literally a coming-into) that the “interior man” is a unity of three functions: knowing, retaining, and willing (*mens, memoria, voluntas*). The same one soul (*animus*) is cognitive, retentive, and dynamic. This interior psychic triad brings one as close as is possible for human understanding to reach up to the divine exemplar, the creative ideal (*ratio aeternae*) of humanity, and of each individual human soul. These three psychic features are beyond doubt: “If one doubts, then one is alive (*si dubitat, vivit*) and to be alive as an immaterial being is to remember, to understand, to will, to think, to know, and to judge who may be doubting” (*Vivere se tamen et meminisse, et intelligere, et velle, et cogitare, et scire, et judicare quis dubitet*).¹⁰⁹

If doubt and deception are so alive within us as we are always searching for truth, where does a teacher get 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?*¹¹⁰ Augustine answered his own question from the standpoint of the truth and coherence as known to the learner: *After teachers have used words to explain all the branches of learning that they claim to teach, 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.*¹¹¹ Augustine did not build a

¹⁰⁸ S. Harrison, *Do We Have a Will?: Augustine’s Way in to the Will* in G. B. Matthews (ed.) *The Augustinian Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, 203.

¹⁰⁹ V. J. Bourke. *op. cit.*, p.24.

¹¹⁰ *The Teacher*, 45.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

case for relativism, but rather valued the judgment of the learner. The value of the teacher lies in what the teacher points the student toward. Testing the truth the teacher points at will determine the authority of the teacher. For Augustine this concept was, according to Jacobs, a move away “from the truth of authority communicated externally to the authority of truth discovered internally.”¹¹² Cary describes this movement through this concrete example,

The road to understanding often begins with our believing what our teachers tell us — as when we believe a mathematical formula on the authority of our math teacher, even though we cannot really see what it means. But of course if we are good students then we desire to understand the changeless truth it signifies — to see it for ourselves, with our own mind’s eye.... If, in studious love, we seek to understand what the formula signifies, we may be rewarded with vision — that brief moment of insight when we say, “Aha! now I see it!” What we see is located within us, not in the external world.¹¹³

Augustine described the factors of this “now I see it” phenomenon as part of his coming to Christian faith. As a Manichean, he waited for Faustus, the great Manichean teacher, to come to illuminate him. When Faustus came, he spoke in the rhetorical form of an authority, but Augustine found him lacking in the 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 truly enlightening. As Baldwin notes, “Faustus as a model of a bad teacher offering form without content is set against Ambrose as the model of a good teacher offering truth.”¹¹⁴ Augustine learned little from Faustus and his great rhetorical form, but learned much from Ambrose even though Baldwin observes, “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.”¹¹⁵ Despite any weakness as a teacher Ambrose helped Augustine attain a brave heart to overcome doubt through a coherent presentation of what Augustine came to know as truth.

Going further, Augustine subjects the authority of the teacher to reason

¹¹² 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, *Op.cit.*, 117.

¹¹³ P. Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: Legacy of a Christian Platonist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 145.

¹¹⁴ D. R. Baldwin. *Op.cit.*, 20.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

in order to arrive at an authority of truth. He captures this relation of authority and reason in these words: *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*



**Reflect on the Variety of Tools
Augustine Used to Search for Truth**

*what I want most is to grasp the truth, not just by faith alone but also by understanding.*¹¹⁶ To be a good teacher, then, is about helping people in their search for truth and understanding. For Augustine, *The teacher leads people from what they know to what they do not know, or even are unwilling to believe. The teacher shows all the other conclusions that follow from what learners already understand or accept on faith. The effect is that, 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 with something they already accept as true, they make a clear distinction between the true idea and what is false.*¹¹⁷ The teacher does not provide truth but facilitates the search, in another image Augustine captured his intention this way, *You must tell yourselves the truth. 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. I can address these faces through your ears even though I cannot see them. Now that I am presenting you with a mirror, each of you should look at yourselves and tell yourselves what you see.*¹¹⁸

Because of possibilities for doubts and deceptions, good teaching demands careful attention to what the learner understands. For Augustine, great preparation is not worth much if the learner does not arrive at some

¹¹⁶ *Answer to the Skeptics*, III, 20.

¹¹⁷ *Answer to Cressonius*, I, 19.

¹¹⁸ *Sermon 306B*, 4.

understanding. As he said, *What value does purity of speech have if understanding, on the part of the listener, does not follow it? Speaking has no purpose when those, for whose benefit we speak, do not understand what we are saying. Thus, the teacher should avoid all words which do not teach.*¹¹⁹

Reflecting Augustine's pedagogical transformation as a priest and bishop, this dialogue of teacher and learner is also a dialogue involving the teacher's ongoing learning as he comes to know more through dialogue during teaching. Contrary to any understanding of Augustine's writings presenting a solitary teacher and writer with his own "take" on truth, Augustine described his dialoguing in search for truth, that lies behind his writings, in this way, *May God grant that even I should make continuing progress when I provide others with books to read. Also, even I find what I am seeking when I try to answer the questions of others. Therefore, following the Lord's command and with His help, I have not undertaken to speak with authority on matters known to me as to increase my knowledge by speaking devoutly about them.*¹²⁰

From this, Augustine's religious sense of the search for truth is clear. Yet, the religious understanding which he terms illumination does not negate the essential role of human reasoning in searching for truth. For Augustine, without reason we will never see the truth we seek. As he saw it, *Just as the sun is shown to the eyes, reason pledges to make God known to your mind when it speaks with you. In a way the senses of the soul are the mind's own eyes. Further, those things which are most scientifically certain are like the earth and earthly things, which the sun shines upon so that we may see them. While God Himself does the illuminating, reason functions in the mind like the act of looking occurs in the eyes.*¹²¹ According to 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.'^{122,123}

In Augustine's pedagogical practice of the search for truth, the Liberal Arts 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*

¹¹⁹ *Teaching Christianity*, IV, 10, 24.

¹²⁰ *The Trinity*, I, 8.

¹²¹ *Soliloquies*, I, 6, 12.

¹²² *City of God*, X, 14.

¹²³ J. Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time, History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of Saint Augustine*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1986, 50.

*result, they desire truth more enthusiastically, pursue it more firmly and in the end rest in it more satisfyingly. This Licentius, is what I call the happy life.*¹²⁴ Since truth is not and probably never will be fully at hand in this life, Augustine also cautioned about the study of the liberal arts, *While many holy people have not studied them at all, many who have studied them are not holy.*¹²⁵ Hughes sees this caution clearly resulting from Augustine's personal educational experience,

Augustine's hostility toward classical liberal education in his later writings seems clear enough. He found it built upon praise and thus prone to cultivate pride in its masters. His experience as one such master bore witness to this vulnerability, and his conversion to Christianity required a purification, an "unlearning" of so much of his past. If useful skills were still to be found in the liberal arts, they could only be so if they were broken loose from the structures of Roman culture.¹²⁶

Not all in Roman culture was good. Neither was it all bad. Augustine's concern was for finding all the tools available for a truly liberating education. His conversion to Christianity led Augustine to see how some aspects of his liberal education were more enslaving than liberating. Cary interprets Augustine's understanding this way: "In the classical philosophic view of education represented by Augustine, liberal education (the learning appropriate to a free person rather than a slave) forms human character by strengthening it with the virtues necessary for the pursuit of truth, which is the pursuit of happiness. Thus any pedagogy not based on the students' innate love of truth is not liberal education but training for servants."¹²⁷ For Augustine, 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 thus comes from the help liberal education gave him as well as the vulnerability he experienced when his liberal education supported his straying from the search for truth.

Where does all this bring us to in understanding pedagogical practice that will help us in the search for truth? Like Augustine, we are vulnerable learners struggling as we find our way on our journey in the search for truth. Chadwick observed that the "unity of truth may lie beyond the various subjects of human knowledge with their different methods of investigation."¹²⁸ Assuming that Chadwick's reflection is correct, then the Augustinian pedagogical practice of the search for truth is tied to our

¹²⁴ *On Order*, I, 8, 24.

¹²⁵ *Retractations*, I, 3, 2.

¹²⁶ K. L. Hughes, "The 'Arts Reputed Liberal': Augustine on the Perils of Liberal Education in K. Paffenroth and K. L. Hughes, *op. cit.*, 102.

¹²⁷ P. Carey, *Study as Love*, *op. cit.*, 62.

¹²⁸ H. Chadwick, *Augustine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 34.

attempts to find a unity in what we know amid division emanating from competing ideas and explanations.

AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION QUESTION

Learning to Search for Truth

*In the light of my own learning experience,
how can I learn constructive ways to search for truth?*

**Augustinian Learning (Teaching) Practice:
Learning to Dialogue in Unity amid Division**

In struggling to arrive at a unity of truth that “may lie beyond” in Chadwick’s sense, Augustine was always pointing out human limitations. But, he also found hope. As Schuld observes, Augustine “leavens his sober pessimism about the political realm with a measure of hope for piecemeal and provisional advances in the pursuit of justice.”¹²⁹ Rather than a sober pessimism Markus sees Augustine’s less than easy struggle to find a unity of truth as 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 grip of a spell. And that, in the last years of his life, is precisely what disenchantment brought to Augustine.¹³⁰

For Markus, the disenchantment results from Augustine’s conversions or (as they have been termed in this work) transformations. Disenchantment came not only from these transformations, but also from really difficult experiences in his life where he had trouble developing 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.¹³¹ While he writes of being *weary from the scandals of the world*,¹³² Augustine experienced the disillusion of learning from his own scandals. He had to deal with the scandal in his community at Hippo resulting from the failure of some of his community to give all they owned to the poor¹³³ as well as the destructive results from his role in

¹²⁹ J.J. Schuld. *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003, 174.

¹³⁰ R.A. Markus. *Conversion and Disenchantment in Augustine’s Spiritual Career* (Saint Augustine Lecture Series 1984). Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1989, 39.

¹³¹ See, *Letter 23A**, 4.

¹³² *Letter 73*, 10.

¹³³ See *Sermons 355 and 356*.

Antoninus becoming Bishop of Fussala.¹³⁴

In struggling with these divisive difficulties Augustine learned insights into the truth he shared in unity with others. Paradoxically,¹³⁵ while teaching through writing divided him from his planned directions, it also was a way he learned. As Augustine describes it, *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 fellowship, both by writing and by speaking, I certainly will not keep quiet, if I can help it.*¹³⁶ Within his experience of scandals he finds wholehearted love (*caritas*) akin to his positive experience of writing. Augustine describes the paradox in his relationships with friends in this way, *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.*¹³⁷

In Arendt’s understanding of Augustine this struggle was not just with others. For him, it was a struggle we each have with our own will in trying to develop a brave heart. She observes, “Augustine does not speak of two laws but of ‘two wills, the one new and the other old, one carnal and the other spiritual,’ and describes in detail, like Paul, how these wills struggled ‘within’ him and how their ‘discord undid [his] soul.’”¹³⁸ Even here the solution for Augustine is wholeheartedness, i.e., wholehearted love. Arendt goes on to say,

But the healing of the will does not come about through divine grace. At the end of the *Confessions* he returns once more to the problem and relying on certain different considerations that are explicitly argued in the treatise *On the Trinity* (which he was to spend fifteen years writing, from 400 to 416), he diagnoses the ultimate unifying will that eventually decides a man’s conduct as *Love*.¹³⁹

In our journey in the search for truth, Augustine even finds in the ways we reason methodological sources for conflicting senses of oneness. As he reflected, *Reason is the faculty that enables me to analyze and synthesize the things that ought to be learned.... Both in analyzing and in synthesizing*

¹³⁴ See *Letters 270 and 20**

¹³⁵ In a dialogue on an earlier version of this work that a probing question from Professor Michael Bradley of Merrimack College enabled me to understand that the elements of paradoxical positions of Augustine help in understanding the scope of Augustine’s thought, particularly an underlying unity within apparently divided elements.

¹³⁶ *Sermon 162C*, 15 (Dolbeau 10).

¹³⁷ *Letter 73*, 10.

¹³⁸ H. Arendt. *The Life of the Mind*, 87. Arendt’s reference here is to *Confessions VII, 5*. The italics and bracketing are Arendt’s.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 95. Again, italics are Arendt’s.

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.¹⁴⁰ Here a role for the teacher may be helping the learner to move beyond struggling with differing methods for achieving an integrated understanding.

Even when Augustine finds unity in truth, any learner may easily need aid in overcoming division of thought. As an example of such a need, Augustine describes differing presentations of Scriptural teaching 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.*¹⁴¹

For Augustine, a teacher can imitate him in aiding a learner by pointing toward a unity underlying disparate elements. The teacher can do this by laboring with learners to build a structure of cohesive unity. Augustine describes such building of cohesive unity in this way, *If the beam and stones of the house were not fitted together by a definite order (in a way 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.*¹⁴²

Beyond differences in method, meaning or order, the different paces at which learners make their journeys in the search for truth can lead to confusion. Augustine described a way for us to develop a helpful “interdependence” (unity) 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.*¹⁴³

Interdependence can also have “reciprocity” experienced in the very tension of different paces of learning. Augustine alerts the “faster” learner to ways to find new insights from our 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 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. Is that not what happens when we show others beautiful scenes which we have often passed by with only a careless glance, but now find new fresh joy in the scenes by sharing in another’s joy on first seeing them? The intensity of this experience is greater, the closer we are to each other. The deeper the bond of love is when we enter into each other’s minds, the more likely old things become new for us again.*¹⁴⁴

Paradoxically, not all interrelationships bring learners to helpful interdependence or reciprocity. The different ways learners hear each other and their teachers can be another obstacle in arriving at a unity of understanding. As Augustine notes, *Different people will necessarily affect the teacher in different ways. 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.*¹⁴⁵

Augustine also cautions that teacher attitudes can even prevent interdependence or reciprocity and become a source of division. Augustine describes the agitation or harshness of an impatient teacher as an obstacle to learning 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 teacher himself had the opportunity to listen to in a calmer circumstance.*¹⁴⁶

According to Schuld, Augustine’s ability to see goodness and ways of uniting 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*

¹⁴⁰ *On Order*, II, 18, 48

¹⁴¹ *Confessions*, XII, 31, 42.

¹⁴² *Sermon 336*, 1-2.

¹⁴³ *Expositions on the Psalms 90*, 2, 1

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 17.

¹⁴⁵ *Religious Instruction of the Uninstructed*, 23.

¹⁴⁶ *Sermon 47*, 9.

as an outwardly and not just inwardly looking body.¹⁴⁷

In this way of thinking, that we have described earlier, 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 Burt such teaching and learning obstacles are, also in an Augustinian sense, an opportunity to see our unity in our recognition of our solidarity in knowing that we are all like Augustine vulnerable and broken people -- cracked pots in need of brave hearts. In Burt's conception, Recognizing happiness as the goal or end of humanity and unity as the means to that end, he [Augustine] came to see that the great tragedy of the human condition was alienation. Every human being is a cracked pot. We want to be whole while we live fractured lives, afflicted by the separations within ourselves, separations between ourselves and other individuals, and separation from that one being who can bring final happiness, the infinite God.¹⁴⁸

For the teacher working in solidarity (dialogue) with other learners helping them over learning obstacles, the struggle is a paradoxical 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 as a servant. As a result, I speak*



Imagine Augustine's Uniting a Community of People with Different Understandings

¹⁴⁷ Schuld, *op. cit.*, 122.

¹⁴⁸ D. X. Burt, O.S.A. *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999, 2-3.

*not as a master but as a minister, not to pupils but to fellow pupils, not to servants but to fellow servants.*¹⁴⁹ He always worried that the teacher and even the advanced learner could easily lose sight of this service. He put it this way, *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.*¹⁵⁰

Further for Augustine, unity and solidarity come from wholeheartedness (charity/*caritas*) in our service to others. In his words, *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.*¹⁵¹ Burt describes Augustine's understanding of service in teaching and learning as a means of arriving at a unity even in the face of evident inequality in these words,

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 remain always a learner and never achieve equality in knowledge is not truly a teacher.¹⁵²

Augustine describes his own work at being a true teacher when he describes the change in his relationship with one of his students. He finds a joy in a student becoming 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.*¹⁵³

Thus, Augustine finds in his own struggles and vulnerability in

¹⁴⁹ *Sermon 242*, 1.

¹⁵⁰ *Sermon 198*, 13.

¹⁵¹ *Eighty-three Diverse Questions*, 71, 1.

¹⁵² D. X. Burt, O.S.A. "Let Me Know Myself..." *Reflections on the Prayer of Saint Augustine*, 74.

¹⁵³ *On Order*, I, 6, 16.

learning a paradoxical key to unity. As vulnerable strugglers in learning we have a never ending basis for communion with other learners. For Augustine, our individual walking with the Inner Teacher will be an impetus, a source, moving us beyond ourselves, uniting with others, finding solidarity in common weakness as we learn together.

AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION QUESTION
Learning to Dialogue in Unity amid Division
In the light of my own learning experience,
how can I experience unity through dialogue with others whose understandings differ from mine?

Summations

Normally this part of a presentation might be called conclusions. But, in the face of an Augustinian understanding that teaching and learning are experiential and active, including an ongoing journey and ongoing dialogue, conclusions would convey an inappropriate level of closure. Yet Augustine's ideas on learning have enough clarity to demand some summations. His distinctive conceptions which, according to Carol Harrison, set apart his literary aesthetic also can be seen as setting apart his pedagogical practice, i.e., the distinctive concern with truth and clarity, the priority of teaching, the role of delight in relation to the fallen will, and of the love of God and neighbor.¹⁵⁴

For Augustine, teaching should assist us to take wholehearted responsibility (have a brave heart) for our own learning, not as a doctrine but in our living as he did after reading the *Hortensius* and after each of his other pedagogical transformations. Further, a community of co-learners in dialogue, like the one Augustine found in unity with his fellow converts to Christianity, enhances what we find not in an abstract analysis but in our own journey through individual action of personal responsibility for learning. Where there is need, teachers can emerge from the community. The diverse teaching of such teachers will only be successful when they remain rooted not in a theory of learning but rather in their experience of learners in community. Among the means for a successful learning journey are developing ever stronger abilities, in the search for truth, for navigation among and dialogue about knowledge, memory, understanding and will and their relation to wisdom.

¹⁵⁴ C. Harrison, *The Rhetoric of Scripture and Preaching: Classical Decadence or Christian Aesthetic?* in R. Dodaro and G. Lawless (eds.), *op. cit.*, 226.

Given the importance of the will for Augustine, authentic Augustinian pedagogy demands that disposition and learning are put into action through practice. This practice (praxis) reflects Augustine's own arrival at effective learning. The values of effective Augustinian pedagogy flowing from Augustine's lived experience, and his reflective thought, can be found in his being transformed to attain and keep a wholeheartedness for learning, a never ending journey in the search for truth and his building a dialogue of unity in the midst of overwhelming diversity. As Baldwin interprets it,

The ending of the *Confessions* is directed at the teacher as well as at the learner, at the teacher who is a learner, who asks, seeks and struggles to understand how best to affect others who seek understanding. And surely Augustine takes up this struggle. Teaching is central to his own activity — in his capacity as bishop, as polemicist, and as a writer of the *Confessions* themselves. But by posing teaching as a problem in his *Confessions*, he invites us also to enter into that struggle by considering where exactly the constructive human activity of human teaching is to *[be]* found.¹⁵⁵

According to Augustine's biblically based reflections on the means to gain understanding at the end of his *Confessions*, one finds only by seeking, one receives only by asking and one has doors opened only by knocking.¹⁵⁶ In humble (cracked pot) parallel one may say that according to Augustine's understanding of teaching and learning,

through a journey seeking truth we find understanding,
through dialogue with learners different from ourselves we receive understanding, and
through a transforming wholeheartedness for learning we have the doors of understanding opened.

After reflecting on Augustine's thoughts, hearing his words and seeing his lived experience of learning and teaching, the struggle before us, as cracked pots, is to set our will (brave heart) to act by taking personal responsibility for implementing the practices of this distinctive pedagogy.

¹⁵⁵ D. R. Baldwin. *op. cit.*, 15-16.

¹⁵⁶ *Confessions* XIII, 38, 53.