

Welcome to this second presentation on Transformation and Reflection in Augustine of Hippo. Before you, once again, is our infographic of transformation and reflection in Augustine. As we noted in the last presentation, the outer trapezoid identifies 3 core characteristics of Augustine that were transformed by his conversion, by his learning. Within the trapezoid is a reflection circle involved in Augustine's transformation. This presentation will address this circle.

We left off in the last presentation with Augustine listening to his Teacher Within/Inner Teacher. We can hear what Augustine heard in his Interiority/Reflective Thinking in the more than 5 million words of Augustine available to us today. Augustine was converted by writings/Scripture and his writings have given insights transforming others. Through writing he encountered a larger community of learners. His writings also helped him learn by dialoguing "with" others.

This dialoguing "with" others is the starting point for Augustine's Reflection Circle, his Reflective Thinking. We find Augustine's discussion of his lived experience in his Dialogues/Sermons/Letters. About the importance of discussion Augustine observes, "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 and you would answer. If you find yourself in difficulties, do not be afraid to go back and try again." (Soliloquies, II, 7, 14)

Augustine's conception of the dialogic nature of learning is also 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." (De Catechizandis Rudibus, 23)

From his experience with intellectual friends, Augustine commented, "Those who listen are luckier than those who speak. The learner is humble, but the teacher must work hard at not being proud." (Expositions on the Psalms, 50, 13)

Listening is a transition factor in Augustine's Reflective Thinking. It is not surprising to me that the words listen and silent contain the same letters. In his text Soliloquies we can hear Augustine's silent meditative reflections. This "Soliloquies" aspect can be understood in these words from Augustine, "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." (De Vera Religione, 39, 72) We do this "stepping toward the light," through Augustine's advice, "Let us leave something for people's reflection, a generous margin for silence. Go within yourself; leave the noise and the confusion behind. Look inside yourself and see if you can find that hidden corner of the soul, where, free of noises and arguments, you don't need to begin disputes or brood on pig-headed quarrels." (Sermon 52, 19, 22)

Listening and silence are not the aims of the "Soliloquies" dimension of Augustinian reflective thinking. They are the processes. In one place he states the aim as "Let me know myself, Let me know You." [O, Lord] (Soliloquies, II, 1, 1) and in another place he names the aim of the "Soliloquies" as, "Know who you are and be yourself." (Sermon 137, 4, 4)

While the “Soliloquies” dimension of reflective thinking gives us “What” we have heard, Augustine went on, in a way, to ask himself, So What? We can see this in his text, *Reconsiderations* (in Latin, *Retractationes*). In this further reflection, Augustine “reconsidered” what he had thought in light of his “Soliloquies” reflection. Reconsideration is moving on in the search for truth. As Augustine encourages, “Search in ways by which we can make discoveries, and discover in ways by which we can keep on searching.” (*The Trinity*, IX, 1, 1)

Reconsideration is part of building our understanding. According to Augustine, “Use knowledge as a kind of scaffolding to help build the structure of love and understanding, which will last forever even after knowledge destroys itself. Knowledge is useful when it is used to promote love. But it becomes useless, even harmful in itself, if separated from such an end.” (*Letter 55*, 33) Love is aided by humility here, because “To reach a high spot you need a ladder. To get to the height of greatness, use the ladder of humility.” (*Sermon 96*, 3) As we build, we must remember, “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.” (*Sermon 336*, 1-2)

While we are building understanding, Augustine reminds us that our reflective thinking is a journey, as he says, “On earth we are always travelers, always on the go. Do not grow complacent with what you are. Where you have become pleased with yourself, there you get stuck. If you say, ‘That’s enough!’ You are finished. Always add something more. Keep on walking. Always forge ahead.” (*Sermon 169*, 18)

The move beyond “reconsiderations” in our reflective thinking is for Augustine, where we are called to share our findings, plans and visions. We can see this clearly in Augustine’s *Confessions*. This final dimension of reflection is the communal “Confession” of Truth in a “Now What?” sort of way.

For Augustine, “The love of knowledge and truth should invite us to continue learning. The love of others should compel us to teach.” (*Answers to the Eight Questions of Dulcitus*, 3). This result happens because Augustine believes 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.” (*Expositions on the Psalms*, 75, 17) This truth is not abstract thinking but a sharing of love. For Augustine, “Love 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.” (*Eighty-three Diverse Questions*, 71, 1)

As we return to our infographic, what this presentation has covered is the inner Augustinian Reflection Circle which was the means by which Augustine participated in his change of his whole self through his learning transformation. While personal, learning transformation is not solitary but should something we share in support of one another’s advancing in learning.