

Good Day. I am Gary McCloskey and this presentation is a summary of my essay:

***Augustinian Learning in a Technological World:  
Social and Emotional Applications***

**Augustinian Pedagogy Practitioner Impetus**

One can easily respond to the connection of Saint Augustine of Hippo to contemporary technology with the question: "Really???" This essay continues my work of responding to questions of Filipino teachers who have been practicing the Values of Augustinian Pedagogy as the ethos of their schools. An initial response was at an 2019 Augustinian Education Conference in Bogotá, Columbia followed by a presentation at a 2019 Asia-Pacific Augustinian Family Educators' Congress. This paper refines that work, particularly incorporating feedback and insights from participants.

**Two Notes of Caution**

First, I agree with Professor Robert Dodaro, O.S.A., when he observed: The more I read Augustine and read studies about him and about his time, the more I come to two conclusions, apparently disjunctive. They continue to strike me forcefully. First, I find it increasingly difficult to domesticate Augustine, that is, to make him appear at home in our times. Secondly, I find his theology and approach to various pastoral issues increasingly more relevant for our times.

On the one hand I am saying that Augustine's Church and the times in which he lived, late Roman antiquity, have to be seen as strange even alien to our own times, between his Church and our Church and secondly, in spite of the fact that I continue to reach this difficult conclusion, I continue to see the urgency of Augustine's theology and his pastoral responses for the Church.

**A Second Note of Caution**

I have been guided by what I have found in the work of the educational philosopher, C.A. Bowers. He has identified the non-neutrality of technology, i.e., that it is not ethically neutral. Bowers sees the use of technology as involving moral double binds, i.e., whatever you do leads to choices that include negative ethical implications. Bowers reminds us, that technology brings homogenization and loss of indigenous wisdom. Also, technology's "binariness" reduces situations into data alone. Bowers even entitled one of his books, "Let them Eat Data."

My essay focuses on connections among Saint Augustine, technology and

the 5 core competencies of Social and Emotional Learning, i.e.,

Self-awareness

Self-management

Social awareness

Relationship skills, and

Responsible decision-making

Santiago Insunza identifies "the principle categories of Augustinian thought" as interiority and communion. We can see Augustinian interiority connecting to Self-awareness and Self- Management. Also, we can see Augustinian communion connecting to Social awareness, Relationship skills, and Responsible decision-making. But Augustinian categories can lead us beyond simple Social and Emotional Learning transactional skills to join Saint Augustine in the quest for the *Sapientia Sacra* (Holy Wisdom) as Eguiarte describes it.

The Augustinian categories of interiority and communion can help us approach Social and Emotional Learning in a technological world with depth and calmness in the face of transactional speed and efficiency as well as the rampant, even radical, exteriority that technology has brought to us in the last several generations with multitasking leading to intellectual anxiety created by information overload that is described in online conversations as TMI (Too Much Information). Newton and others see this as resulting in technological restlessness needing the deep work that Internet Sabbaths can balance.

Internet technology has moved to a broader social/participatory experience termed, Web 2.0, as well as Web 3.0, a Sematic Web, with interactions surveilling us. Sharing enables people to measure who they are by the number of Internet friends, fans, likes, and badges they have. Fake Engagement provides viral offensiveness, cyberbullying, and fake news. Users are seen as objects where their information is bought and sold and targets for purveyors of products and opportunities. The depth of *Sapientia Sacra* (Holy Wisdom) in Augustinian Interiority and Communion can help in keeping balance in Social and Emotional Learning in the technological world.

A guiding principle of contemporary understandings of Augustinian Interiority is Saint Augustine's observation in *On True Religion*, "Do not stay outside yourself but enter within since the truth dwells in the interior

person... Therefore, step to where the light of reason is lit." More than technological connectivity in learning, this gives us a depth to approach the Social and Emotional Learning categories of Self-awareness and Self-management.

I have connected the processes of Augustinian interiority to the Augustinian Pedagogy approach of reflection found in the genres of writings of Saint Augustine. I term this an "Augustinian Reflection Circle (L-O-R-D Approach)." In Saint Augustine's use of the various genres in his *Soliloquies*, (*Reconsiderations*) *Retractationes*, *Confessions*, and his *Dialogues*, *Sermons* and *Letters* he uses elements of learning via various aspects of reflection, i.e., **L**isten to Lived Experience, **O**rganize and Reorganize Findings, **R**efine Results for Sharing, and move to further **D**ialogue with Others and the World. We can use the acronym, **L-O-R-D** as a mnemonic to capture the 4 reflection elements.

#### **LISTEN as in Saint Augustine's *Soliloquies***

Saint Augustine was attuning his self-awareness when he prayed in his *Soliloquies*, "Let me know myself. Let me know You." In the *Soliloquies* we can see Saint Augustine modeling listening in order to achieve that self-awareness. We also see him recognizing his self-awareness as residing in a larger context. ("Let me know You"), that is, the Lord. Listening as reflective learning requires humility.

#### **ORGANIZE and REORGANIZE as in Saint Augustine's *Reconsiderations***

In moving to the *Reconsiderations* aspect of the Augustinian Reflection Circle we continue our work on Self-awareness. Saint Augustine incorporates what he has found in his listening into what he has already known, challenging us to "use knowledge as a kind of scaffolding." In building our knowledge Saint Augustine reminds us, "For greatness, use the ladder of humility." *Reconsiderations* is also a phase for some intellectual gardening - for Saint Augustine gardens were important aspects of his intellectual and spiritual development.

In his *Reconsiderations* "gardening" Saint Augustine uncovered a self-awareness of his true gifts. In his conversion:

His false gift of An Ear for Eloquence became a self-awareness of his true gift of a Search for the Truth with Christ, the Inner Teacher.

His false gift of A Passionate Curiosity became a self-awareness of his true gift of a Pursuit of Right Love and Will with Christ the Physician.

His false gift of A Genius for Friendship became a self-awareness of his true gift of a Quest for Community with the Whole Christ (*Totus Christus*).

#### **REFINE FOR SHARING as in Saint Augustine's *Confessions***

The Augustinian Reflection Circle phase of *Confessions* captures the element of refining for sharing what we have found in our reflections. In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine presents salient points of his life offered to help others to live well. In this he models his own call in *The Trinity* to "Search in ways by which we can make discoveries and discover in ways by which we can keep on searching." Saint Augustine's approaches to reflection meet Pahomov's criteria for meaningful reflection, that it be metacognitive, applicable, and shared with others.

#### **DIALOGUE WITH OTHERS as in Saint Augustine's *Dialogues, Sermons, and Letters***

In his *Soliloquies* Augustine identifies the importance of the method of question and answer to learning with one another. His *Sermons, Letters, and Dialogues* give us ways to learn the importance of listening to one another, and to nature, and the larger world. Saint Augustine modeled responding to others in the works he wrote.

We can see him model true friendship beyond Facebook friends and that truth is not relative but communally discovered unlike fake news, and that learning is an "I-thou" as well as "I-it" relationship.

#### **Augustinian Communion**

Augustinian Spirituality is, according to Gabriel Quicke, essentially a Spirituality of Togetherness. This distinctive Augustinian "with others." characteristic, can be contrasted with a "for others" approach of Ignatian Pedagogy as articulated by Pedro Arrupe. Superior General of the Jesuits. This "with others" direction is grounded in Saint Augustine's experience of Christ as *Totus Christus*. Rowan Williams has written, "Augustine is the first to use the expression *totus Christus*, [as] ... Jesus and the members of his Body, understood as making up together a single *persona*, a single acting and speaking subject." In Acts 4:32-35, a fundamental text for Saint Augustine's *Rule* for religious living, Margaret Scott sees Christians as Table-People, taking this togetherness from the altar table to the dining table.

A further dimension of this Augustinian togetherness can be found in Carmen Caltagirone's conception of *Friendship as Sacrament*. Saint Augustine adds to this sacramental sense of friendship the biblical notion of "bearing one another's burdens" from Galatians. Saint Augustine even embodied this notion of friendship in the depth of his dialoguing with others in his *Letters*, his *Sermons*, and other writings. This might be termed an "Apostolate of Friendship," as Thomas Merton described his own letters and his own writings for others. However, this Communion and our Social Awareness in Social and Emotional Learning are challenged in a Faceless Virtual World

### **Practices for Augustinian Communion**

From Augustinian Communion we can glean the practices of engaging our brokenness, practicing humility, strengthening courage and cheerfulness, as well as working with diligence to engage effectively in Social and Emotional Learning in technological realities.

In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine describes "Passions of the Intellect" as Joy, Desire, Sadness, and Fear. These passions, for Augustine, impact and color intellectual things providing an emotional aspect to our thinking. Such an emotional aspect is so fundamental to good living he puts it at the center of his *Rule* for living in community which he sees as being of "one mind and one heart intent upon God." In contemporary learning methods there has been a bias toward the cognitive with a practical absence of affective "heart" dimensions. A most striking image used by Augustine to describe our brokenness (intellectual and affective) is humans as "Cracked Pots." As he notes, "Many people promise themselves that they will live a holy life. But they fail because they go into the furnace and come out cracked." Donald Burt extends this thought into a description of the "cracked self." This image is grounded in the prophetic image of the Potter and Clay as well as the Pauline image of Treasure in Earthen Vessels. From Augustinian Communion we gain the perspective that we are all broken, cracked pots needing help and healing. We should use this brokenness to empower us, as strange as it seems, in practicing our Social and Emotional Learning Relationship skills, with brave hearts, in technological circumstances.

### **Practicing Humility in Relation to Social and Emotional Learning Relationship Skills**

Schultze and Crouch see the information age as lacking in humility and humility can give us the power to put technology in its proper place.

Humility is a fundamental aspect of Saint Augustine's thinking and

relationship with Christ. Prior to his conversion Augustine was a man of pride who used relationship skills in the field of persuasion. He describes himself as a "seller of words" (*venditorem verborum*). With cyberspace operating as a forum for persuasion Augustine's notion of communion can be an antidote to the habits of the "selling" model of Web 2.0, in particular the "Hooked Model" of persuasion (Hook, Story, Offer) as well as cyberspace Behavioral Addiction. In Saint Augustine's understanding of humility, doubt has a real value. Howie sees Saint Augustine as seeing the humility of doubt as a "readiness to learn the Truth." Humility can help us to develop a brave heart for using our Social and Emotional Learning Relationship skills in a technological world of persuasion.

### **Strengthening Courage and Cheerfulness in our Relationship Skills**

In *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, Saint Augustine identified for the deacon, Deogratius, concerns that can be addressed by the preacher's encouragement, i.e., giving courage to hearers to learn. I paraphrase Saint Augustine in this way:

Encourage tired hearers with a cheerful attitude.

Encourage discouraged hearers with consideration and patience.

Encourage bored hearers with care to find new and exciting things.

Encourage sad hearers with love and joy.

Encourage apathetic hearers with compassion and energetic exhortation.

Encourage tense and fearful hearers with kindness and tact while building trust.

### **Strengthening Courage and Cheerfulness**

In a less religious context Martin Seligman terms such concerns as, "Flourishing." Saint Augustine adds a need for Cheerfulness rooted in the biblical understanding that "God loves the cheerful giver." Saint Augustine terms cheerfulness in *De Catechizandis Rudibus* as *de hilaritate comparanda* and as an important tool for the teacher/preacher. The courage and cheerfulness of Augustinian Communion can assist us in dealing with technologically engendered social anxieties by replacing FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) with JoMO (the Joy of Missing Out) or Nomophobia (Fear of Lacking Cell Phone Access) with IRL (what happens In Real Life) and avoiding the development of "Blackberry Thumb," or "Cell Phone Elbow."

### **Working with Diligence in Relation to Responsible Decision-making**

In practicing Augustinian Communion, we should Work with Diligence.

Saint Augustine is famous for his observation "Love and do what you will." "Love" in this observation is from the Latin verb "*diligo*," which is the root for the English word, "diligence." This Augustinian observation might be better translated as "Love diligently and do what you will." This loving diligently in Augustinian Communion is also at the center of the biblical commandment of "Love of God and love and neighbor" which places loving diligently at the core of Saint Augustine's *Rule* for community living. In our acting in cyberspace on the Social and Emotional Learning Category of Responsible decision-making with such diligent love, Augustinian Communion is loving rightly to overcome a divided will and a constant building up of a true "edifice of love." This working with diligence also aids in sharpening our intellectual and mental powers as we work with diligence through chains of reasoning moving from the known to the unknown as well as honing our mental abilities.

### **Conclusion**

By looking at Social and Emotional Learning in a technological world through the Augustinian lenses of Interiority and Communion, we have been able to find value-added aspects to any understanding we have of Social and Emotional Learning and/or the dark side, and ill-will of the participatory/social Web. While Social and Emotional Learning and cyberspace are transactional in nature, the practices from Augustinian Interiority and Communion with them may enable us to go deeper and work with *Sapientia Sacra* (Holy Wisdom) as Saint Augustine strove to do in his own life and that we might have him as our companion on our learning journey.

Thank you for your attention.

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