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# Ever Learning, Ever Loving: Augustine on Teaching as Ministry

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# Ever Learning, Ever Loving: Augustine on Teaching as Ministry

## **Abstract**

While most remember Augustine (354-430 AD) as theologian, exegete, and philosopher, the purpose of this essay is to consider Augustine's legacy and ministry as teacher. After his conversion (386 AD), Augustine's views on teaching took a turn. His theological convictions thus set the course for his views on teaching throughout the rest of his life. It is to such views on teaching that this essay seeks to examine. Therefore this essay will wrestle through Augustine's views on the role of the teacher and the learner and the link between the two, his theological basis for teaching, and some of the methods he used in teaching. Having established these crucial points, it will be argued that Augustine's views on the role of teacher have significant implications for Christian educators today.

## **Keywords**

Augustine, Teaching, Learning, Love, Ministry

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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## INTRODUCTION

While most remember Augustine (354-430 AD) as theologian, exegete, and philosopher, the purpose of this essay is to consider Augustine's legacy and ministry as teacher. After his conversion (386 AD), Augustine's views on teaching took a turn.<sup>1</sup> His theological convictions thus set the course for his views on teaching throughout the rest of his life. It is these views on teaching that this essay seeks to examine. Therefore this essay will wrestle through Augustine's views on the role of the teacher and the learner and the link between the two, his theological basis for teaching, and some of the methods he used in teaching. Having established these crucial points, it will then be shown that Augustine's views on the role of teacher have significant implications for Christian educators today.

This essay, then, will unfold in the following way. I begin by examining Augustine's theological basis for teaching. In this first section I show four primary theological principles that directed Augustine's view on teaching. Having set the theological foundation for Augustine's view of teacher, I explore his concept of the teacher and student dynamic, including some discussion on Augustine's use of methods. As will be emphasized, methods are secondary to his view of the teacher/student relationship. Having shown, briefly, Augustine's theory of teaching, grounded in his theological convictions, I will conclude by considering five principles that are applicable to modern Christian educators.

## THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR TEACHING

Augustine's view on the teacher and the learner is significantly grounded in his theological convictions. He saw teaching as a spiritual exercise or discipline and that there was an ethical responsibility on behalf of the follower of Christ to train and serve others for the purpose of Christian formation.<sup>2</sup> In this section I will explore four areas which provide a theological grounding for Augustine's view of the teacher: love for God and neighbor; love for truth; theological anthropology, and illumination.

### *Love for God and Neighbor*

At the core of Augustine's views on teaching is, on the one hand, his view of the learner. For the teacher never ceases to learn, but comes alongside the student as a fellow learner. Yet, this does not go far enough. The chief end of learning is, then, to grow in one's love toward God. Loving God permeated all of Augustine's thought, a principle which became an important hermeneutical tool in his interpretation of the Scriptures. In one of his letters, Augustine says the following:

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Augustine, *The Confessions*, III.4.7; IV.2.2

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, X.4.6.

But I cherish a hope in the name of Christ, which is not without its reward, because I have not only believed the testimony of my God that “on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets;” but I have myself proved it, and daily prove it, by experience. For there is no holy mystery, and no difficult passage of the word of God, in which, when it is opened up to me, I do not find these same commandments: for “the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned;” and “love is the fulfillment of the law.”<sup>3</sup>

Augustine saw the commandment to love God as the central commandment that one must reflect upon, but the command to love one’s neighbor directly follows.<sup>4</sup> In regards to the two commands, Augustine writes:

For they ought to be thoroughly familiar to you, and not merely to come into your mind when they are recited by us, but they ought never to be blotted out from your hearts. Let it ever be your supreme thought, that you must love God and your neighbor: God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. These must always be pondered, meditated, retained, practiced, and fulfilled. The love of God comes first in the order of enjoying; but in the order of doing, the love of our neighbor comes first.<sup>5</sup>

The order of the two commands is important for Augustine. First is the love of God. The mode by which this is to be done is through “enjoying” God.<sup>6</sup> One ought to place enjoyment of God above all other things. Interestingly, in the mode of “doing,” the love of neighbor takes precedent over all other things that one does. Loving neighbor is the outward expression of loving God.<sup>7</sup> For Augustine, loving God and neighbor is not something that one merely recites, but should become the ground for all that one does. It is not enough for the believer to merely ponder these when meeting together, but these two commands are to permeate every aspect of one’s life. This permeating comes through ‘pondering’, ‘meditating’, ‘retaining’, ‘practicing’, and ‘fulfilling’. Thus given what Augustine says in these passages, one can conclude that loving God and neighbor becomes the central integrative motif for all that Augustine sought to do, including teaching.

We can take the above point beyond inference. In *On Christian Doctrine*, a work dedicated to teaching students how to properly interpret and deliver the meaning of Scripture, Augustine emphasizes throughout the first book how enjoyment of God should take priority. He distinguishes between “using” and

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<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *Letter LV*, 21.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, I.35.39.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, XVII.8.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, I.22.20.

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, VIII.12.

“enjoying” things.<sup>8</sup> Because of the fallenness of the world, believers should not seek to enjoy the world; rather they are to use it.<sup>9</sup> Because of his supreme immutable and eternal nature, God alone is to be enjoyed and esteemed above all things. Only enjoyment in God can bring about the “happy life.”<sup>10</sup> What of loving our neighbors? This, too, becomes an important element within *On Christian Doctrine*. To love one’s neighbor (or self, for that matter) is not for one’s own sake or the person’s sake alone, but for the sake of “Him who is the true object of enjoyment.”<sup>11</sup> The best state that one can be in is when one’s “life is a journey towards the unchangeable life, and his affections are entirely fixed upon that.”<sup>12</sup> In loving others, Augustine emphasizes that “all men are to be loved equally” and that the greatest desire one can have for one’s neighbor is for her to know and love God.<sup>13</sup> On this point he says, “We ought to desire, however, that they should all join with us in loving God, and all the assistance that we either give them or accept from them should attend to that one end.”<sup>14</sup> Augustine saw that the fulfillment and end of the law and Scripture is to Love God and neighbor. “[W]e should clearly understand that the fulfillment and the end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture,” says Augustine, “is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed, and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Love for Truth*

Another central tenet of Augustine’s theological foundation for teaching is his love for truth. In one sense, the search for truth is nothing other than the love for God.<sup>16</sup> It is by seeking truth, not vanity, through participation in the love of God, that one finds happiness.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Augustine uses the word “thing” in order “to signify that which is never employed as a sign of anything else” A “thing” might signify any object, such as “wood,” “stone,” or “cattle.” See *On Christian Doctrine*, I.2.2.

<sup>9</sup> Here it may seem that Augustine was influenced too much by Platonism, since most Christians believe that one can enjoy the world, despite its fallen nature. Nevertheless, the point for our purposes in this essay is to demonstrate the importance that Augustine placed on enjoying God in his teaching. For him, enjoyment of God should be placed above all things. Even when one finds enjoyment in others, say “a man in God,” one really finds joy in God, since the man, too, is finding joy in the one who is ultimately being pursued. See *On Christian Doctrine*, I.33.37.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, I.5.5, 8.8, 22.20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, I.22.21.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I.28.29, 29.30.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, I.29.30.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, I.35.39.

<sup>16</sup> John Immerwahr, “Augustine’s Advice for College Teachers: Ever Ancient, Ever New,” *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 4-5 (October 2008): 663. *Academic Search Complete*, Ebscohost [accessed October 8, 2011].

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, V.11; Lucy Banard, “The Pedagogical Gospel according to Saint Augustine,” *International Journal of Humanities* 5, no. 2 (2007): 10. *Humanities International Complete*, EBSCOhost [accessed October 8, 2011].

Initially, it was Augustine's search for truth that led him away from the Catholic Church. Yet, in his search for truth, he became dissatisfied with the various other philosophies.<sup>18</sup> At his conversion, Augustine saw that Christianity provided the only true philosophy which made sense of life—a philosophy which brought coherence to the world.<sup>19</sup> For Augustine, truth is ultimately grounded in Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Augustine did not see a separation between faith and reason, like some of those medieval theologians who later followed. There is no disjunction between the two. Yet, as Pope Benedict XVI expresses, there are two “dimensions” to Augustine's view on faith and reason. The first is “Credo ut intelligas” (I believe in order to understand). It is through faith that one enters into a relationship with God, and thus gains access to the truth. For the second dimension, “intellige ut credas” (I understand in order to believe), it is necessary, in Augustine's view, to scrutinize truth in order that God may be found.<sup>21</sup> Thus as will be shown, this later dimension becomes a central part of Augustine's teaching methodology.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, it is strikingly similar to the Socratic Method, yet, on the other, profoundly different in that Augustine ultimately rejects Socrates' emphasis on knowledge obtained through *remembering*.

### *Theological Anthropology*

A third theological foundation for Augustine's view on teaching is his understanding of anthropology. Mary T. Stimming makes an interesting observation in regards to Augustine's view on anthropology and the role of the teacher. In the *Confessions* Augustine makes the following statement:

And so we humans, who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you—we who carry our mortality about with us, carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud. Yet these humans, due part of your creation as they are, still do long to praise you. You stir us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> H.H. Benedict XVI. “On St. Augustine's Search for Truth. ‘Faith and Reason Are the Two Forces that Lead Us to Knowledge.’” [www.piercedhearts.org/benedict\\_xvi/general\\_audiences/jan\\_30\\_08.htm](http://www.piercedhearts.org/benedict_xvi/general_audiences/jan_30_08.htm). [accessed November 13, 2011].

<sup>19</sup> Macario Ofilada Mina, “Community, Learning and Love: Philosophical Explorations in Augustinian Spirituality and Pedagogy,” *Phillippiniana Sacra* XLII, no. 126 (September-December, 2007): 574-575. *ATLA Religion Database*, EBSCOhost [accessed October 8, 2011].

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, VII.18.24.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> See Augustine, *Concerning the Teacher*.

<sup>23</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, I.1.1.

What is significant about this passage, suggests Stimming, is that, despite humanity's proclivity toward sin, "we exist from, in, and towards God."<sup>24</sup> Humans were made to seek after God. This is a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human.

As those who were created to seek after God, it is notable that humans may become the instruments of God.<sup>25</sup> Augustine saw himself as such an instrument designated by God to serve others. He experienced such service through the saints that passed before him and sought to be obedient to Christ in doing likewise. "To such people," says Augustine, "the people you command me to serve, I will disclose myself."<sup>26</sup>

Lastly, in regards to this third foundational point, Stimming provides yet another observation. Augustine saw that the teacher/student relation provides an insight to the depths of the human condition. We are all affected by sin. Rather than "truth-centered," teaching and learning can often fall into the trap of "self-seeking."<sup>27</sup> In recounting his time as a student and teacher, Augustine recalls in the *Confessions* several occasions where he himself had fallen into such a trap.<sup>28</sup> For the teacher, Augustine realized that the chief sin to be cautious of is that of vanity.<sup>29</sup>

Augustine recognized the innate abilities and potential of the human creature. Unlike all of God's other creatures, humans have the potential to learn, to obtain knowledge, and to reflect on the world. Yet, he also recognized the human condition, and that there is a propensity within the human creature to disregard such potentialities and to seek after self.

### *Illumination*

The fourth theological concept is that of illumination. In *Concerning the Teacher*, Augustine recognized the limited nature of teaching and sought to bring some resolve to the issue of obtaining knowledge. He recounts a dialogue that he had with his teenage son, Adeodatus. Through this dialogue, Augustine sought to demonstrate that words as signs do not, in the end, impart knowledge, nor does the teacher.<sup>30</sup> As Peter King insightfully summarizes:

The result of Augustine's philosophical investigations is that language is inadequate to the task. We come to know linguistic facts through language—that two words mutually signify one another, say—and we can also acquire beliefs about nonlinguistic items through language from the testimony of others.

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<sup>24</sup> Mary T. Stimming, "Confessions from the Classroom: Teaching with Augustinian Eyes," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 2, no.2. (1999): 137.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, X.4.6.

<sup>27</sup> Stimming, 139.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.; Augustine, *Confessions*, I.5.15; I.11.19; I.14.30; III.3.6; III.4.7; IV.2.2; VII.1.2.

<sup>29</sup> Stimming, 139.

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *Concerning the Teacher*, XIII.41-XIV.45.

But that's all. We can't acquire *knowledge* about nonlinguistic items, as opposed to (mere) belief, through language.<sup>31</sup>

Augustine concludes that knowledge is something that cannot be obtained or conveyed through language or 'signs'.

Yet, on the other hand, Augustine rejects the Socratic notion that knowledge is something that one remembers. In *The Trinity*, Augustine retorts: "But if this were recollection of things previously known, not everybody or practically everybody would be able to do the same if interrogated in that way; it is unlikely that everybody was a geometer in a previous life, seeing that they are such a rarity in the human race that it is a job even to find one."<sup>32</sup> The point of Augustine's joke is that people have different levels of learning.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, as King reminds us, Augustine follows many who critiqued Plato/Socrates for thinking that no information is conveyed through leading questions.<sup>34</sup>

But if language and teaching do not convey knowledge, and if knowledge is not something that comes through remembering, then how is it that a person comes to it? For Augustine, the solution came through his theory of illumination, or, in the words of King, "an inner episode constitutive of knowledge, one whereby we become aware of (or 'see') the truth."<sup>35</sup> Yet, in Augustine's thought, Christ is the ultimate teacher.<sup>36</sup> Further, Augustine understood that much of our coming to truth or knowledge is grounded in the way that God the Creator has established His creatures to come to grips with His creation, that is to say, "the nature of the intellectual mind has been so established by the disposition of its creator that it is subjoined to intelligible things in the order of nature, and so it sees such truths in a kinds of non-bodily light that is *sui generis*, just as our eyes of flesh see all these things that lie around us in this bodily light, a light they were created to be receptive of and to match."<sup>37</sup> Thus the very capacity for learning and coming to the truth is found in God's grace, through creation, on the one hand, and, in the life of the believer, new creation, on the other.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Peter King, "Augustine on the Impossibility of Teaching," *Metaphilosophy* 29, no. 3 (1998): 7.[http://www.individual.utoronto.ca/pking/articles/Augustine\\_on\\_Teaching.pdf](http://www.individual.utoronto.ca/pking/articles/Augustine_on_Teaching.pdf) [accessed November, 12, 2011].

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, VII.4.24.

<sup>33</sup> King, 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Augustine, *Concerning the Teacher*, XII.39-40.

<sup>37</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, XII.4.24.

<sup>38</sup> For an excellent discussion on Augustine's view of illumination see Gareth B. Matthews, "Knowledge and Illumination," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edited by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 171-185.



## TEACHER, STUDENT, AND METHODOLOGY

In the first part of this essay, I examined four areas which provided a theological grounding for Augustine's view of teaching and learning: love for God and neighbor; love for truth; anthropology; and illumination. In what follows I consider the student/teacher relationship in the thought of Augustine, followed by his use of methodology. It will be argued that Augustine's use of method is secondary to the student/teacher relationship. Methodology was controlled by his view of the student/teacher dynamic and by his theological grounding for teaching and learning. I will then conclude by providing several implications for Augustine's theology of teaching for modern Christian educators.

*Teacher/Student Dynamic*

Before discussing the teacher/student dynamic in Augustine's thought, it would be helpful to consider his view on the role of the teacher and the nature of the student. In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine puts forth his view of the teacher/interpreter of Scripture. One who holds such a role should be "the defender of the true faith and the opponent of error, both to teach what is right and refute what is wrong, and in the performance of this task to conciliate the hostile, to rouse the careless, and to tell the ignorant both what is occurring at present and what is probable in the future."<sup>39</sup> Central to the role of the teacher, then, is the ability to recognize truth from error. Not only should the teacher explicate truth, but she should also be ready to defend it. Further, teaching for Augustine is content driven. That which is being taught is "the true faith." The teacher of Scripture is constantly interacting with "great matters" of Christian doctrine.<sup>40</sup>

With respect to students, Augustine recognizes that there is not just one kind of student. Some pupils are eager and ready to learn, while others need rousing to learn.<sup>41</sup> Once the students are ready to learn, the teacher must assess where the students are. At times students need instruction; whereas other times they need clarification. With respect to those students who need rousing, it is important for the teacher to employ various methods in order to stir up their emotions in order for them to learn.<sup>42</sup>

For Augustine, there are other elements that make the teacher. Following Cicero, Augustine stresses that the aim of the orator is to teach, delight, and move the student. Quoting Cicero he adds, "To teach is a necessity, to delight is a beauty, and to persuade is a triumph."<sup>43</sup> Of the three, however, the most important is instruction. Augustine recognizes that not all who teach have been instructed in rhetoric. Therefore he expresses that it is better for the teacher to keep in mind that

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<sup>39</sup> *On Christian Doctrine*, IV.4.6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.18.35-37.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* IV.4.6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Cicero quoted by Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine*, IV.12.27.

wisdom is more important than eloquence and that truth is more important than expression.<sup>44</sup> Another important trait of the teacher is for the teacher to live in harmony with his teaching. This, says Augustine, will bring about “greater effect.”<sup>45</sup> On this point he stresses, “But whatever may be the majesty of the style, the life of the speaker will count for more in securing the hearer’s compliance. The man who speaks wisely and eloquently, but lives wickedly, may, it is true, instruct many who are anxious to learn, though, as it is written, he ‘is unprofitable to himself.’”<sup>46</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the teacher should depend on God in his teaching. Before teaching, the teacher should pray for himself and for his students. Even after preparation and before teaching, the teacher should pray again. On this point Augustine suggests, “And when the hour is come that he must speak, he ought, before he opens his mouth, to lift up his thirsty soul to God, to drink in what he is about to pour forth, and to be himself filled with what he is about to distribute.”<sup>47</sup> This is especially important, given the nature of faith and the many things that could be said, and the many ways of saying those things. Only God knows the hearts of all who are being taught.<sup>48</sup> What is the relation, then, of the teacher and the learner for Augustine?

As noted in part one, Augustine’s view of the teacher is one who ultimately is a learner. As a learner, the ultimate pursuit of the teacher is to love and enjoy God, and in doing so, to seek truth. The teacher should seek to come alongside of the student as a fellow learner, in humility, understanding that it is by God’s grace that one obtains knowledge. Coming alongside of the student does not mean that the teacher should forget her place of authority. There is a place for such, but Augustine understood that coercion does not bring genuine learning.<sup>49</sup> Thus authority and coercion ought not to be equated.<sup>50</sup> Further, as noted, the purpose of teaching/learning is ultimately “Truth-centered” and not “self-centered.” Thus the ultimate objective of the teaching/learning process is to arrive at truth.

Yet, as was also considered, if truth or knowledge is not something that ultimately comes through use of language or through the departure of knowledge by the teacher, then such requires active participation on the part of the student. As Lucy Banard suggests about the “Augustinian student,” s/he “is not merely the passive recipient of knowledge, as if a sponge, yet acknowledged as an active

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., IV.5.7-8, 28.61.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., IV.27.59.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., IV.27.59.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., IV.15.32.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> This becomes apparent in passage from the *Confessions*. Augustine recounts that when he was forced to study Greek literature, he found the assignments rather boring. Yet, in regards to learning Latin, he picked it up quite easily because it was in the gentle care of his nurses, without any painful pressure. See *Confessions* 1.14.23.

<sup>50</sup> Stimming, 140.

participant in his or her attainment of knowledge.”<sup>51</sup> Such active participation should be coupled with a mentality of faith seeking after understanding, recognizing that all knowledge is a gift by God. In his work, *Teaching Christianity*, Augustine argues that the purpose of studying Scripture is to “discover its meaning and to pass it on to others.”<sup>52</sup> Yet, Augustine recognizes that such a task is never done apart from God’s help, whether it is the task of ‘discovering’ the truth or the task of ‘passing it on to others’.<sup>53</sup> He gives as an analogy God’s multiplying of the “five and seven.” “So just as that bread increased in quantity when it was broken,” says Augustine, “in the same way all the things the Lord has already granted me for setting about this work will be multiplied under his inspiration, when I start passing them on to others.”<sup>54</sup>

John Immerwahr, in conducting a study of Augustine’s work *Instructing Beginners in Faith*, demonstrates that one of Augustine’s key tenets of the book is to show that teachers and students are to function in “a reciprocal and dynamic relationship, where each is constantly influencing the other.”<sup>55</sup> An endearing example of this is found in *Concerning the Teacher*, where Augustine acknowledges that he should have considered Adeodatus more seriously in regards to the use of the Punic word for *piety*.<sup>56</sup> In his acknowledgement to his son and pupil, Augustine demonstrates humility, showing that he himself is not beyond learning. Immerwahr brings out two further conclusions in regards to his study on *Instructing Beginners in Faith*. First, interestingly, Augustine sought to have his students like him as a teacher, but not in the sense of “personal gratification.”<sup>57</sup> Rather, Augustine realized that if students did not find the teacher’s instruction appealing, the teacher begins to “grow discouraged and, in the very midst of the instruction . . . begin to falter and feel ground down because all our effort seems to be for nothing.”<sup>58</sup> Hence, the reason that students should like their teachers is not to make the teacher feel better, but to make the teacher better at teaching.<sup>59</sup> The second conclusion is that, in order for the teacher/student relationship to work, there must be the element of love. According to Immerwahr’s interpretation of Augustine, love is the clearest example of reciprocity within a relationship. It is through love that a person has the power to evoke love in another. Yet, a lack of reciprocity will damage the student/teacher dynamic more than anything else.<sup>60</sup> Thus this notion of reciprocity

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<sup>51</sup> Lucy Banard, “The Pedagogical Gospel according to Saint Augustine,” *International Journal of Humanities* 5, no. 2 (2007): 11. *Humanities International Complete*, EBSCOhost [accessed October 8, 2011].

<sup>52</sup> Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, I.1.1. Note: *Teaching Christianity* is the same as *On Christian Doctrine*. This version, however, is a modern translation of the work.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>55</sup> Immerwahr, 658.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, *Concerning the Teacher*, 13.44.

<sup>57</sup> Immerwahr, 659.

<sup>58</sup> Augustine, *Instructing Beginners in Faith*, 10:14 quoted by Immerwahr, 659.

<sup>59</sup> Immerwahr., 659.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 659-660.

of love in the relationship between teacher/learner becomes the locus of Augustine's teaching ministry.

### *Teaching and Methodology*

Throughout Augustine's writings and teaching one may find a variety of methods employed. One common method often found in Augustine's teaching is the Socratic Method. As Gareth B. Matthews demonstrates, Augustine often employs the question, "How is it possible that *p*?"<sup>61</sup> This question is consistently seen throughout the *Confessions*, especially in regards to Augustine's discussion on 'time'.<sup>62</sup> Another example of the Socratic Method is found in Augustine's dialogue with Adeodatus in *Concerning the Teacher*. Rather than seeking to tell Adeodatus what to believe, Augustine wants him to discover the truth. He does this by employing a variety of questions with the intentions of leading him and Adeodatus to the truth.

When looking through Augustine's sermons, it is not uncommon to find Augustine cracking a joke, using wit, or telling a story when teaching.<sup>63</sup> The purpose is not to entertain the person as much as it is to help the student retain energy.<sup>64</sup> From his writings, we often find him breaking down the material for his learners. In his work *On the Creed: A Sermon to the Catechumens*, we find Augustine taking the Apostle's Creed and breaking it down to each of its essential parts, explicating each part in a way that is digestible for the students. Yet, we also see Augustine expounding on the truth of Christian doctrine in more substantial and complex ways, whether through writing a handbook of Christian doctrine for a friend, as in the case of *The Enchiridion*, or in explaining such doctrines as the Trinity.<sup>65</sup>

What basis does Augustine give for using various methodologies when teaching? As a professional orator, Augustine found the tools of oration helpful in effectively communicating Christian truth. Therefore, he sought to integrate the truths that he found in oration of his day with the expression and delivery of the truth found in the Christian faith. He emphasized the importance of not only giving content (instruction), but also perspicuity of style, the ability to keep a student's attention, and eloquence.<sup>66</sup>

As noted earlier, Augustine recognized that students come in various forms, all with differing expectations, desires, and backgrounds. Some students are eager to learn, while others need motivation. The goal of Christian education, then, is not

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<sup>61</sup> Gareth B. Matthews, "The Socratic Augustine," *Metaphilosophy* 29, no. 3 (July 1998): 202. *Philosopher's Index*, EBSCOhost [accessed October 8, 2011].

<sup>62</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.

<sup>63</sup> Immerwahr, 662; Augustine, *Sermon* 9.5,6

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 662.

<sup>65</sup> See Augustine *On the Creed: A Sermon to Catechumens; The Enchiridion; and The Trinity*.

<sup>66</sup> cf. Titus 2:7-8.

merely instruction—the giving of content—but for students to be moved by truth.<sup>67</sup> He understood that it is difficult at times, especially when students do not want to take initiative in applying what they have learned. “The eloquent divine,” says Augustine, “when he is urging a practical truth, must not only teach so as to give instruction, and please so as to keep up the attention, but he must also sway the mind so as to subdue the will.”<sup>68</sup> Here, eloquence becomes an important tool for the teacher in helping the student move from assenting to a certain truth to practicing it. He further points out that discussion on different areas of the faith requires different tones in our speech (different styles of speaking). He compares the difference between trying to explain a difficult doctrine, such as the Trinity, and trying to motivate learners who do not want to act on what they have learned. In explaining the Trinity, one’s approach will be one of explicating certain proofs done in a calm discussion; whereas, trying to motivate learners to act out on that to which they have assented may require teaching done “with power, and in a manner calculated to sway the mind.”<sup>69</sup> Yet, at times, when we turn to praising God, our speech should gravitate toward “beauty and splendor.”<sup>70</sup> Augustine finds warrant for using various styles of speech by appealing to examples found in Scripture, particularly in the writings of the Apostle Paul, and from various teachers of the church.<sup>71</sup>

Augustine’s desire in using various methods was to bring the student to a point of understanding and living out truth. As noted in the discussion on theological anthropology, humans naturally move away from the truth. They tend toward “self-centeredness” rather than “truth-centeredness.” But if, as Augustine believed, humans are ultimately made for God and long to rest in Him, then the task of learning, which is the search for truth and wisdom, is movement toward God, in whom all wisdom and truth is grounded. The best state that one can be in is a journey toward God, fixing her affections on Him.<sup>72</sup> Augustine sought to employ various methods in order to lead his students toward this journey. For him, the greatest demonstration of one’s love toward the other is helping her to know and love God.<sup>73</sup>

### *Implication for Teachers*

Having examined Augustine’s view on teaching/learning, it has become clear that at the center is a theological foundation, with primacy given to the Christian commandments to love God and to love one’s neighbor. Moreover, Augustine saw that the command to love one’s neighbor or, in other words, the principle of charity, becomes the integrative motif for the student/teacher dynamic and for his

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<sup>67</sup> *On Christian Doctrine*, IV.13.29

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.19.38.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.20-21.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, I.22.21.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, I.28.29, 29.30.

methodology. But how might Augustine's views on teaching be helpful to modern Christian educators? There are at least five important principles Christians can take from Augustine's theology of teaching.

*Content-full:* Truth contained in Scripture, and as expressed in Christian doctrine, was essential to Augustine's teaching. After his conversion, authority of Scripture directed his search for truth. The place that Augustine gives to the authority of revelation can be clearly seen in his work, *Contra Academicos*:

To nobody it is doubtful that there is a two-fold force that leads us to learning: authority (*auctoritas*) and reason (*ratione*). And for me it is certain that I should not stray from the authority of Christ, because I cannot find anything else more powerful. In the themes that demand arduous reasoning, given that such is my condition that I impatiently desire to know truth, not only by faith, but by the comprehension of the intelligence, I am entirely confident to find among the Platonists the doctrine which is most in conformity with our revelation.<sup>74</sup>

Augustine saw the value in reason, particularly in Platonism, but the content that directed his search for truth was found in the "authority of Christ." The classroom experience, then, should be one that leads both student and teacher toward truth. Augustine knew that was not always the case. As Mary T. Stimming points out, Augustine understood that "sin leads teachers and students to cling to their personal, usually petty, interests and hence to abandon the responsibility to the subject matter at hand and the ultimate goods which intellectual knowledge can serve. Teaching and learning become self-centered, not (T)ruth-centered."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, it is imperative that the teacher be mindful of falling into such a trap and the need of keeping the classroom directed toward truth.

*Integrative:* As was stressed in the previous point, Augustine was not afraid to interact with the thought of the Platonists. We see this also in his incorporation of rhetorical practice in his teaching. Augustine practiced what modern Christian educators call "the integration of faith and learning." For Augustine, God is the source and ground for all truth. However, as noted in the above passage from *Contra Academicos*, the control factor for discovering truth in the world was "conformity with . . . revelation."

*Relational:* Christian educators should seek to get to know students and to allow students to get to know them, especially since the teacher and student are moving along on the same journey. Here, John Immerwahr provides some important advice: "If the relationship between teacher and learner is the primary factor for success in student learning, the teacher cannot be successful without knowing the student, and vice versa."<sup>76</sup> Building relationships with students allows the teacher to understand where the students are in the learning process. As important as delivering content is, it is just as important for students to know that

<sup>74</sup> Augustine, *Contra Academicos*, III.20.45. Quoted in Mina, 576.

<sup>75</sup> Stimming, 139.

<sup>76</sup> Immerwahr, 660.

the teacher cares about who they are. Opening one's self up allows students to catch a glimpse of the teacher's heart and own journey toward learning. But doing so should caution the teacher to heed Augustine's advice about living out what she teaches. If the student sees his teacher practicing what she teaches, he is, perhaps, more apt to desire to follow her in the journey toward truth.

*Reciprocal:* Teaching should also be reciprocal. Too often the classroom or teaching setting is merely content driven, with very little attention given to an environment that reinforces reciprocal learning. Just as students can learn from their teachers, so too can teachers learn from their students. For Christian educators, there is room for humility in instruction. In *The Trinity*, Augustine provides a clear portrait of his willingness to learn as he engaged his readers:

Accordingly, dear reader, whenever you are as certain about something as I am go forward with me; whenever you stick equally fast seek with me; whenever you notice that you have gone wrong come back to me; or that I have, call me back to you. In this way let us set out along Clarity Street together, making for him of whom it is said, *Seek his face always* (Ps 105:4).<sup>77</sup>

Humans, by nature, are fallen, and thus are fallible in their learning and interpretation of truth. Reciprocity in learning allows both teacher and student to move along "Clarity Street together," correcting one another as they move toward truth.

*God-directed:* Most importantly, for Augustine, education was truth-centered, and therefore, God-directed. Unfortunately, some Christian educators view teaching as simply giving content or passing on knowledge. As Augustine stressed, teaching is much more. He understood the great responsibility involved in teaching, and thus sought to use various methods in order to bring his students to the point of, not only assenting to truth, but practicing truth in their lives. He understood that teaching is about helping the student become passionate about learning. For, in so doing, the student is seeking after truth. And as Augustine recognized, the quest for truth is ultimately a quest for the love of God. Thus the ultimate goal and outcome of Christian education is worship and the enjoyment of God—a goal lived out by Augustine, who served as a model educator, learner, and example.

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<sup>77</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, I.1.5.

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