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**Aurelius Augustine's
Use or Discarding
of
The Classical Methodology of Education
to
Promote the Christian Faith**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree**

**MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY
at
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO
1999**

by

Gordon A. Beck

Spring 1999

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Chronological table of Augustine's life and educational writings

354	Augustine born at Thagaste
371	Goes to Carthage for the first time
372	Takes a concubine and Patricius dies
373	Reads <i>Hortensius</i> , birth of Adeodatus Consecration of Ambrose
383	Sails for Rome
384	Appointed professor of rhetoric in Milan
385	Monica arrives in Milan
386	Conversion at the end of August, goes to Cassiciacum (September) writes <i>Contra Academicos, De Beata Vita, De Ordine</i> or <i>Divine Providence and The Problem of Evil</i> (December), <i>Soliquia</i> (winter).
387	Baptism on Easter, writes <i>De immortalitate anima</i> Death of Monica
389	Death of Adeodatus
396	<i>De Doctrina Christiana</i>
397	<i>Confessiones</i>
399	<i>De natura boni contra Manichaeum, De Trinitate</i>

405	<i>Contra Creconium grammaticum</i>
410	Alaric enters Rome, Roman refugees to Africa
413	<i>De civitate Dei</i> , I-III (written before the death Marcellinus) <i>De civitate Dei</i> , IV-V
415	<i>De civitate Dei</i> , VI-X
417	<i>De civitate Dei</i> , XI-XIII
420	<i>De civitate Dei</i> , XVII
425	<i>De civitate Dei</i> , XVIII <i>De civitate Dei</i> , XIX-XXII
430	Death and burial of Augustine, the ravaging of Numidia by Vandals. ¹

¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), cf. pp. 16, 74, 184, 282, and 378. Brown gives a detailed chronology of the major historical events during Augustine's lifetime and also lists all his major works.

Outline for a Master of Sacred Theology Paper

Thesis statement: It is the purpose of this paper to examine Augustine's use or discarding of the classical methodology of education as found in his works *de Ordine* and *de Doctrina Christiana*.

Introduction: The tension in the early church between the Christian faith and pagan culture found a compromise in Augustine's declaration: "Every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is the Lord's"². This he declared in *de Doctrina Christiana*, 396.

I. Historical Background

- A. The ancient Homeric *paideia*
- B. The conflict between the philosophical and the rhetorical truth claims within the classical methodology of education
 - 1. Plato and the philosophical tradition
 - 2. Isocrates and the rhetorical tradition
 - a. The influence of Cicero's *Hortensius*
 - b. Augustine's compromise: the rhetor in the service of truth
- C. The classical *weltanschauung* before Augustine
- D. A summary of the classical methodology of education

II. *De Ordine*: Augustine's use or discarding of the classical educational methodology in his *de Ordine* or *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil*:

² Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine*. Translated with introduction by D. W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958), p. 54.

- A. Augustine's use of classical educational goals leads the wise, godly person to live a happy life (*beata vita*) in the cruel Roman world.
1. To know God
 2. To know one's soul
 3. To live the happy life, *beata vita*
- B. Augustine uses the classical methodology of education to find the answer to the question: can one perceive and grasp an order of reality (*ordinem rerum*) by which the entire universe is held together and governed (*coercetur ac regitur*)?
1. "Order is an arrangement of similar and dissimilar things, assigning its proper place to each one."³
 2. "Order is that by which God governs all things that are."⁴
 3. "But with God, order always was"⁵
 4. "Order is that which will lead us to God, if we hold to it during life; unless we do hold to it during life, we shall not come to God."⁶

³ Augustine, *de Ordine*. annotations by Robert Russell. (New York: Cosmopolitan Science & Art Service Co., Inc., 1942), p. 183.

⁴ Ibid., Bk. II, cap. IV, par. XI, pp. 92-93. *Ordo est quo Deus agit omnia quae sunt, si etiam stulus quae agit, agit ordine.*

⁵ Ibid., Bk. II, cap. VII, par. XXIII, pp. 114-115. *Sed semper erat ordo apud Deum.*

⁶ Ibid., Bk. I, cap. IX, par. XXVII pp. 50-53. *Ordo est quem si tenuerimus in vita, perducet ad Deum, et quem nisi tenuerimus in vita, non pervenimus ad Deum.*

C. Related questions

1. Are there events that occur by chance and outside order?
 2. Does God will evil?
 3. The role of the senses
 - a. The eyes sense movement and color
 - b. The ears sense sound
 4. Augustine's personal journey of faith sought wholeness in the One God.
 - a. His soul, cleansed by virtue, seeks oneness or unity.
 - b. His mind uses memory as its slave.
 - c. His reason, capable of philosophical reflection, makes sense out of cruel changes.
 5. The soul (*anima*) seeks to return to the one (*unum*) immovable God.
 - a. God is the highest reason and the over-soul of the world to which the soul of people returns.
 - b. God is just because He gives each one his due.
 - c. The One, immovable God came among us in the Incarnation of His Son.
-

6. Augustine's use or discarding of the classical use of poetry, philosophy and rhetoric (the liberal arts) in the wise man's pursuit of the happy life, *beata vita*.
 - a. Augustine's criticism of poetically inclined Licentius.
 - b. Augustine's criticism of the vanity of rhetoric.
 - c. Philosophy, the dialogical end of liberal arts.
7. The place of Augustine's mother, Monica, and authority are in keeping with the classical methodology.
8. What then is evil?
 - a. The teacher who teaches grammar before the alphabet.
 - b. The poet who uses solecisms and barbarisms.
9. The wise man's enjoyment of God, who orders all things, overcomes all evil and is the answer to *moira*, fate.

III. *De Doctrina Christiana* The use and discarding of the classical methodology of education in *de Doctrina Christiana* to train the aspiring Scriptural exegete and ecclesiastical orator in the proper rules of Scriptural interpretation and in teaching its truths

- A. A proper understanding of Scripture leads to the same goal that philosophy leads to--to enjoy the Highest Good, the One God, the Trinity.
- B. Scripture, when understood properly, leads to enjoyment and love of God and love of others, including love of one's enemies.

1. As the classical study of philosophy took one away from the things of this life, a study of Scripture exposes one's love of temporal things and self.
 2. Faith will stagger if the authority of Scriptures staggers. If faith staggers, charity will stagger.
 3. In keeping with the philosopher's desire to know deep things, the more difficult the meaning of the passage, the greater the exegete will appreciate its meaning.
 4. A sign is a thing that causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses.
 - a. The Scriptural understanding of numbers frees the exegete from fateful notions.
 - b. An understanding of music is useful for understanding Scripture.
- C. In keeping with the philosopher's desire to know Truth, the ecclesiastical exegete and orator should understand that wherever he may find Truth (scientific truth) it is his Lord's.
1. The practice of astrology is rooted in anti-Scriptural, anti-Truth, fate-filled notions.
 2. The Truth of an institution or custom depends upon common agreement, which may differ from Scriptural Truth.

3. As the classical methodology taught logic as a method of discovering Truth, logical Truth can be found in the Bible, I Corinthians 15.
 4. A knowledge of Scriptural languages aids in discovering its truths.
- D. If rhetoric in the classical sense can be used in either urging evil or justice, why should it not be used in the service of Truth?
1. Rhetoric should not be taught *per se* but should be caught by reading and hearing eloquence.
 2. The ecclesiastical orator is unaware of his eloquence but knows the wisdom of Scripture.
 3. The rhetoric used in Scripture doesn't abandon rhetoric's principles.
 - a. Romans 5:3-5
 - b. Amos 6:1-6
 4. Augustine finds Cicero's three pronged use of rhetoric (to teach is a necessity, to please is sweetness, to persuade is wisdom) useful for teaching Scriptural truths.
 5. Cicero urged that oratory should vary according to the subject: small things in a subdued manner, moderate things in a temperate manner, and grand things in a grand manner.
 - a. Although the ecclesiastical orator has a grand subject, he speaks it best in a subdued manner.

- b. Scripture makes use of all three styles. (Matthew 25, Romans 12:6-16, Romans 8:28-39)
 - c. Church fathers Cyprian and Ambrose, and even Augustine, used these styles of oratory.
6. The ecclesiastical person should aspire to pursue those truths that are useful.
- IV. A summary and some implications for the Lutheran churchman

Introduction

The Christian Faith and Culture

The tension between the Christian faith and culture in which the Christian finds himself has been part of the Christian experience ever since the disciples of the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked, “Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not” (Mt. 17:22)? Jesus’ famous answer demonstrates that the Christian always lives in two worlds. “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Mt. 17:21).

A survey of the Biblical record will show that the degree to which the Christian participates in or uses the pagan world may vary. It will range from quoting a secular poet, as St. Paul does when he quotes the Cretan poet Epimenides (600 B. C.) in his *Cretica* to the philosophers on Mars Hill, “For in him we live, move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28)⁷, to the sharp separation from the world that can be found in this passage from the first letter of St. John, “Do not love the world or anything in

⁷ Robert G. Hoerber, ed. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, New International Version. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), p. 1690. (Other commentaries suggest that this quote comes from Aratus’ (315-240 B. C.) *Phaenomena* or from Cleanthes (331-233 B.C.) in his *Hymn to Zeus*. Some attribute the whole passage and the one following in Acts 17 to Epimenides’ epic on Minos and Rhadamanthus. Some doubt whether “in him we live . . .” is a quotation. And some note that the same thought is found in Psalm 139.

the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (I John 2:15).

The writings of the early church fathers reflect the same tension. The degree to which the early church fathers made use of or participated in the pagan world ranged from Tertullian (145 - 220), who, in his tract *de Idololatria* (221 - 222), denies Christians the right to teach (not to learn) secular subjects (because the teaching of secular subjects is absolutely incompatible with the Christian faith and on the level with the making of idols or of participating in astrology) to Augustine who advises the aspiring churchman that all truth (whether sacred or secular) is the Lord's.⁸ In *The Confessions*, written at the time of the writing of *de Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine declares, “He [God] is everywhere where there is the least trace of truth.”⁹ Balanced against these words are Tertullian's stern words:

Moreover, we must inquire likewise touching schoolmasters; not only of them, but also all other professors of literature. Nay, on the contrary, we must not doubt that they are in affinity with manifold

⁸ Augustine, *de Doctrina Christiana*. Trans. with an intro. by D.W.Robertson, Jr. (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958), Bk. II, cap. XVIII, p. 54.

⁹ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Trans. by Rex Warner with intro. by Vernon J. Bourke. (New York: New American Library, 1963), Bk. IV, cap. 12, p. 81.

idolatry. . . . How do we repudiate secular studies, without which divine studies cannot be pursued? . . . Learning literature is allowable for believers, rather than teaching; for the principles of learning and of teaching are different. If a believer teach literature, while he is teaching doubtless he commends, while he delivers he affirms, while he recalls he bears testimony to, the praises of idols interspersed therein. . . . Hence the devil gets men's early faith built up from the beginnings of their erudition.¹⁰

Emperor Julian, the Apostate (360-363), who was a thorough-going Hellenist and who attempted to reverse the Christian trends of Constantine and his sons by closing down as many Christian institutions as possible, forbade Christians on June 17, 360, from teaching in pagan schools. He felt that when they taught the stories of the Greek and Roman gods they made a mockery out of what should have been taught in reverence. Julian, along with many pagan Roman emperors before him, was convinced that the worship of the Greek and Roman gods was what made the Roman Empire great. For Julian the worship of the pagan gods was at the heart of Rome's glory.

The actual wording of Julian's edict said that permission to teach had to be obtained in advance from the municipal authorities and the

¹⁰ Tertullian, *de Idololatria*. in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III. Trans. by the Rev. S. Thelwall. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co. 1986), cap. X, pp. 66-67 (Hereafter referred to as *ANF*).

Emperor himself. This served as a guarantee for the teacher's efficiency and morality. "Christians who taught Homer and Hesiod without believing in the gods they described were accused of failing in honesty and candor by teaching something they did not believe. They were ordered either to apostatize or to give up teaching."¹¹

By inference we can assume that the early church fathers who were contemporaries of Julian must have not agreed with Tertullian's earlier mandate. Julian's edict inferred that Christians under his reign taught pagan subjects. And the history of the early church demonstrated that Tertullian's view was extreme and difficult to follow. For the greater part, the church borrowed from the pagan culture much like the Israelites did when they took the gold from Egypt before they exited from slavery in that land.¹²

But what actually was taught to the youthful Christians like John Chrysostom or Aurelius Augustine in the pagan schools of Antioch or Thagaste or Carthage? What world view or *weltanschauung* was promoted? How much could be used and how much needed to be

¹¹ H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*. trans. by George Lamb. (New York: Mentor Books, 1956), pp. 430-431.

¹² Cf. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. Bk. II, cap. XL, p. 76.

discarded in the teaching of the faith? How sharp or how blurred did Augustine make the separation between the person of faith and the culture in which that person was found?

These are some of the questions we will raise during this paper. In order to get at the answer to these questions, we will trace the classical methodology of education and its curriculum as it expresses the expectations the Roman culture had for its young. How many of these expectations would Augustine use in the education of his future Christians? After we delineate the classical methodology of education up until and during Augustine's day, we will seek to discover the influence of Roman culture's classical methodology of education in Augustine's *de Ordine* and *de Doctrina Christiana*. How much of the classical Roman educational methodology should the Christian use and how much should he discard?

As we have already noted, Augustine is not the first early church father to deal with this tension, but he comes as Eugene Kevane (quoting Karl Jasper) states, at the "Axial Period"¹³ where we find Augustine

¹³ Eugene Kevane, *Augustine the Educator*. (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1964), p. 14. (Kevane quotes Karl Jaspers' *The Origin and Goal of History*. [London: Routledge, 1953] p. 26.)

projecting an “altogether different linear view of history which had been confined to the chosen people in Palestine during most of the classical centuries.”¹⁴ We find the prefiguring of this break with ancient classical thought in the lives and teachings of the early church fathers but it is given most elaborate expression in Augustine.

The use or discarding the classical method of education can be already seen in the early church fathers prior to Augustine. Would Origen (185 - 253) have been effective as a catechist in the city of Alexandria had he not started a grammar school and been a teacher of grammar first? Would he later conclude that the work of a catechist was incompatible with the teaching of grammar?¹⁵ Would the influential church father John of Antioch and Constantinople (347 - 407), a contemporary of Augustine, be known today as the Golden Mouth (Chrysostom) had he not had the pagan training in rhetoric in the school of one of Rome’s most famous rhetors, the teacher Libanius?¹⁶ Would

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Cf. Philip Schaff, “The Life and Work of St. John Chrysostom” in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol IX. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmanns Publishing Co. 1996), p. 6, (Hereafter referred to as “*NPNF*”).

Jerome (345 - 420), another contemporary of Augustine, have had an interest in languages, and, therefore, become skilled enough to translate the Bible into Latin (*The Vulgate*) if he had not studied rhetoric (the most sought after discipline at the time) under Aelius Donatus in Rome?¹⁷ Origen's passion for meaning, Chrysostom's passion for oratory, and Jerome's passion for translating evoke the question, which liberal arts tools are needed to promote the faith? The tension between the use or discarding of the classical method of education can be seen in the classical shadow that haunted Jerome for most of his life. It was probably guilt over such fondness for the learning of secular subjects that drove Jerome, in the midst of a fever-ridden illness and in the midst of an ascetically enforced Lenten season of 374, to experience the famous anti-Ciceronian vision. Thereafter, he resolved to stop studying the pagan writers and devoted himself to sacred studies¹⁸ And finally, even though Augustine resigned from his position as a teacher of rhetoric in Milan after his conversion in 386, how much of the classical methodology of education would he retain? This paper will show Augustine's use of

¹⁷ Philip Schaff, "Prolegomena to Jerome," *NPNF*, Second Series, vol. VI. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Erdmanns Publishing Co. 1989), p. xvi.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

or the discarding of the classical methodology of education in the training of the churchman of his day. The main focus of inquiry will be on his two works *de Ordine*, written after his conversion in 386 and before his baptism on Easter 387 at the retreat at Cassiciacum, and *de Doctrina Christiana*, written ten years after his conversion.

Jerome, who, in spite of his resolve to refrain from reading and using the pagan writers, later encouraged Magnus, an orator of Rome, to make use of them.¹⁹ Chrysostom, who demonstrated his rejection of the pagan Roman culture by purposefully not mentioning in his sermons and writings his pagan teacher, Libanius, yet used the arguments of Plato to prove that the soul of a faithful servant of God is immortal.²⁰ Sensing this tension in the early Church, we can see why the rhetorically and Platonically-influenced statement of Augustine's that "every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 149 ff. In this letter that is dated A.D. 397, Jerome cites Moses, who relied upon his Egyptian training; the Book of Proverbs, which commences with dark sayings that belong by right to the sphere of the dialectician and philosopher; David, who uses the sword of Goliath to kill him; Hosea, who took a whore, Gomer, to be his wife; Jewish historian Josephus, who quotes many secular writers; early church father Origen, who quotes Plato and Aristotle, Numenius and Cornutus; and Cyprian, who wrote with splendid rhetoric that idols are no gods.

²⁰ Chrysostom, "To Prove That No One Can Harm The Man Who Does Not Injure Himself" in Philip Schaff, ed. *N P N F.* vol. IX. p. 269 ff. Chrysostom's treatise borrows the argument that Plato used in his tenth book of *The Republic* for the immortality of the soul.

the Lord's"²¹ was a compromise to the tension that had been in the Christian church since its conception.

The Homeric *Paideia*

Kevane stated that "every human culture possesses a distinctive system and process of education, else it could not live in history for inability to transmit its essential values to its younger generation."²² What were those essential values in the Greek culture? What was the proper way of transmitting them? The method of educating was the *paideia* or *humanitas*, "the distinctive classical education which corresponded to the initiation schools and was the accepted instrumentality in classical antiquity to teach a boy to become a man."²³

Classical education began with Homer. The texts of Homer were the basic texts. They were poetic. They glamorized the mythical heroes and heroines, gods and goddesses. The poetry's aim was not essentially aesthetic but the immortalization of the hero. The poet, as Plato was to say, "clothes all the great deeds accomplished by the men of old with

²¹ Augustine, *Of Christian Doctrine*. Bk. II, cap. XVIII, p. 54.

²² Kevane, p. 8.

²³ Ibid.

glory, and thus educated those who come after.”²⁴ What we have in the Homeric *paideia* was not history *per se*; it was not research into truths, ethical or metaphysical; it was not totally secular, either; but it was the promotion of ancient legends which carried with them values that all the young, through the recitation of Homeric poetry, were taught to imitate and to model. Here the Greek boys learned what it meant to be free, as much as one could be free in the fate-filled Greek world, what it meant to live a morally responsible life, and what it meant to be a complete Greek man. A major shift in Greek thought came with the dawn of the philosophical age as expressed in the questioning method of Socrates, the dialogues of Plato and the writings of Aristotle. The Greek world, and subsequent Roman world, would not be quite the same after these three had made their appearance on history’s stage. Yet, through the subsequent more philosophical centuries, the stories of the escapades and heroic adventures of the gods and goddesses, mortal heroes and heroines, lingered on in the schools and the training of the young. A fully educated young man should know about these things.

²⁴ Ibid.

The Philosophical and the Rhetorical Classical Traditions

A safe assumption that one can make when doing research in the classical methodology of education is that little changed over more than eight centuries of Roman history. The same curriculum is followed through the centuries with the end being the Socratic dialogical method of finding Truth as its highest level of learning. The researcher only has to examine Augustine's treatise *The Teacher* (begun during his days at the *Cassiciacum Otium* in A. D. 386 - 387 and finished after he moved to Thagaste, North Africa) to see the relationship between it and Plato's *The Republic* completed in 375 B.C. Both works are written around the Socratic mode of questioning: *The Republic* between Socrates and his companions; *The Teacher* between Augustine and his brilliant illegitimate son, Adeodatus. Both works celebrate the pursuit of Truth through the exchange of words in a conversation. Both are attempts to move the reader to think that reality (*res*) is beyond what one sees (*signum*). Both are convinced that man's rational soul is the connection to Truth. In Plato's analogy of the cave²⁵ the cave's denizens see only shadows of

²⁵ Plato, *The Republic*. Trans. with notes and interpretative essay by Allan Bloom. (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1968), BK. VII, 514 - 517b, p. 193 ff.

reality until one of them is forced out of the cave into the light of Truth.²⁶ In *The Teacher* Augustine guides his son out of the signs of this world into the Light of Christ's truth. Both Plato and Augustine are moving from the lower to the higher, from that which is seen to that which is not seen. The difference is that in *The Teacher* Augustine will not allow himself to be called the teacher of Truth. "We should not call any man on earth a teacher." Augustine quotes Matthew 23:9, "There is One in heaven who is the Teacher of all."²⁷

. . . What is meant by "in heaven" is something that will be taught by us by Him who directs us even through human agencies and external signs to turn inwardly to Him for our instruction. To love Him and to know Him, that is the happy life, which all proclaim they are seeking, but few there are who can rejoice at having really found it. . . . So you [Adeodatus] can see from whom it was that you learned these things. It was not from me [Augustine]. But if you did not know that what I said was true, then neither He nor I have taught you.²⁸

In *The Republic* Plato insists that Truth is something discovered

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Augustine, *The Teacher*, cap. XIV in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol 59, trans. Robert P. Russell. (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1967), p. 60.

²⁸ Ibid.

through the exercise of the mind and dialogue. In *The Teacher* Truth is something taught by Jesus. But in both the method that Plato had so successfully borrowed from Socrates is used.

Down through the centuries of Roman history if changes come in the classical educational methodology, they come slowly. The major thinkers over the twelve or more centuries that the classical period extends are easy to name: Plato, Isocrates, Cicero, Augustine. These are key in understanding the major themes that carry the classical methodology of education forward until the “Axial Period” of Augustine.²⁹

Plato and the Philosophical Tradition

In Book X of Plato's *The Republic* he banished the poets (poetry at the very essence of the Homeric *paideia*) as a serious detriment for the Socratic pursuit of the Truth in his Ideal City.³⁰ He accused them of glorifying an imitation of the Greek heroes and heroines. They aroused the passions and do not lead to what was just and noble, good and beautiful. They were used later to glorify and at the same time to mock

²⁹ Kevane, p. 22.

³⁰ Plato, *The Republic*. Bk. X, 595a - 608a, pp. 277ff.

the gods and goddesses in the Roman theatres. These were the very gods and goddesses that any conservative, pagan Roman citizen would say made Rome great.

It was Ellersmann's point that even after Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire, the catholic church did not set up its own schools of learning. This was something we would think she would have done after the pagan rule of Julian, the Apostate ³¹ Instead what the catholic church did was to allow its members to attend the pagan schools in which the classical methodology of education was employed and the liberal arts were taught. Here the classical poets were read, the refined techniques of rhetoric were practiced, and the philosophical methods of dialectics were mastered. Having been schooled in this classical methodology, the student was equipped to make his contribution to the catholic, Roman society. The same expectations were demanded of the pagan student, except that he did not recognize Jesus as the teacher of Truth.

These schools, for Marrou, were not separated from the

³¹ Gerard Ellersmann, *Attitude of Early Christian Latin Writers Toward Pagan Literature and Learning*. (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1949), pp. 1 ff.

Hellenistic culture. They were expressions of it. The best of what one found in these schools one found in the Roman culture. A civilization must achieve its true form before it can create the education in which it was reflected. "Classical education did not attain its own distinctive form until after the great epoch of Greek civilization. We have to wait until the Hellenistic era before we find it in full possession of its specific forms, its own curricula and methods."³²

Isocrates' School and the Rhetorical Tradition

Another of Marrou's points was that by the time the youthful Augustine went to the schools in Carthage, rhetoric had overtaken philosophy as the all-inclusive discipline. By the end of the fourth century it was far more worthwhile to master rhetoric's refined techniques than to become a master of the Socratic dialogue. If we don't grasp this shift in emphasis in the classical methodology of education, we will fail to grasp the change that occurred in Augustine's life at his conversion and yet the need to retain the place of rhetoric's tools in the proclamation of the truths of the Scripture.

The Athenian, Isocrates, 436-338 B.C., was the founder of the

³² Marrou, p. xiii.

rhetorical school which soon came into competition with the more philosophic Platonic schools for the minds of the Greek youth.

. . . two forms of culture are typified by Plato and Isocrates: the philosophical and the rhetorical. Of these the dominant member was unquestionably the second, which left a profound impression on all manifestation of the Hellenistic spirit. For the very great majority of students, higher education meant taking lessons from the rhetor, learning the art of eloquence from him. [As John Chrysostom had done from Libanius] The fact must be emphasized from the start. On the level of history Plato had been defeated: posterity had not accepted his educational ideas. The victor, generally speaking was Isocrates, and Isocrates became the educator first of Greece and then of the whole ancient world. His success had already been evident when the two were alive, and it became more and more marked as the generations wore on. Rhetoric is the specific object of Greek education and the highest Greek culture.³³

What made Plato's academy so foreboding to many was that he demanded of his students a series of studies so complex and difficult that most students did not complete them. All this he did under the illusion that perfect wisdom and perfect knowledge could be known about all things, and subjects that distracted from the pursuit of this

³³ Ibid., pp. 267-268.

pure knowledge were banished from the city.

. . . we know that Plato was violently critical of the poets who in his own time were considered classics--especially Homer: but his criticism went beyond the tragic poets to the part played by myths generally in the traditional education of Greek children. . . . Plato condemned the poets because their myths were lies giving a false picture of the gods and heroes and one that was unworthy of their perfection. The poets' art, being a product of illusion, was pernicious because it was inconsistent with Truth--to which all education should be subordinated--and because it distracted the mind from its proper end-- the attainment of rational knowledge.³⁴

Plato's concern for Truth posed the question whether the goal of education should be artistic and poetic or truth-seeking and scientific. The question lingered on though, and both expressions were seen in the writings of Augustine.

It was Isocrates and his school of rhetoric, on the other hand, that opposed Plato's concern for pure Truth. Platonic Truth wasn't practical, thought Isocrates. In the area of human affairs of what to do and what to say, for example, there can never be a precise science. "The 'genuinely cultivated' man-- ΠΕΠΛΑΙΔΕΥΜΕΝΟΣ-- says Isocrates, is not the man who knows pure Truth but is the kind of person who has a gift for 'hitting

³⁴ Ibid., p. 109.

upon' the right solution or at least the solution that is most nearly right, the best in the circumstances-- κἀλῖρος: and this is because he has the right 'opinion' --δοξά."³⁵

In *The Republic* Plato dismissed "doxa"-- the popular opinion that the masses agreed upon-- as being the opposite of wonder. It was this "wonder" (Augustine called it "longing" or "yearning") that was for Plato the beginnings of the philosopher king but for Augustine the beginnings of the godly happy man or woman. For `example, the person who saw beyond the cock fight to a similarity in the way all cocks fight³⁶ or who saw beyond the graceful movements of a dancer-- to Beauty, was the person who longed for [wondered about] God.³⁷ For Plato this gift of wonder and the exercise of reason was the beginning of Wisdom and the discovery of the Highest Good. The pursuit of Plato's long-sought-after wisdom of justice, for which all of his students strove, ended up in no real city, for Plato's city was a city of ideas, a dream city. For Augustine the pursuit of the happy life (*beata vita*) ended up in a real city, the City

³⁵ Ibid., p. 133.

³⁶ Cf. Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. I, chap. VIII, par. XXVI, p. 51.

³⁷ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XI, par. XXXIV, p. 137.

of God.

For Isocrates Plato's concerns did not take care of immediate, practical concerns. These could best be handled through the gift of polished oratory.

In the real city on earth, as Julian the Apostate, who modeled his emperorship after Platonic principles, found out, the philosopher king was an object of ridicule. His city eventually met with failure because ridicule could have been a reason for his death.³⁸ "There was no point in attempting to mount into the heavens of Ideas or in playing about with paradoxes: for the purpose of living properly what we need was not new and surprising ideas but established good sense, traditional wisdom."³⁹ What Isocrates tried to foster in his disciples was the ability to make decisions, a type of intuitive grasp of the complexity of human affairs and a perception of the imponderable of human affairs.⁴⁰ For him there became a connection between rhetoric and morals. The intimate bond between form and content was inseparable. This demanded a sensitivity

³⁸ Lebanus, *Lebanus Selected Works*, vol. I, trans., intro., and notes by A. F. Norman. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 285.

³⁹ Marrou, p. 133.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

of thought and a sense for different meanings, that was difficult to express in conceptual ideas. These were the things that the poets make you feel, the very poets that Plato wanted to expel from his city. Science and the search for Truth can never attain this. "The result is that an 'oratorical' kind of education, which in appearance is entirely a matter of aesthetics, whose one aim is to create 'wizards with words,' is in fact the most effective way of developing subtlety of thought."⁴¹ For Augustine it became not only a means of making a living but also a means of teaching young people the skills that led toward the emptiness of vain glory.

Isocrates' Academy was practical. He, too, educated his students for the political life, "preferring to teach them to be able to form sensible opinions about things that were useful rather than spend time in hair-splitting about points that were utterly useless."⁴²

Cicero's Hortensius

Nearly four centuries before Augustine and four centuries after Isocrates, Cicero (106-43 B.C.) sensed one reason the Roman Empire

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 133.

(which he loved so much and fought to keep alive) was dying was because the teaching of rhetoric and the practice of it led to so little Truth. He felt that the reason we, as human beings, had an advantage over brute creatures or barbarians was that we can reproduce our thoughts in words, both written and oral. This culture of the word, since the days of Plato, had led humanity out of its brutish barbarian existence to the cultured Roman condition of having educated citizens. This culture of the word, the *logos*, must be first and foremost a philosophical culture of Truth. This must not degenerate into a development of mere powers of speech and persuasion, divorced from content and substance and Truth.⁴³ “This basic concept of human excellence ran through Cicero’s philosophical and educational works like a gold thread, seeking to bind the Roman world with its native virtue to the best in Greek heritage of *paideia*.”⁴⁴

Ten years after his conversion and some twenty-two years after this recorded encounter with Cicero’s *Hortensius*, Augustine wrote in Book III of his *Confessions*--

⁴³ Kevane, p. 47.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Among such companions in this unsettled age of mine I pursued my studies of the books of eloquence, a subject in which I longed to make my name for myself, though my reason for this was damnable and mere wind, being simply joy in human vanity. In the normal course of study I came across a book by Cicero, a man whose style, though not his heart, is almost universally admired. This book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy; it is called *Hortensius*. Now it was this book which altered my way of feeling, turned my prayers to you, Lord, yourself, and gave me different ambitions and desires. Every vain hope suddenly became worthless to me; my spirit was filled with an extraordinary and burning desire for the immortality of wisdom, and now I began to rise, so that I might return to you. I was in my nineteenth year (my father having died two years previously), and I might be assumed to be spending money my mother sent on sharpening my tongue; but it was not for the purpose of sharpening my tongue that I had used this book of Cicero's; what moved me was not the style, but the matter.

I was on fire then, my God, I was on fire to leave earthly things behind and fly back to you, nor did I know what you would do with me; for with you is wisdom. But that book inflamed me with the love of wisdom (which is called "philosophy" in Greek).⁴⁵

Such an influence had this book on Augustine, that after his conversion and before his baptism, at his retirement and place of therapy, Cassiciacum, he insisted that those with him read it. "It produced in them

⁴⁵ Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Trans. by Edward B. Pusey, intro. by Harold C. Gardiner. (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1964), Bk. III, cap. IV, p. 56.

a part of the effect of which the saint desired.”⁴⁶ Retiring from the vain pursuits of teaching the hollow principles of rhetoric, Augustine consciously worked out his Christian educational philosophy. He echoed Plato when he showed concern that Licentius, his prize student, spent too much time with poetry.⁴⁷ What separated Augustine’s educational goals from the pagan educational goals of his time was his quest for Wisdom and Truth and the Highest Good. The absence of these forced him to resign from the school of rhetoric. The resultant modifications of these will be seen in his *de Ordine* and *de Doctrina Christiana*. They can be seen in his plea to put all truth in service to the Lord.

The Classical *Weltanschauung* before Augustine

During the centuries preceding Augustine, the Roman outlook on life which overrode all of life, including the worship of the Roman gods and the goals of the classical methodology of education, was the deeply embedded notion of *Moirai* or fate. This was expressed poignantly in the philosophical systems of Stoicism and Epicureanism. They responded to the deep-seated convictions within Greek and Roman cultures and

⁴⁶Kevane, p. 60.

⁴⁷Ibid.

concluded that the tragic and fateful happenings in life had no real answer. The mature Hellenistic person did what he could with what was sure to come. The Stoics promoted emotional restraint. The Epicureans promoted licentious living within limits. Platonism and Neo-Platonism did not do a much better job in giving an answer to *Moira*. Their answer appealed to the immortality of the immaterial soul and stated that evil was not a substance, as Manichaeism insisted, but a “turning away into separateness: its very existence assumed the existence of an order It was the self-willed part that was diminished, by losing contact with something bigger and more vital than itself.”⁴⁸ That which is the “bigger and more vital” is the One, Unchangeable God who encompassed all change and all evil, too.

For, Plotinius’ universe was a continuous, active whole, which could not admit brutal cleavages and no violent irruptions. Each being in it drew strength and meaning from its dependence on this living continuum. Evil, therefore, was only a turning away into separateness: its very existence assumed the existence of an order, which was flouted while remaining no less real and meaningful. It was the self-willed part that was diminished by losing contact with something bigger and more vital than itself.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Brown, p. 99.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

But reading the panegyrics of Libanius (especially his never-delivered panegyric after the sudden death of his hero, Julian, the Apostate), we sense a defensiveness and a self-justification against the harshness of life in his times. This could explain why rhetoric, which had refined its techniques over the centuries since the days of Isocrates, becomes the chief means of defense against a harsh, cruel Roman world. We find that rhetoric becomes a means of self-glorification and self-promotion, yea even a means of giving to another, especially at the time of death, immortality. But behind the persuasive words of the speaker of a panegyric at a Roman funeral is the notion that fate (*moira*) has once again prevailed. Fate is stronger than the great Roman gods that the young learned about in the grammar schools; it is more pervasive than philosophy, which the thinkers of the day are disciplined in; and even the best orator would fall victim to it. Its end is to return all things from which they came. Kevane calls it “the myth of the eternal return”.⁵⁰

Kevane read this already in Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

... we find that the cyclic doctrine lies at the very root of his theory of knowledge based on pre-existence and

⁵⁰ Kevane, p. 11. Kevane quoting from B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. III. (New York: Bigelow and Brown), pp. 405-6. [Plato writes of this in chapter 57 of *Paedo*].

thus becomes the foundation of his *paideia* of reminiscence. 'For the revolution of the spheres.' he writes, 'carries the immortal souls around, and they behold the world beyond . . . And the intelligent soul . . . feeding upon the sight of truth is replenished, until the revolution of the world brings her round again to the same place.' Plato at times speaks of fate in terms of an iron necessity,⁵¹

In the eyes of many weak Roman Christians, Christianity, too, fell under the power of *Moirai*. Such was the conclusion of the proud Roman citizens who saw their beloved, and once proud, city of Rome fall to the Vandals under the leadership of Alaric in 410. Such was the report of the refugees who fled to North Africa to speak to Augustine in Hippo. They longed for the old days when the Roman gods were worshiped, for it seemed to them that it was Christianity's fault that their beloved Rome had fallen to ruin. They longed to return to their deep-seated Roman conservatism when the Roman gods, who seemed to be in control, still ruled. They, with their pagan relatives and neighbors were saying, "if Rome had not turned into Christianity officially, this disaster would not have happened." Under all their pleading words was the conviction that fate (*Moirai*) had a way of bringing the worst to the best. We found in

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 12. Kevane uses the myth of Er, *The Republic*, Bk. X, 614B-621D.

Augustine's Christian educational writings a powerful philosophical and theological antidote to their fate-filled perception of history.

The Classical Educational Curriculum

To see how the classical methodology of education impacted Augustine's answer, a review of its curriculum will be helpful for our purposes. As we have already stated, the classical education methodology did not change much from the time of Plato to Augustine, some eight hundred years. The following was Ellspermann's description of the classical curriculum.

At the age of twelve the boy was sent to the *grammaticus*. Along with purely grammatical studies, punctuation and accent for the purpose of speaking and writing correctly in Greek and Latin, poetry was thoroughly studied. In Greek, Homer came first. Other poets were Hesiod, the dramatists, and the lyric writers in selections. Quintilian thought it best to begin with Vergil. Besides Vergil, the other Latin poets chiefly read were Livius Andronicus, Ennius, Plautius, Terence, Horace, Lucan and Statius. In connection with detailed explanation of the poets, the *grammaticus* gave his students lectures on metre, poetry in general, mythology, philosophy, astronomy, history, or music. Thus a general education was obtained. Here, too, many selections from the poets were committed to memory, and there was much practice in verse making. The poets then, were the first main object of study. As exercises in prose, the young students reproduced stories in their own words, turned poetry into prose. Pupils who were not to go further in their studies, i. e.,

to the *rhetor*, were given a training in elementary rhetoric. They thus completed “*orbis ille doctrinae quam Graeci* εγκυκλιον παιδείων *vocant*”.

The crown of Roman education was rhetoric (at least by the late fourth century), or the art and practice of public speaking. The Roman youth entered the school of rhetoric when he was sixteen years old. Here he read the historians and orators, and the reading was accompanied by the study of technicalities of style as exhibited in the works of the masters of oratory and prose. The principal aim of the *rhetor* was to make a man able to speak correctly. Written exercises, discourses, refutations, panegyrics, and development of matters of common knowledge first rendered the faculties supple. The *rhetor* then employed his student in declamation proper, making him deliver an exposition on some subject, such as a case of conscience or a fictitious suit. The emphasis was on form; the matter or content was more or less indifferent. Declamation, introduced into Rome about 84 B.C. became the supreme test and crowning exercise in rhetoric, success in which was the ambition of pupils and the pride of their parents. Declamations were classed as *suasoriae*, where a certain course of action was debated; and as *controversiae*, where some point was affirmed or denied. The training under the *rhetor* was designed to equip pupils for the vocations of public life--for deliberative and forensic oratory. Such exercises, incredible though the situations might be, imparted through the mental gymnastics involved a nimbleness of mind, a quickness in propounding an argument, a versality in treatment, and a finish in speech, almost amazing. Though such a system has obvious advantages, yet from a practical standpoint it could be empty, puerile, vain, lacking virility and seriousness. The range was narrow and unreal; threadbare themes were discussed. Hence arose the

far-fetched absurdities with which the declamations abound.⁵²

II

The Classical Methodology of Education in *de Ordine*

Unlikely as it may seem, Augustine's Christian educational philosophy answered for him the central issues of life: does the order of God's providence embrace everything good and evil? If God created all things good, where did evil come from? Was evil there from all eternity? Or did evil begin in time? These questions plagued him all his life from the time he joined the Manichean sect during his school days in Carthage until he wrote the last chapters of his seminal defense for the Christian faith, *Concerning The City of God against the Pagans* after the downfall of the city of Rome. One could guess that Augustine was thinking of the same theological problem years later when the Vandals began to ransack his city of Hippo during the year of his death 430.

We will consider in depth *de Ordine*, and we will find that the goal Augustine has in mind for the well-trained godly man was that he should see beyond the catastrophes and tragedies and changes of life to a greater

⁵² Ellspermann, pp. 5-6.

and deeper plan of God. By searching his soul (something which Augustine felt few in his day did) and discovering God behind the order to all things, Augustine's student would be led to live the happy life, *beata vita*.

The chief cause of this error is that man knows not himself. Now for acquiring this self-knowledge, he needs a constant habit of withdrawing from things of the senses and of concentrating his thoughts within himself, and holding it there. This they alone succeed in doing, who definitely mark out in solitude the impressions of opinion which the course of daily life has made, or correct them by means of the liberal branches of learning.⁵³

At the end of this educational piece, written in dialogue form, Augustine wrote poetically out of pure excitement over what the soul discovers when it withdraws from the sensual experience and contemplates God.

But when the soul has properly adjusted and disposed itself and has rendered itself harmonious and beautiful, then it will venture to see God (*audebit jam Deum videre*), the very source of all truth and the very Father of Truth. O great God, What kind of eyes shall

⁵³ Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. I, cap. I, par. III, pp. 10-11. *Cujus erroris maxima causa est, quod homo sibi ipse est incognitus. Qui tamen ut se noscat, magna opus habet consuetudine recedendi a sensibus et animum is seipsum colligendi atque in seipso retinendi. Quod ii tantum assequuntur, qui plagas quasdam opinionum, quas vitae quotidianae cursus infligit, aut solitudine imurunt aut liberalibus medicant disciplinis.*

those be! How pure! How beautiful! How powerful! How constant! How serene! God blessed! And what is that which they see! (*Quid aurem est illud quod vident?*) What is it? I ask? (*Quid, quaeso?*) What should we surmise? What should we believe? What should we say? Everyday expressions present themselves, but they have been rendered sordid by things of least worth. I shall say no more, except that to us is promised a vision of beauty (*nisi promitti nobis aspectum pulchritudinus*)--the beauty of whose imitation all other things are beautiful, and by comparison with which all other things are beautiful in comparison with which all other things are unsightly. Whoever will have glimpsed this beauty--and he will see it, who lives well, prays well, studies well (*videbit autem qui bene vivit, bene orat, bene studet*).⁵⁴

As we can see Augustine's educational goals, though highly influenced by the impractical concerns of Plato's world of ideas, are applied to practical concerns of the inconsistencies of life that Romans experienced in the late fourth century.

How will it ever trouble him why another man, desiring to have children, has them not (*cur alius optans habere filios non habeat*), while another man casts out his own offspring as being unduly numerous; why one man hates children before they are born, and another man loves them after birth; or how it is not absurd that nothing will come to pass which is not with God--and therefore it is inevitable that all things come into being in accordance with order--and nevertheless God is not petitioned in vain? (*Ex quo necesse est ordine*

⁵⁴ Ibid., Bk. II, cap. XIX, pp. 166-167.

*omina fieri et tamen non frustra Deum rogari?)*⁵⁵

Augustine's well-trained man is a tranquil, happy person who has learned to look beyond the changes, tragedies, inconsistencies and injustices in life to the whole of life.

Finally, how will any burdens, dangers, scorns, or smiles of fortunes disturb a just man? In this world of sense it is indeed necessary to examine carefully what time and place are, so that what delights in a portion of place and time, may be understood to be far less beautiful than the whole of which it is a portion. And furthermore, it is clear to the learned man that what displeases in a portion, displeases for no other reason than because the whole with which that portion harmonizes wonderfully, it is not seen; but that in the intelligible world, every part is as beautiful and perfect as the whole. (*In illo vero mundo intelligibili, quamlibet partem, tanquam totum, pulchram esse atque perfectum.*)⁵⁶

What did the life of one who followed the prescriptions of Augustine look like? After the godly person has gone through Augustine's curriculum, how shall he live? Augustine's expectations were quite clear. He wrote, "Youth devoted to this science ought (*Adolescentibus ergo studiosis*) . . . "

⁵⁵ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XIX, par. LI, pp. 166-167.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XIX, par. LI, pp. 166-169.

1) to live so as to refrain from all wantonness, from the enticement of gluttony, from excessive care and adornment of the body, from silly practices of games, from dullness of sleep and sloth, from jealousy, detraction, and envy, from the ambition for honor and power, and from the unrestrained desire of praise.

2) to be convinced that the love of money is an unfailling poison for all their hopes. (*Amorem aurem pecuniae totius suae spei certissimum venenum esse credant.*)

3) to do nothing half-heartedly, nothing rashly. In case of faults of their associates, let them either cast out all anger, or so restrain it that it will be like anger dismissed. Let them hate no one. (*Neminem oderint.*)

4) not to be unwilling to correct vices. (*Nulla vitia non curare velint.*) Let them take care especially not to be excessive in vengeance or stinting in forgiveness.

5) [to] punish only what can be improved, (*Nihil puniant quod non valeat ad melius*) and favor nothing that may become worse.

6) [to] regard their own fellowmen and all those over whom authority has been given to them respectfully. Let them be so obedient that it would be embarrassing to give them commands, and let them rule so considerably that it becomes a pleasure to obey them.

7) not to be troublesome to one who is reluctant.

8) [to] avoid enmities, bear them patiently, and end them most speedily.

9) to observe this one familiar proverb: not to do to anyone what they would not have done to themselves.

(Nemini faciant quod pati nolunt.)

10) not . . . to undertake the administration of the State unless they are matured. (*Republican non administrare, nisi perfecti*).

11) not [to] think himself (those who turn to these studies late in life) bound by no other precept, in fact, he will all the more easily observe those things in mellowed age.

12) [to] have friends in all circumstances in life.

13) [to] live in a fitting and decent manner, supported by faith, hope and love, let them have God the object of their worship, their thinking, and their serving. (*Deum colant, cogitant, quaerant, fide, spe, charitate subnixi.*).

14) [to] desire tranquility, and a definite course for their own studies and for those of all their associates and for themselves and for whomsoever else such things are possible, a good and quiet life. (*Et sibi quibusque possunt mentem bonam pacatamque vitam*).⁵⁷

Can There Be a Perceived Order of Reality?

The purpose of recording the discourse at the baths of Cassiciacum between newly converted Augustine and his group of companions (Alypius, Navigius, Licentius, and Trygetius) and his mother, Monica was to develop an answer of how one reached these goals in a world filled with

⁵⁷ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. VIII, par. XXV, pp. 118-121.

change, discouragements, and evil. Could these things have happened by chance? Could it even be possible that God willed them? Or was there a deeper plan, that most do not sense, by which all things were arranged and under God's Providence?

Licentius, the son of Augustine's benefactor, Romanianus, played the most dominant role in the dialogue, perhaps because he, above all the rest, was fascinated by and indulged in the writing of poetry, an activity that Plato, as we have noted, opposed in Bk X of *The Republic*.⁵⁸ It was Licentius that Augustine wanted to instruct by means of dialogue to become the wise, godly man who could transcend the many assaults on the Christian's life to live the happy life, *beata vita*. By addressing the whole work to little-known Zenobius,⁵⁹ a secretary in the imperial government, *a magister memoriae*, we sensed that Augustine intended his work to have a far-reaching impact upon Roman life. By addressing Zenobius, Augustine demonstrated that he was a total Roman citizen

⁵⁸ Plato, *The Republic*. Bk. X 595a - 608, p. 429. [In his interpretative essay Allan Bloom goes to great length to explain why Plato banished the poets from his ideal city.]

⁵⁹ Augustine, *de Ordine*. p. 181. The footnote mentions that the only other sources of information that refer to Zenobius are found in two of Augustine's letters. In one of these letters we discover that he had been made a *magister memoriae*, i.e., a secretary in the imperial government.

because his educational vision, found in *de Ordine*, was thoroughly immersed in the Roman culture, yet Christian.

At the outset Augustine declared his statement of purpose, “to perceive and to grasp the order of reality proper to each thing, and then to see or to explain the order of the entire universe by which this world is truly held together and governed—that, Zenobius, is a very difficult and rare achievement for men.”⁶⁰ Augustine knew that most people do not spend time doing the thing that he has set his group to do. It called for his participants to ponder (*curae*)⁶¹ or to care about these matters, for it can only be done by those who marvel or wonder (*mirabilis*)⁶² about things. These people were truly rare. Once one wondered about what has been set forth by Augustine one became aware that his problem has many aspects to it, for mere observation of the events of the Roman world will lead one to the conclusion that “either divine Providence did not reach to the outer limits of things or that surely all evils were

⁶⁰ Augustine, *De Ordine*. pp. 6-7. *Ordinem rerum, Zenobi, consequi ac tenere cuique proprium, tum vero universitatis quo coercetur ac regitur hic mundus, vel videre vel pandere difficillimum hominibus atque rarissimum est.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. I, par. I, p. 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. III, par. VIII, p. 18.

committed by the will of God.” (*aut certe mala omnia Dei voluntate committi*)⁶³

Even a human being was not held responsible for what he could not do or prevent. How could God? But if one said that there was no order to things, then one would have to say that either things occur by chance or were not part of the effect of a design or were not part of the hidden control of divine majesty.

In leading his group of vacation retreaters to a satisfying answer to the problem he posed, Augustine wanted Licentius to be committed to the conviction about order, which he did on the morning after the beginning of the discourse. Licentius’ definition was “Order is that by which are governed all things that God has constituted.”⁶⁴

But before Augustine led Licentius to this conclusion he appealed to him about a common annoyance that he cannot explain--his sleeplessness caused by an irregular water fall. “I was awake, therefore, as I said, when the sound of water flowing past at the rear of the baths

⁶³ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. I, par. I, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. X, par. XXVIII, pp. 54-55. *Ordo est, inquit, per quem aguntur omnia quae Deus constituit.*

came to my ears; and it was noticeably louder than usual.”⁶⁵ Driven by the gift of wonder, Augustine asked, “What was its cause?” Licentius, who was also awake, working on his poetry, was frightened by some mice. What were the reasons for these occurrences? Was it the leaves that fell into the spring that back-up the stream that caused the water to flow irregularly? What was it that caused Licentius to respond to his muse, Calliope?⁶⁶ By these Socratic questions Augustine drew out of Licentius the longing to care about and ponder over the deeper things, the philosophical things, and nudged him away from his poetic flights to think about the problem Augustine has set before him. Being a thinking man, Licentius concluded, “nothing is done apart from order.”⁶⁷ Licentius was, as Plato had once strongly urged, moved away from things poetic to seek the Truth in these matters, and he concluded that it was a higher pursuit than what a soothsayer did when predicting the future on the basis of what a mouse did.⁶⁸ “For Philosophy--as I have begun to believe as you

⁶⁵ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. III, par. VI, p. 17.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. III, par. VIII, p. 19.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. III, par. VIII pp. 22-23. *Nam praeter ordinem nihil mihi fieri videtur.*

⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. III, par. IX p. 21.

prove it day by day--is our true and tranquil abode" (*Vera et inconcussa nostra habitatio*).⁶⁹ From then on he was convinced that he would defend order in all things (*ordinem rerum*)⁷⁰ He then made his commitment to order even deeper by stating "that even though someone were to worst me in this debate, I should attribute even that fact to the order of things, and not to reasonless chance."⁷¹

Augustine moved the discussion further by posing to Licentius whether order was either good or bad and whether there can be anything that is opposite of order. "Nothing" (*Nihil*) "how indeed can anything be opposed to that which has seized and held the whole?"⁷² "Then can error be opposed to order?" Trygetius asked. Licentius was equally as adamant as before.

Not at all; Licentius replies. For I see that no one goes wrong without a cause. Moreover, the series of causes is contained in order, and error not only arises from a cause, but it gives origin to something else of which it

⁶⁹ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. III, par. IX pp. 20-23.

⁷⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. III, par. IX, pp. 20 & 23.

⁷¹ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. III, par. IX, pp. 22-23. *Adam hoc nulli temeritati, sed rerum ordini tribuam.*

⁷² Ibid., Bk. I, chap. VI, par. XV, pp. 32-33. *Nam quomodo esse contrarium quidquam potest ei rei quae totum occupavit totum obtinuit?*

is itself the cause. Wherefore, insomuch as it is not apart from order, so neither can it be opposed to order. *Quamobrem quo extra ordinem non est, eo non potest ordini esse contrarius.*⁷³

Augustine sensed now that Licentius, with his firm defense of order was becoming like a dear son of his, because, even though Augustine had lost hope in him with regards to the lower branches (*mediocres litteras*) of learning, now he was into the very heart of philosophy (*in mediam venire philosophiam*). Like a true Platonist who responded to an idea just because it was an idea, Licentius exclaimed. “Both good and bad things are in order.” (*et bona et mala in ordine sunt.*)⁷⁴

Trygetius is not so easily convinced, “what more impious statement could be made than that evil things themselves are comprised in order; for surely God loves order.” (*Certe enim Deus amat ordinem.*)⁷⁵ Licentius agrees but wonders whether it then follows that evils come from God and that God even loves evils. (*Ex quo sequitur ut et mala sint a summo Deo et mala Deus diligit.*)⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. VI, par. XV, pp. 32-35.

⁷⁴ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. VI, par. XVII, pp. 34-35.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. VI, par. XVII, pp. 34-37.

⁷⁶ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. VI, par. XVII, pp. 36 & 37.

It is now Augustine's turn to insert his wisdom.

And he greatly loves order precisely because by it he loves not evils. But how can evils themselves be "not in order," although God does not love them? Now this itself is the order of evils: that they be not loved by God. And does this order of things seem to you unimportant that God loves things good and does not love things evil? And thus evil which God does not love, are not apart from order; and nevertheless He does love order itself. This very thing he loves: to love good things, and not to love bad things--and this itself is a thing of magnificent order and of divine arrangement.⁷⁷

What the reader of this discourse should sense by now is that Augustine has really two orders (*ordines*) in mind. The first is order, the sequence, of events in life, including both good and evil events; but he also has in mind an educational sequence by which the student is equipped to grasp that all events in life are held together in a whole. But Augustine seems to suggest that one has to be willing to pursue Truth in a Platonic, dialectic manner in order to grasp this. Only a few are capable of doing this, but the pursuit and the ends to which it leads--to

⁷⁷ Ibid., Bk. chap. VI, par. XVII, pp. 36-37. *Et ordinem ideo multum diligit, quia per eum non diligit mala. At vero ipsa mala qui possunt non esse in ordine, cum Deus illa non diligit? Nam iste ipse est malorum ordo ut non diligantur a Deo. An parvus rerum ordo tibi videtur, ut et bona Deus diligit et non diligit mala? Ita nec praeter ordinem sunt mala, quae non diligit Deus, et ipsum tamen ordinem diligit: hoc ipsum enim diligit diligere bona, et non diligere mala, quod est magni ordinis et divinae dispositionis.*

to know the Highest Good, the Truth, the Whole, the Unchangeable and the Beautiful--makes for the wise person of God. In longing for and seeking this Highest Good, Augustine appeals to the Platonic school of thought and rejects the rhetorical school of thought that had occupied his youthful life for the twelve years before he sought a retreat at Cassiciacum.

The following morning, with a clear mind, Augustine concludes,

Order is that which will lead to God, if we hold to it during life; and unless we do hold to it during life, we shall not come to God. And if I am not deceived by my affection for you, we now believe and hope that we shall come to God. Most carefully, therefore, ought this question to be resolved and worked out by us.⁷⁸

Now Augustine moves his companions, although Alypius and Navigius have gone off to Milan, to the point where he wants them and he moves us the readers, too, to go beyond what we sensually experience to wonder about what our senses inform us. But he concludes that it is not wise to push the issue any further, lest, while Augustine longs to teach order, he

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 51-53. *Ordo est quem si tenuerimus in vita, perducet ad Deum, et quem nisi tenuerimus in vita, non pervenimus ad Deum. Perventuros aurem nos jam, nisi me animus de vobis fallit, praesumimus et speramus. Diligentissime igitur inter nos ista quaestio versari debet atque dissolvi.*

should “exceed moderation, the parent of order.”⁷⁹ The comment, which appears near the end of the educational piece, reminds one of Aristotle’s Golden Mean in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. “Now it [virtue, *arete*] is a means between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a means because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate.”⁸⁰

He concludes at one point that it is even by this order that the great God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit has “for our sake deigned to take up and dwell in this body of our own kind, yet the more lowly it appears, so much more it is replete with clemency and the farther and the wider remote from a certain characteristic pride of ingenious men.”⁸¹ (*ingeniosorum superbia*)⁸²

By the “ingenious men” Augustine means the Platonists. Augustine

⁷⁹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XIX, par. L, pp. 164-165. *Modum excedam, qui pater est ordinis.*

⁸⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Bk. II, chap. 6, 1107a, trans., W. D. Ross in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. & general introduction by Richard McKeon. (New York: The Modern Library, 1947), p. 340.

⁸¹ Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. II, chap. V, par. XVI, p. 101.

⁸² Ibid., p. 184.

can agree with them on many points--the gift of wonder, the ascendance to God by the perceptions of the soul, the Socratic questionings of what the senses grasp, and a dialectical process of a group like the one at Cassiciacum who seeks the Truth behind all things; but he cannot, and they will not, agree with him concerning the incarnation of God. This the Platonists cannot fathom. How could the One, the Highest Good, the Wisdom, the Truth, or the Logos become flesh? Over this central Christian teaching Augustine separates himself from the Platonists.⁸³

“Therefore, God is governed, says Trygetius. What of it?” he replies. “Do you not admit that Christ is God, Who came to us by way of order, and says that he was sent by God the Father? If therefore God sent us Christ by way of order, and we admit that Christ is God, the God not only governs all things, but Himself is governed by order.”⁸⁴

Are there events that are outside God’s order? Can things happen

⁸³ Augustine, *de Ordine*. pp. 184-185. Russell states that it is evident that this notion precluded not only the fact but even the possibility of the Incarnation when the Son of God assumed complete human nature in the unity of the Divine Person. This Augustine found incompatible with revealed truth. Other errors he found among the Platonist were a) that the world came into being necessarily and by a process of emanation; b) the doctrine of the transmigration of souls; c) the eternal duration of the world.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Bk. I, Chap. X, par. XXIX, pp. 54-55. *Ergo agitur Deus, ait Trygetius. Et ille: Quid enim, inquit, Christum Deum negas, qui et ordine ad nos venit, et a Patre Deo missum esse se dicit? Si igitur Deus Christum ordine ad nos misit et Deum Christum esse non negamus, non solum agit omnia, sed agitur ordine etiam Deus.*

by chance? Does God will evil? All these are not possible if order, the order that God governs, is behind everything. Evil itself can not destroy order nor can it be outside of order, but God includes it in his order.

The Role of the Senses

What is the role of man's senses in pursuing order? Do they deter or do they aid in attaining the Truth about order or do they detract? The two human senses that Augustine deals with are the sense of seeing, through which we detect movement and colors, and the sense of hearing, through which we detect sounds. It is by way of the sense of hearing that the waterfall, near where Augustine and his companions are asleep, leads them into a discussion on order. Most people would merely hear the waterfall. They would not ask what made it flow irregularly, and therefore keeps Augustine awake. Augustine's opinion of those who live only by their senses can be compared to the people who are chained and shackled to the far side of the cave wall in Plato's analogy of the cave.⁸⁵

They see flickering images against the cave wall of the images that the people on the parapet behind them carry back and forth. "They live

⁸⁵ Plato, *The Republic*. Bk. VII, 514A, pp. 193ff.

wretched lives, but they live.”⁸⁶ Their existence is similar to that of a slave. They are slaves to the images that their senses perceive and to the opinions (*doxa*) of others. They lack the gift of wonder and the mind that questions. Living by the perceptions of the soul, on the other hand, one lives not merely to exist but one lives a happy life, (*sed beate vivere satis sit*).⁸⁷

Knowledge gained only by the senses is a knowledge of the lowest form for a human being. The acquisition of this knowledge is necessary for the development of the wise, godly person. It does not, however, lead him to be with God nor even to know himself. These two are essential for Augustine, but the education that comes through the senses is necessary for one’s complete education.⁸⁸ “. . . whoever knows only those things which the senses reach, seems to me to be not only not with God, but not even with himself.”⁸⁹ This is the error of errors in the Greek world, as the Greek tragic dramatists would over and over point out. Lack

⁸⁶ Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. I, chap. VIII, par. XXIV, p. 47. *vivunt miseri, vivunt tamen*.

⁸⁷ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. VII, par. XXIV, pp. 46-47.

⁸⁸ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. II, par. V, p. 77.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. II, par. V.

of self-awareness brought the hero to a tragic end. This sends the tragic Greek hero to the oracle at Delphi to hear and read the ancient truth, “Know Thy Self”.⁹⁰ The Greek tragic dramatists tell stories of the harshness of Greek life.

But the perception of the senses is necessary, for Augustine. One cannot live in this world without the use of them. There are even traces of reason in the senses. One may be drawn away from more important matters to watch the bitter fight of two irrational cocks. This often happens in life. The senses perceive the bright colors of the two cocks, their irregular movements and the final outcome of their fight. These sense observations are needed before reason, the mind, and the soul can ask questions like, why do all cocks act similarly? What is common to all cock fights? Why do cocks fight for dominance over their hens?⁹¹ But if the questions are not asked and the possible answers are not discussed in a dialectical manner, the spectators who observe the fight are no better than the people who are shackled to the far side of Plato’s cave. Seven centuries before Augustine’s Cassiciacum retreat Plato has Socrates ask

⁹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), p. 158.

⁹¹ Cf. Augustine, *de Ordine*, Bk. I, chap. VIII, par. XXV, p. 49.

of Glaucon,

Isn't this at last the song itself that dialectic performs? It is in the realm of the intelligible, but it is imitated by the power of sight. We said that sight at last tries to look at the animals themselves and at the stars themselves and then finally at the sun itself. So, also when a man tries by discussion-- by means of argument without the use of any of the senses--to attain to each thing itself that is and doesn't give up before he grasps by intellect itself that which is good itself, he comes to the very end of the intelligible realm just as that other man was then at the end of the visible.⁹²

People who only live by their senses and the agreed upon opinion (*doxa*) of others will only live in the realm of the visible. They are chained to this life. They are shackled from seeing what the soul can perceive and to what the intellect can grasp. In the cruel, indifferent Roman world that Augustine lived, they will be confused and disappointed by the changes of life and end up complaining about God.⁹³ "Thus it happens that whoever narrow-mindedly considers this life by itself alone, is repelled by its enormous foulness, and turns away in sheer disgust."⁹⁴

⁹² Plato, *The Republic*. Bk. VII, 532a, p. 211.

⁹³ Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. I, chap. I, par. I, p. 7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93. *Ita fir ut angusto animo ipsam solam quisque considerans, veluti magna repercussus foeditate aversetur.*

The soul is our next topic in understanding more thoroughly Augustine's educational principles. The soul according to Augustine naturally seeks unity in all things. The very Latin word for soul, *anima*, is closely linked to *unum* or one.

The soul returned to itself in this manner, understands what is the beauty of the universe; (*quae sit pulchritudo universitatis intelligit*) this term is evidently derived from the word *unum* (one). Wherefore, the beholding of oneness is not granted to that soul (*animae*) which wanders toward many objects and eagerly pursues mental beggary, which though it does not know it, can only be avoided by keeping aloof from the multitude; and I mean, not just the multitude of men, but all things that the senses reach. *Multitudinem autem non hominum dico, sed omnium quae sensus attingit.*⁹⁵

Augustine's Personal Journey to Faith Seeks Wholeness

Having been influenced indirectly by the life and practices of the most extreme ascetic of his times, Anthony in Egypt,⁹⁶ Augustine's Christian conversion draws him away from the things of this world. The garden outside of the house where Alypius and he are staying in Milan and the words of the child repeating his Latin phrase, *tolle lege, tolle*

⁹⁵ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. II, pp. 10-11.

⁹⁶ Augustine., *The Confessions*, trans. by Rex Warner. (New York: New American Library, 1963), Bk. VIII, chap. VI, p. 171.

*lege*⁹⁷ are only the stimulus. The Bible passage from Romans that he opens to, “not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in concupiscence” (Romans 13:13-14),⁹⁸ only convinces him more that his soul needed a place to exercise its God-given ability to be one with God and away from the world. We can sense why Augustine theologically (philosophically) thinks it necessary to retreat from the colors and sounds of Milan to the Cassiciacum retreat. Here his soul wouldn’t be as tempted to wander where his sense draws him. Here his soul could concentrate on the Oneness, the Wholeness, of life. It is in the city that the soul experiences want by the senses grasping only the separation of things. Ten years later in *The Confessions* Augustine would criticize the people of his times who live only by their senses and who

go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad streams of rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the turnings of the stars--and they do not notice themselves and they see nothing marvelous in the fact that when I mentioned all these things I was not seeing them with my eyes, yet I would

⁹⁷ Ibid., BK. VIII, chap. VIII - XII, pp. 174-182.

⁹⁸ Ibid., Bk. VIII, chap. XII, p. 183.

not have been able to speak of them unless these mountains and waves and rivers and stars (which I have seen) and the ocean (which I have heard about) had been visible to me inside, in my memory, and with the same great spatial intervals and proportions as if I were really seeing them outside myself.⁹⁹

Memory as a Slave to the Mind

His soul and the souls of his acquaintances need to detach themselves from the things of the world before they can practice the ancient method of discovering the Truth, the method of human dialogue.

But memory is a key tool in leading Augustine's students out of the cave of unwisdom to the light of wisdom, for it is needed to retain what the student has heard from the philosopher, the lover of Wisdom.¹⁰⁰ It is needed in all the necessary and worthy branches of learning (*honestas ac. necessarias disciplinas*). A wise man needs memory (*memoria opus esse sapienti*). Memory is a servant (*servo tuo*), yea, a slave of the soul. If it is used properly, it can lead you to the order of things.¹⁰¹

Although memory occupies only a brief portion of Augustine's dialogue in *de Ordine*, it is essential in understanding Augustine's

⁹⁹ Ibid., Bk. X, ch. VIII, p. 219.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. II, chap. II, par. VII, p. 83.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. II, par. VII, p. 81.

educational thoughts. A commentary on memory is found in the tenth book of *The Confessions*. Here we, too, find that memory is a slave of the mind¹⁰² or the soul, for both mind and soul are the same thing for Augustine, “for whatever is in the mind is also in memory.”¹⁰³

It is the soul, fed by the images of memory, that discovers order. The soul, if it is wise, holds fast to this order. In true Platonic fashion it devotes itself to philosophy. At first it introspects itself. As soon as this mode of learning has persuaded the soul that reason either is the soul itself or belongs to it, it is less trusting of the senses. It discovers, too that there is in reason nothing more excellent or dominant than numbers, or that reason is nothing else than number.¹⁰⁴ Reason is the capacity to analyze and to seek that which is a unity. The reasonable examination of numbers begins with the number one. Reason seeks the same thing that a soul seeks, that is, unity. It is Augustine who says “it is oneness that I seek, it is oneness that I love.”¹⁰⁵ It is no surprise that

¹⁰² Ibid., Bk. II, chap. II, par. V, p. 79.

¹⁰³ Augustine, *The Confessions*. Bk. X, chap. XVII., p. 227.

¹⁰⁴ Augustine, *de Ordine*. p. 165.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 161.

he clung to and fought for so often in his life the one “catholic” expression of the church.

In order to make sense of the evil in life, memory is important, for it feeds the rational soul that longs for a greater Whole. Once the highest Good is reached the wise, godly man fixes his gaze on the immovable God, “Who abides forever, for Whose presence there is no waiting, and of Whose absence there is no fearing, because by the fact that He truly is, He is always present. The wise man, the godly man, once he has arrived at this happy life, conserves it well and uses his memory sparingly.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the wise man in his pure enjoyment of God doesn’t need memory because all that he needs is fulfilled in that one grand moment of contemplation. Yet, if he is to serve his fellowman, his soul needs what memory can give him, a recall of past events.¹⁰⁷

Reason Makes Sense out of Changes

Memory is of greatest value in leading some one, as Augustine does Zenobius in *de Ordine*, from living on the level of the senses to living on the basis of the perceptions of one’s soul. Memory informs the soul

¹⁰⁶ Augustine, *de Ordine*. BK. II, chap. II, par. VII, pp. 80-81.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. II, par. VII. p. 83.

so that reason can sort through what the senses give memory. Although the tenth book of *The Confessions* strikes the reader at first as a needless appendix to his spiritual autobiography, it is central to understanding Augustine's spiritual journey of moving from the Manichaean way of explaining evil as substance to obtaining true Wisdom where all of life, material as well as spiritual, is grasped as part of the whole and the happy godly life is lived. This lower life is lived by the senses, passions and lusts. Only memory itself can see that it is God (as Augustine so frequently points out in *The Confessions*) all along who is behind every event,¹⁰⁸ every tragedy that occurs in his life like the death of a dear unnamed friend,¹⁰⁹ every hollow rhetorical deception that the Manichean Faustus promoted,¹¹⁰ the abrupt dismissal of his dear nameless mistress,¹¹¹ his resignation from his shop-talk,¹¹² and the death of his mother in Ostia.¹¹³ God, the highest Good, who changes not, who is present

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, *The Confessions*. Bk. V, chap. VIII, pp. 101-102.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Bk. IV. Chap. X, p. 79.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Bk. V, chap. VI, p. 96.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Bk. VI, chap. XV, p. 133.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, Bk. IX, chap. IV, p. 188.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, Bk. IX, chap. X, pp. 200ff.

everywhere, is pursuing and guiding Augustine to the time of his conversion and baptism. God is the Truth, the Wisdom and the Highest Good, and who is behind the order of all things, but one does not arrive at this spiritual insight by living according to one's passions or one's senses. This lower level of living will lead one to pursue the prescriptions of this world. These prescriptions lead Augustine's father, Patricius, to want Augustine to pursue the vocation of a lawyer and for Augustine to rebel and pursue the life of fame and glory, the life of a rhetor.

Like Cicero before him, Augustine, ever the academic, sees in the rhetoric of his day a hollowness and a vanity that glorifies the self. So rhetoric and its traditional classical goals to teach, to delight, and to persuade needs to be combined with the philosophical pursuits of Wisdom and Truth. Augustine knows from personal experience that the tools of rhetoric, when applied in a skillful manner, could impress and persuade the masses, but this does not make them worthwhile for the Roman Empire or for the education of the man or woman of God. What is needed, according to the recently converted Augustine, is a return to the rigorous and demanding Socratic pursuit of Truth, and this Augustine does from the beginning to the end of *de Ordine*.

Augustine's first impressions of Cicero's *Hortensius* had not changed. He was fully focused on the pursuit of Truth. Augustine saw that for the Christian there was a necessary need for Plato's concern for Truth, even if it had impractical consequences, so that Christianity could be freed from the Roman cultural pursuits that led to vain-glory.

As a celibate and promoter of the monastic life (as Augustine turned out to be), he pursued the same Platonic concerns in his quest to find and refine a usable answer to the origin and place of evil in God's ordered world. Now at the Vintage Vacation site of Cassiciacum and now retired from his life as a rhetor, he sought to work out his educational goals for the Christian man or woman who had to deal with the harshness of fifth century Roman life and who lived in the cultural climate of *moira*.

What made for a mature person of God in this type of world? How did one attain this life? What were the methods of achieving it? How did one see behind the cruel changeableness of life to the changeless, one God? What tools could be used from the classical methodology of education? And which ones needed to be discarded?

The simplistic answers of the Manicheans, who cloaked their

answers in the rhetoric of their day, didn't satisfy the discerning and gifted Augustine. The skeptical responses of the doubters of his day only drove him away from God. But the thoughts of the Platonist gave him wholeness in a disconnected and crude world. The evidence of their influences could be seen in both the Socratic methodology and the eventual answers that the retreaters with Augustine arrived at.

As he reported in *The Confessions*,¹¹⁴ his conversion to Christianity was coupled with a rejection of the things of this world. The dismissal of his mistress was the first rejection, a resolution not to marry (even though he was pledged to another woman) was the second, and the teaching of rhetoric at his talk-shop was the last worldly involvement to be rejected.¹¹⁵ At the same time Augustine suffered from a breathing disorder and needed to retreat for health reasons.¹¹⁶ It was in this idyllic setting that Augustine wrote many of his formative works that set the stage for his later educational philosophy for the Biblical exegete, *de Doctrina Christiana*.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Bk. VIII, chap. VI, p. 171.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., Bk. IX, chap. II, p. 185.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Bk. IX, chap. II, p. 186.

The Soul (*anima*) Seeks the One (*unum*), Immovable God

Being the wordsmith that he is, Augustine sees in the words *unum* (*one*) and *anima* (soul) similarities in meaning and purpose. The Latin word for soul comes from the Latin word for one. Should it not be true then that the soul seeks to return to the One God, from whom all things come? Augustine's famous prayer then doesn't just sound good. It is rooted deep within his philosophical way of dealing with the Christian's journey to faith. "You [O Lord] stimulate him to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find peace in you."¹¹⁷ The senses are incapable of understanding; there are only traces of reason in them. It is the soul, possessed with the powers of reason and identified with the activities of the mind that can see beyond what the senses perceive to be the great *ordo* of God.

The soul, returned to itself in this manner, understands what is the beauty of the universe; this term is evidently derived from the word *unum* (*one*). Wherefore, the beholding of oneness is not granted to that soul which wanders toward many objects and eagerly pursues mental beggary, which, though it does not know it, can only be avoided by keeping aloof from

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. 1, p. 12

the multitude; and I mean, not just the multitude of men, but of all things that the senses reach.¹¹⁸

It is the soul in the wise person who can carry out the objectives of Augustine's educational pursuits--to know God and to know one's self. The wise person loves wisdom, philosophy. To philosophy pertains a twofold question: the first treats of the soul (*Una de anima*); the second of God (*alter de Deo*). The first makes us know ourselves (*Prima affect ut nosmetipsos noverimus*) (a directive that was rooted deep in the Greek culture as so many of the Greek dramatists point out in their tragedies); the second makes us know our origins (*altera, ut originem nostram*).¹¹⁹ (This God, although one and immovable like Plato's, the Greeks do not know.)

The former is the more delightful to us; the latter is more precious. The former makes us fit for a happy life (*beata vita*); the latter renders us happy. The first is for beginners (*prima est illa discentibus*); the latter, for the well instructed (*ista jam doctis*). This is the order of wisdom's branches of study (*Hic est ordo studiorum sapientiae, per quem fit quisque idoneus ad intelligendum ordinem rerum*) by which one becomes competent to grasp the order of things and to discern two worlds (*duo mundos*) and the very Author

¹¹⁸ Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. I, chap. II, p. 11.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. XVIII, p. 158.

of the universe . . . (*et ipsum parentum universitatis*).¹²⁰

The soul's connection to God is not, as the Manicheans thought, a connection of substance (*Nihil velint omnino distare*). Like all of creation the souls of people are distinct from God.¹²¹ Yet Augustine stops short of saying how the souls come to be and what is their origin and what actually are their powers here below. How far are they subject to death? And are they immortal as Plato contends in the tenth book of his *The Republic* because evils can not destroy them?¹²² “. . . if any one dares rashly and without due order of the branches of learning to rush to the knowing of these things, he becomes, not a man of credibility; not a man of discretion, but a man ready to discredit everything.”¹²³ Like the mysteries of the First Principles that God is one, omnipotent and that He is tripotent, Father and Son and Holy Spirit,¹²⁴ Augustine leaves the deeper understanding of the soul a mystery.

¹²⁰ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XVIII, par. XXXXVII, pp. 158-159.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 187.

¹²² Plato., *NP.NF*, in intro to “To Prove That No One Can Harm The Man Who Does Not Injure Himself” by St. Chrysostom, vol IX. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 270.

¹²³ Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. II, cap V, par. XVII, p. 103.

¹²⁴ Ibid., BK. II, chap. V, par. XVI, p. 101.

God, as the Highest Reason to Which the Soul Returns

Since it is man's reason that gives him the capability to sort through and connect the things that the senses feed it, man's reasoning powers are most like God. It is the reasoning powers of God that connect all things and give it an order. He calls God the over-soul or world-soul, although later in his end-of-his-life writings he confesses that he has been too rash in accepting this Platonic teaching and that neither reason nor faith can prove whether there is an over-soul.¹²⁵ But the notion does give greater support to his assumption that the soul longs for and desires to return to its source.

“Now that which is rational in us, that which uses reason and either produces or seeks after the things that are reasonable--(*Namque illud autem nobis est rationale, id est quod ratione utitur et rationabilia vel facit vel sequitur.*) since by a certain natural bond it was held fast in the fellowship of those with whom it possessed reason as a common heritage, and since men could not be most firmly associated unless they conversed and thus poured, so to speak, their minds and thoughts back and forth to one another--saw that names or meaningful sounds, had to be assigned to things, so that men might use the sense almost as an interpreter to link together, inasmuch as they could

¹²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. XI, par. XXX, p. 131. In the footnote Russell cites Augustine there “that he had been rash (*temere*) in accepting as *true* something not proved either by reason or by faith” p. 186.

not hear the present words of those not present.¹²⁶

This reasonable God is the God of order, as Licentius states at the beginning, who though he governs according to order also is governed by order, for it was by order that Christ was sent by God the Father to us.¹²⁷ Then in what manner does God govern? He governs in such a way that He not only does things by order, but He Himself is governed by order. One can see this in nature that is put together in a well-fitting manner or in a musical piece that is well harmonized or in the beauty of a dance or in a piece of poetry that possesses a balance in the use of poetic techniques. These lift the senses beyond themselves to the reasonable order behind all things.¹²⁸ This can be seen everywhere because God is everywhere. “Perhaps because God is everywhere, then wheresoever the wise man goes, there he finds God with whom he can be. So it follows that we can at the same time affirm that the wise man passes from place

¹²⁶ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XII, par. XXXV, pp. 138-141.

¹²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. X, par. XXIX, p. 55. *Si igitur Deus Christum ordine ad nos misit et Deum Christum esse non negamus non solum agit omnia, sed agitur ordine etiam Deus.*

¹²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. XI, par. 32, & 147; Bk. II. Chap. XIV, par. XL, pp 135.

to place- which is 'to be moved'-- and yet that he is always with God."¹²⁹

This wise man may move from place to place, but because he has a mind and a soul he can be connected with the wise God in any place.

The Just God

Licentius, defending the position that God established order and is governed by order,¹³⁰ also stated confidently that "God is absolutely just (*erat Deus justus*)." There was never a time when he wasn't just (*Deus semper justus fuit*.) even though there was a time when there was not evil (*exstitit malum*), for evil had a beginning. Where and how this evil came from, Augustine didn't say. But it did have a beginning, and God had the ability to distinguish evil from good (*a bono sejungeret*).¹³¹ "For the fact that evil had a beginning is surely not brought about by the order of God; but when it had become a fact, it was included in God's order."¹³² Evil, then, is not totally in opposition with God but somehow is mysteriously included in the order of God as dark colors are included

¹²⁹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. VI, par. IXX, p. 107.

¹³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. II chap. VII, par. XXII, p. 113.

¹³¹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. VII, par. XXII, pp. 112-113.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 114-115. *Quod enim factum est ut malum nasceretur, non utique Dei ordine factum est, sed cum esset natum Dei ordine inclusum est.*

with bright colors to make a picture.

The Incarnation and the Platonists

What sets Augustine apart from the Platonists is his belief that this one, immovable God, who is present in all places at the same time, who is tripotent, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, came among us for our sake. These are part of the mysteries of the Godhead that set Augustine apart from the Platonists, from the ingenious men (*ingeniosorum superbia*).¹³³ It is the conviction of a true Platonist, like Apuleius of Madaura, that God does not mingle with men.¹³⁴ What puzzles the Platonists is the seeming contradiction that the One God could dwell among men, that the wholly other God, the immovable God, could dwell among that which is changeable, that the self-sufficient, good God can come to dwell among mankind who is vulnerable to evil. This Augustine assumes is a part of revealed truths.

¹³³ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. V, par. XVI, pp. 100-101 [See footnote 81].

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 184. In addition to the above-mentioned Platonic assumption, other points generally identified with the Platonic school were seen to be incompatible with revealed truth and were accordingly repudiated by Augustine. Chief among these errors were the following: a) that the world came into being necessarily and by a process of emanation; b) the doctrine of the transmigration of souls; c) the eternal duration of the world.

The Place of Poetry, Philosophy and Rhetoric

At the beginning of the discourse when Augustine finds that Licentius is awake, Augustine challenges him to think about why the waterfall flows intermittently. What he is really asking is for Licentius to think about the order of things. Or what causes things to occur in the manner that they do? Why do things happen the way they do? He is challenging him to search for truth. Augustine says “Quite rightly, therefore you were not marveling; and you were musing on Calliope.” (who is the chief muse of the poets).¹³⁵ Augustine is moved to ask, “Whence does marveling arise, or what is the source of this defect but something unusual and apart from the evident order of its causes?” The question evokes from Licentius a commitment to order. “Apart from the evident order, I admit that, but, it seems to me, nothing is done apart from order.”¹³⁶ Licentius is now moved to study philosophy, for philosophy, as he has begun to believe, is man’s true and tranquil abode (*vera et inconcussa nostra habitatio*).

Yet, Augustine doesn’t reject everything related to poetry. In

¹³⁵ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. III, par. VIII, pp. 18-19. *Merito, inquam, tu nihil mirabar is et apud Calliopam te intus tenebus.*

¹³⁶ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. III, par. VIII, p. 19.

showing that moderation in poetry is connected to the reasonableness of things, he says that the good poets know how to use the right amount of solecisms and barbarisms, even though they call them tropes and metaplasms. If we remove these from poems, shall we be so delighted? “Because order directs and restrains them, it does not suffer them to be in excess in their proper place, or to be anywhere out of place. Unpretentious and seemingly inelegant diction, interspersed in a discourse, brings bolder relief the fancy flights and the ornate passages.”¹³⁷

Like Plato who banned the poets from his ideal republic, Augustine is disturbed by his student’s interest in poetry because such musings do not lead to truth. Only Socratic-like questionings will lead to an understanding of the ordering of things. The question at the Cassiciacum retreat is, is there, in the face of the cruelties of the Roman world, an order to things or not? Now drawn away from his poetry and toward the search of truth, Licentius is convinced that there is an order to all things.

But the popular study of rhetoric doesn’t fare much better for Augustine. Now having given up his “talking-shop” in Milan, he is able to

¹³⁷ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. IV, par. XIII, p. 97.

put in writing why he gave up the most popular field of study of his day. He says that he is sorely vexed while teaching in the school of rhetoric in Milan, “because boys were motivated, not by the advantage and beauty of learning, but by the love of paltriest praise.” (*Sed inanissimae laudis amore discerentur.*)¹³⁸ “. . . some of them were not even ashamed to plagiarize the words of others.”¹³⁹ Augustine fears that Licentius and Trygetius want to introduce an enfeebling jealousy and empty boasting into the philosophical discourse that they are having. These are the very things that rhetoric plays upon. The pursuit of philosophy is the pursuit of learning and wisdom for their own sakes. In true philosophy there is no room for vanity. Augustine confesses that dialectic has the ability to teach and to learn because it leads to the embrace of truth. When this is shaped into oratory, it is called rhetoric. Augustine describes his resignation from his position as teacher of rhetoric in the following manner.

And I decided in your sight that, without making any violent gesture, I would gently withdraw from a position where I was making use of my tongue in the talking-shop, no longer should my young students (who

¹³⁸ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. X, par. XXX, p. 59.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

were not so much interested in your law and your peace as in absurd deceptions and legal battles) buy from my mouth material for affirming their own madness. And luckily it happened that there were only a few days more before the Vintage Vacation, and I decided to endure them so that I might retire from the profession in a regular way. I had been bought by you and was not going to return again to put myself up for sale. . . . There was also the fact that that summer my lungs had begun to give way as the result of overwork in teaching. I found it difficult to breathe deeply; pains in the chest were evidence of the injury and made it impossible for me to speak loudly or for a long time. . . . What had helped me in the past to bear my hard labor had been the desire to make money. The desire had now gone, and if its place had not been taken by patience, I should have been quite overwhelmed by staying on at my work. Some of your servants, my brothers, may say that I sinned in this, because, with my heart fully set on your service, I continued to hold even for one hour my professorship of lies. But I know that you, most merciful Lord, have pardoned and remitted this sin too, along with any other terrible and deadly sins in the holy water of Baptism. . . . And the day came on which I was actually to be freed of this profession of rhetoric, from which in my mind I was already free. So it was done. You rescued my tongue as you had rescued my heart. I rejoiced and blessed you and with all my friends went off to the country house. My writing was now done in your service, through still, in this kind of breathing space, the breath it drew was from the school of pride. . . . For till then, *the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.* And the prophet cries out, *How long, slow of heart? Why do ye love vanity and seek after lying?* He cries out, *How long?* He cries out, *Know this.* And I so long, not knowing, loved vanity and sought after lying. And so I listened and trembled, because these

words were spoken to such people as I remembered myself to have been. For there was both vanity and lying in those phantasms which I had accepted as the truth, and now in the grief I felt at the remembrance of it I loaded myself with bitter and sincere reproaches. I wished that those who still love vanity and seek after lying could have heard me.¹⁴⁰

But philosophy seeks the Truth, and this Augustine does in the *de Ordine*. The whole discourse at the Verecundus-owned retreat center is set up like a Platonic dialogue. Augustine asks the question of his students to stretch their mind about things that their senses cannot perceive and only their minds can grasp. He is leading them out of the “cave” of life and into the light of Truth; that order is that which will lead us to God. The obstacle that remains in the way of grasping this truth is all the evil that occurs in life. Where did it come from? Did it have an origin? Is it included in the divine order of things? Is it governed or does it govern?

Augustine begins examining the origin of evil in God’s good creation about twelve years before. Then, he finds what he thinks is the answer in the teachings of the Manicheans. They explain evil as a material substance and good as that which is spiritual. But evil as a

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, *The Confessions*. Bk. IX, chap. II- IV, pp. 185-190.

substance does not satisfy when one considers the revealed truth of Scriptures in Genesis where we read that God created all things good. Augustine finds in the classical methodology of education, with a Platonic philosophical emphasis, the necessary tool to grasp life on a deeper level than what the senses can perceive.

The Place of Philosophy

The person, therefore, who has been trained in the liberal arts (*disciplinarum liberalium*) was best equipped to care (*curas*) for order (*ordinem*). The liberal arts carried with them the notion that they freed a man or a woman to be fully a man or a woman, a human being. They delivered them from the bondages which the barbarians were subjected to. It meant that the person was able to speak, to write, to create, and above all to think. Hannah Arendt wrote that the ancient world distinguished between “liberal” and “servile arts.” She concluded that the distinction is not so much that one works with one’s brain and the other with one’s hands, but one made an impact on others through political decisions. These political decisions involved occupations embracing *prudentia*, the capacity for prudent judgment which was the virtue of statesmen, and professions of public relevance (*ad hominum utilitatem*)

such as architecture, medicine and agriculture.¹⁴¹ Both needed the training of the liberal arts, but the former pursued its end for its own sake, therefore, Arendt ranked these occupations higher.

Augustine carried his pursuit of the happy life (*beata vita*) to another level. He resigned from his “talking-shop” because the money he earned from this occupation was based on the faulty notion of what was perceived to be useful in Roman society--the skills of rhetoric to educate, to delight, and to persuade. Augustine knew that finding the Truth of God’s order may not have any usefulness. It could be done for its own sake. “In those years I taught the art of rhetoric. Overcome by a desire for gain, I took money for speech making. Nevertheless, Lord as you know, I preferred to have honest pupils (as honesty is reckoned nowadays); without deceit I taught them the arts of deception, to be used not against the life of any innocent man, though sometimes to save the life of the guilty.”¹⁴² In the latter days of the fourth century people would pay for such a useful skill. Augustine played with this distinction even more in *de Doctrina Christiana*.

¹⁴¹ Arendt, pp. 79-80.

¹⁴² Augustine, *The Confessions*. BK. IV, chap. II, p. 70.

If we take Hannah Arendt's distinction as an accurate assessment of the goal of liberal arts studies in the ancient Roman world, we will, then, read in Augustine's challenge to his students at Cassiciarum a similar challenge that they learn to love wisdom for its own sake. This is the wise, godly person. This is the philosopher king. This is attained through that discipline of disciplines (*disciplinam disciplinarum*), which is called dialectics (*quam dialecticam vocant*). This science teaches both how to teach (*docet docere*) and how to learn (*docet discere*).¹⁴³ "In it, reason itself exhibits itself (*ratio demonstrat*), and reveals its own nature, its desires, its powers. It knows what knowledge is; and by itself, it not only wishes to make men learned, but also can make them so."¹⁴⁴

Augustine shapes his philosophical emphasis toward the love of God for his own sake. He doesn't use the word "love" (*amare*) but the word "enjoy" (*frui*). By this he means to enjoy God for his own sake. "To possess God (*Deum habere*)' is nothing other than to enjoy God (*Deo frui*)."¹⁴⁵ This is the happy life (*vita beata*). This is done especially by

¹⁴³ Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. II, chap. XIII, par. XXXVIII, pp. 143-145.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XIII, par. XXXVIII, p. 145.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. VII, par. XX, p. 109.

those who have been trained through the liberal arts (*disciplinarum liberalium*) and challenged to exercise care (*curo*) for order (*ordinem*).

The Latin word *curo* is key here. *Cassell's Latin Dictionary* defines the word with several meanings: "to care for or to pay attention to or to tend."¹⁴⁶ *Langenscheidt Pocket Dictionary* adds to these definitions, "to be solicitous for and to think of".¹⁴⁷ Augustine's journey toward Truth and the enjoyment of God in the face of all the cruelties of Roman life will begin with *curas*, with a deeper awareness of, yea, even a solicitous pursuit of, things around his young charges than what the senses provide or on the impulses that poetry reflects. At another place Augustine uses the word marveling (*mirabilis, mirabar*).¹⁴⁸ *Cassell's Latin Dictionary* defines *mirabilis* in the first place as "wonderful" or "astonishing" and secondly as "extraordinary" or "unusual".¹⁴⁹

So philosophy, which has as its goals the knowledge of God and the knowledge of one's soul, begins with "wonder" or "astonishment", the

¹⁴⁶ J. R. V. Marchant, ed. *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company), p. 147.

¹⁴⁷ Handford, p. 95.

¹⁴⁸ Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. I, cap III, par. VIII, p. 19.

¹⁴⁹ Marchant, p. 346.

“extraordinary” or “unusual”. These promptings of the soul are best done by one who has been trained in the liberal arts.

If you have a care (*curas*) for order, I reply, you must return to those verses; for instruction in the liberal arts (*disciplinarum liberium*), if only it is moderate and concise, produces devotees more alert and more steadfast and better equipped for embracing the truth (*amplectendae veritati*), so that, Licentius, they more ardently seek (*ardentius appetant*) and more consistently pursue (*constantius insequantur*) and in the end more lovingly cling (*inhaereant postremo dulcius*) to that which is called the happy life (*quae vocatur beata vita*).¹⁵⁰

One of Augustine’s students at Cassiciacum, Alypius, follows through and becomes the Catholic church’s counterpart to a government official. The young lawyer and close friend of Augustine becomes the Catholic bishop of Tagaste in North Africa and later the Primate of the Province of Numidia.¹⁵¹

Augustine’s Mother, Monica

But Monica, the mother of Augustine, who followed him to Milan and now to Cassiciacum and to whose prayers Augustine attributed his

¹⁵⁰ Augustine., *de Ordine*. Bk. I, chap. VIII, par. XXIV, pp. 46-47. By “those verses” one can only assume that what Augustine means here is the liberal arts that aid one in caring for the order of things.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

conversion, was now warmly included in the discourse at Cassiciacum.

And, mother, to the end that these petitions be most observantly made, we enjoin the charge upon you, through whose prayers I unhesitantly believe and proclaim that God has given me this resolve: to prize nothing more highly than the finding of truth, to wish for, to think of, to love nothing else.” (*ut inveniendae veritati nihil omino praeponem, nihil aliud velim, nihil cogitem, nihil amem.*)¹⁵²

It is this author’s contention that Monica is included in the Cassiciacum discussion because as far back as Plato, women are allowed to participate in the exercises of the Platonic dialectics whereas they are not included in the schools of rhetoric.¹⁵³ This shows another shift in Augustine’s thinking after his conversion. *The Confessions* tell us that Augustine had once fooled his mother by leaving her at an oratory dedicated to the memory of St. Cyprian near North African shores when he went off to Rome.¹⁵⁴ The brilliant rhetor, then, does not recognize women equal to any man who could use his rhetorical skills “to hate

¹⁵² Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. Chap. XX, par. LII, p. 169.

¹⁵³ Marrou, p. 105.

¹⁵⁴ Augustine, *The Confessions*. Bk. V, par. VIII, p. 101.

another human being.”¹⁵⁵ Now Augustine doesn’t think it odd to include his mother in the discussion about divine order. The footnote reads: “Throughout the dialogue (*de Ordine*) as well in the *de Beata Vita*, Augustine pays beautiful tribute to his saintly mother Monica. In the latter work, for example, he acknowledges his debt in these touching words: ‘I believe that through her merit I am all that I am’.”¹⁵⁶ Again, while the others marvel at his mother’s intellectual discernment and wisdom, Augustine does not hesitate to suggest that the source of her enlightenment is far beyond the acquired learning of the pagan schools: “She voiced those things in such a manner that we, wholly unmindful of her sex, would feel that some great man was seated among us. Meanwhile I became aware, as far as I could, from what source--yes, from how divine a source--those things flowed.”¹⁵⁷

By including Monica in the discourse, Augustine makes it clear what he is doing at the retreat at Cassiciacum. He is conducting a Platonic discourse to pursue Truth, but now it is being tempered with the pursuit

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., Bk. I, par. XVIII, p. 37.

¹⁵⁶ Augustine, *de Ordine*. p. 183.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 183-184.

of the knowledge of the God who became incarnated among mankind.

How Does One Explain Evil?

Evil is the final obstacle in the pursuit of Truth. It is still an obstruction in the quest for the knowledge of God. How can it be included in order? Augustine's questions about evil are rooted in the life experience of the death of a true friend and Augustine's subsequent thoughts of suicide.¹⁵⁸ How do so many evils come to pass, although God is omnipotent and effects nothing evil? For what purpose did God make the world, although He is of no need of anything? Did evil begin in a point in time? If it always is, is it always under God's control? If evil always is, does it follow that the world always was?

If the world begins in time, how is evil held in check before the beginning of time? If there is a time when evil is not under the control of God, what suddenly happens that had not happened before? Is there any harm that evil could do to God? Augustine concludes that "any investigation in these matters which will need to be done concerning these and similar matters, is to be made according to order or not at

¹⁵⁸ Augustine, *The Confessions*. Bk.IV, chap. IV, pp. 73-75, also Bk. IV, chap. VI, p. 76 says "I was at the same time thoroughly tired of living and extremely frightened of dying."

all.”¹⁵⁹

As with Augustine’s understanding of the soul, Augustine doesn’t have complete answers when answering the above questions. But he starts with his original premise: nothing happens apart from the order constituted by God. Therefore, he concludes that evil had a beginning.

He doesn’t say when it happened or how it came about. Where did it come from, especially if God is good? Could he that is good shape and frame that which is not good? Augustine concludes “that evil had a beginning, is surely not brought about by the order of God; but when it had become a fact, it was included in God’s order.”¹⁶⁰

This inclusion of evil in God’s order is key to understanding Augustine’s thought here. He says it is something like a teacher, who teaches grammar before he teaches the alphabet. Every one who deals with life according to reason would say there is something wrong. A teacher who teaches in this manner doesn’t know the natural order of things and the negative results to the students that will occur because of

¹⁵⁹ Augustine, *de Ordine*. Bk. II, chap. XVII, par. VL, pp. 156-159. *Ergo de his atque hujusmodi rebus, aut ordine illo eruditionis, aut nullo modo quidquam requirendum est.*

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. VII, par. XXIII, pp. 112-115. *Quod enim factum est ut malum nasceretur, non utique Dei ordine factum est, sed cum esset natum Dei ordine inclusum est.*

this altered order. But this is an example of how evil works in life. It is not the opposite of good; it is the diminishing of the good, for both grammar and the alphabet are good in themselves, but when they are taught out of order, evil results. Augustine points also to prostitution as to how evil fits into God's world.

What can be mentioned more sordid, more bereft of decency or more full of turpitude than prostitutes, procurers and other pests of that sort? Remove prostitutes from human affairs, and you will unsettle everything on account of lusts; place them in the position of matrons, and you will dishonor these latter by disgrace and ignominy.¹⁶¹

He suggests here, although he counters this assertion in a later work, that prostitution has some merit. But by itself it is as evil as anything.

Augustine understands beauty in the same way. What would a painting be like if it had only one color or only bright colors?

This truth is found in poetry, too. Good poetry needs a balance of many poetic techniques: solecisms and barbarism or tropes and metaplasms. The proper balance of them leads to a beauty of poetry. Too much of one poetic technique will lead to an inappropriate

¹⁶¹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. IV, par. XII, p. 95.

imbalance, but this never occurs in good poetry.¹⁶²

God does not love evil, Licentius states. God loves order; and because he loves order, evil somehow gets included in the order of things. “This thing he loves: to love good things, and not to love evil things--and this itself is a thing of magnificent order and of divine arrangement. And because this orderly arrangement maintains the harmony of the universe by this very contrast [between good and evil], it comes about that the evil things [lesser goods] must need be.”¹⁶³

The question of the presence of evil haunts Augustine all throughout his life. With his conversation and development of a Christian educational perceptive, Augustine not only comes to believe that the one, eternal, unchangeable God became incarnate to rescue mankind but that the means of enjoying Him and therefore living the happy life, *beata vita*, comes through the classical methodology of education with the goal of training the students in the dialogue method of finding Truth. The liberal arts are essential because they liberate the young from the servile life of people who only live by their senses and do not exercise the innate

¹⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. IV, par. XIII, p. 97.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. VII, par. XVIII, p. 37.

qualities of the soul. An exercised soul, that longs for God, can enjoy God, who has a grand design, much like the painter who preconceives a painting before he puts the colors down on the canvass. The educational process of exercising the soul is as important as finally sensing the divine order behind all things. Both are found in *de Ordine* and both are for Augustine necessary in answering why there is a presence of evil in a universe that God had originally created as good.

III

de Doctrina Christiana

The Proper Understanding of Scripture

Leads us to Enjoy the Highest Good, the One God, the Trinity

About ten years (396) after the *Christianae vitae otium* and the discourse at Cassiciacum, Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, wrote to aspiring church leaders, “In all of these books those fearing God and made meek in piety seek the will of God.”¹⁶⁴ He was still the philosophical ecclesiastical leader, who led toward the Highest Good, but now his search

¹⁶⁴ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. Bk. II, chap. IX, p. 42. *In his omnibus libris timentes Deum et pietate mansueti quaerunt voluntatem Dei.*

was filled with a much more thorough knowledge of the Christian classic, the Scriptures.¹⁶⁵ To realize how true this was the student of Augustine will only have to note the increased number of Scriptural passages at the bottom of the page in a scholarly edition of *de Doctrina Christiana* as opposed to the number of passages found at the bottom of a similar edition of *de Ordine*. But his approach to Scriptures was not like Jerome's (now living in his latter years at Bethlehem) after his dream in which he was called "more a Ciceronian than a Christian"¹⁶⁶ and after which he vowed not to read any more pagan writers. Neither was Augustine's approach like Tertullian's, who condemned the teaching of pagan writers by Christians lest the teacher's faith be contaminated.

Augustine's approach did not reject his classical education. We only have to read Book X of *The City of God Against Pagans* to sense how well Augustine knew his classical pagan writers and how freely he was willing to make use of them.¹⁶⁷ Unlike the negative attitude toward the vain pursuits of rhetoric which we found in *de Ordine*, in *de Doctrina*

¹⁶⁵ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*. pp. 37 & 267.

¹⁶⁶ W. H. Fremantle, *NPNF*, vol. VI. p. xvii.

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, *Concerning The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. by Henry Bettenson, intro. by John O'Meara, Bk. X (New York: Penquin Books, 1984), pp. 371ff.

Christiana we found that he was less critical of rhetoric. It was true that many of his friends who were still Manicheans and who didn't understand the Christian faith still viewed him as the teacher of rhetoric that he once was.

De Doctrina Christiana, which Peter Brown called "one of the most original that Augustine ever wrote,"¹⁶⁸ is replete with references to Cicero, the master rhetor, and Virgil, the master Roman poet. Augustine's compromise is that "every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is the Lord's."¹⁶⁹ Augustine states that the Christian use of pagan authors is like unto the Israelites, who, when they fled in haste from slavery in Egypt, took with them the gold and silver and clothing for their journey. "But they [the Egyptians] gave their gold, silver, and clothing to the people of God fleeing from Egypt not knowing that they yielded those things which they gave 'unto obedience of Christ'."¹⁷⁰ Yet, they are of little value compared to the

¹⁶⁸ Brown, p. 264.

¹⁶⁹ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*. Bk. II, chap. XVIII, p. 54. *Immo vero quisquis bonus verusque Christianus est, Domini sui esse intelligat ubique invenerit veritatem, quam confitens.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Bk.II, chap. XL, p. 76.

truths which are found in Scripture. "The knowledge collected from the books of the pagans, although some of it is useful, is also little as compared with that derived from the Holy Scriptures."¹⁷¹

De Doctrina Christiana is divided into four books. In the first three we find Augustine leading his aspiring exegetes in an understanding of the rules of Scriptural interpretation and in what can be trustworthy and true in life about them. In the fourth book, added three years before his death (427), he goes back to the use and misuse of rhetoric in teaching the truths of Scripture. His main goal in *de Doctrina Christiana* is to train the aspiring Scriptural exegete and ecclesiastical orator in the proper rules of Scriptural interpretation and in teaching its truths.

As it is true in every age, we approach the reading and studying of Scripture with philosophical presuppositions. Augustine, as we have already noted, is no different. He is influenced by the philosophical notions that are embraced and discussed in Milan. He heard them in the sermons of his mentor, Ambrose, who corrected the admirers of Plato who thought that Plato taught Jeremiah the lessons of the Lord Jesus

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XLII, p. 78

Christ.¹⁷² Augustine agrees with his spiritual mentor and stated that Plato received his Christian-like understandings from Jeremiah at the time when he traveled up to Jerusalem on his way down to Egypt. Augustine was convinced that to believe the reverse was utmost madness.¹⁷³ This gave Augustine justification to lean on Plato as he spelled out to his aspiring exegetes that the first principle in Scriptural interpretation was to enjoy the Highest Good, the Trinity, for his own sake. "This is a great and arduous work,"¹⁷⁴ for it means learning the disciplines of the mind and the hard practice of virtue to arrive at such a conclusion.

In Platonic-fashion Augustine assumes that the harder and more difficult it is to discover the truth the more the truth is appreciated.¹⁷⁵ This assumption lends itself to an allegorical method of interpretation of the Scriptures and to a moralistic approach of discovering God.

¹⁷² Cf. *ibid.*, Bk II, chap. XXVIII, p. 64.

¹⁷³ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. I, p. 7.

¹⁷⁵ Brown, p. 260.

Scripture Leads Us to The Enjoyment of God and The Love of Others

Truth, whether it is the truths of Scripture or the wizardry of words that are heard from an orator, is seen as either “things” (*res*) or “signs” (*signum*) but things are learned by signs. “All doctrine concerns either things or signs, but things are learned by signs.”¹⁷⁶ When using this principle as applied to God, the Highest Good, Augustine (as he did in *de Ordine*) encourages the use of man’s mental powers over against his senses, for the senses will lead one to believe in god as the sky or as the brightest light in the sky or to think of a god of gods in terms of a bodily shape. But if one thinks of God as high above all things, one does not limit Him to what the senses perceive. He, then, is one, immutable, intelligible and spiritual. Thus God, to those who use their mental powers, is that thing (*res*) who is perceived as above all other things. Only such a God can be enjoyed for His own sake.

A sign is that which is used to signify something else, like

wood, stone, cattle, and so on. . . There are other signs whose whole use is signifying like words. . . every sign is also a thing for that which is not a thing is nothing at all; but not everything is also a sign. . . Some

¹⁷⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. Bk. I, chap. II, p. 8. *Omnis doctrina vel rerum est, vel signorum; sed res per signa discuntur.*

things are to be enjoyed, others to be used, and there are others which are to be enjoyed and used. Those things which are to be enjoyed make us blessed. Those things which are to be used help and, as it were, sustain us as we move toward blessedness in order that we gain and cling to those things which make us blessed.¹⁷⁷

From this important passage we can sense that Augustine is convinced that all of life is moving back toward God from whom all things came. The aspiring Scriptural exegete will get a head start on this journey back to God, the Highest God, if he masters the difficult art of knowing the difference between the sign (*signum*) and the thing (*res*). It's the way out of the darkness that hangs over the whole world because of sin. "For the Fall had been, among many other things, a fall from direct knowledge into indirect knowledge through signs. . . the knowledge by 'signs', with flashes of direct awareness."¹⁷⁸ Only an exercise of one's mental powers, coupled with a cleansing by virtue, will lead one to the source of all things: the Trinity. This ability to see things behind the signs, Augustine later says, liberates a man and aids in the journey back to God; whereas the one who worships a significant thing without knowing what it signifies

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. II-III, pp. 8-9

¹⁷⁸ Brown, p. 261.

is a slave.¹⁷⁹

But to grasp God takes pure mental powers and moral purity. He is enjoyed for His own sake, for there is nothing higher than He. Therefore, he cannot be used to gain something higher.

The things which are to be enjoyed are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a single Trinity, a certain supreme thing common to all who enjoy it, if, indeed, it is a thing and not rather the cause of all things, or both a thing and a cause.¹⁸⁰

The Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ increases our faith for him whom we have never seen with our eyes. "He came to a place that he already was."¹⁸¹ Man does not know him because they are made conformable to the world by their senses.¹⁸²

In order to see and to believe the God above all gods, the mind needs to be cleansed "so that it is able to see that light and to cling to it

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. Bk. III, chap. IX, p. 86.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. V, p. 10. *Res igitur quibus fruendum est, pater et filius et spiritus sanctus est, eademque trinitas, una quaedam summa res communisque omnibus fruentibus ea, si tamen res et non omnium rerum causa sit, si tamen et caussa.*

¹⁸¹ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. XII, p. 14.

¹⁸² Cf. *ibid.*

once it is seen.”¹⁸³ Here Scripture helps. In fact the key to understanding Scripture, for Augustine, is the two commandments found in Scripture:

Thou shalt love, He said, the Lord thy God with the whole heart, and with the whole soul, and with the whole mind and Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.¹⁸⁴

Acts of charity, especially the act of charity toward one’s enemies, is an indication that the person is on a journey back to God. “I call ‘charity’ the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for his own sake, the enjoyment of God; but ‘cupidity’ is a motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of one’s self.”¹⁸⁵ All of Scripture points to this, and if the aspiring exegete does not read this in the Scriptures, he reads and interprets them wrongly.

It is on the basis of this central principle of interpretation that Augustine distinguishes between which passages should be read

¹⁸³ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. X, p. 13.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. Bk. I, chap. XXVI, pp. 22-23. *Diliges, inquit, Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et ex tota anima tua, et ex tota mente tua; et diliges proximum tuum tamquam te ipsum. In his duobus praeceptis tota lex pendet et prophetae, Matt. 22:37-38.*

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. Bk. III, chap. X, p. 88. *Caritatem voco motum animi ad fruendum Deo propter ipsum, et se atque proximo propter Deum; cupiditatem autem motum animi ad fruendum et proximo et quolibet copore non propter Deum.*

figuratively and which ones are to be read literally. Whatever passage doesn't pertain to virtuous behavior or to charity is to be taken figuratively. Augustine's approach to the study and the teaching of Scripture ends up to be rather simplistic for any reader of the Scriptures in the twentieth century: "Scripture teaches nothing but charity."¹⁸⁶

Scriptures Expose Our Love of Temporal Things

"There is no need for a precept that any one should love himself."¹⁸⁷ The love of self is embedded in the laws of nature. From the man who loves his wife for only sexual pleasures and not for procreation¹⁸⁸ to the man who is puffed up with pride when he approaches Scripture,¹⁸⁹ love of self needs no encouragements. "Thus the proud man or the proud angel places his enjoyment in himself and rejoices that others place their hopes in him also."¹⁹⁰ Scriptures will reveal unto the reader his love of temporal things. ". . . the student first will discover in the Scriptures that he has been enmeshed in the love of

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. *Non autem praecipit scriptura nisi caritatem.*

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., Bk. I, cap XXXV, p. 30.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. III, chap. XIX, p. 96.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, in Robertson's intro., p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., Bk. I, chap. XXXIII, p. 28

the world, or of temporal things, a love far remote from the kind of love of God and of our neighbor which Scripture itself prescribes.”¹⁹¹

Faith Will Stagger If the Authority of Scriptures Staggers

De Doctrina Christiana makes clear that the difference between the Platonist and the Christian is not so much “the Word made flesh”¹⁹² but the authority of Scriptures. These canonical books, that have been selected by the largest number of catholic churches,¹⁹³ bear an authority that no pagan book can claim. One’s faith relationship to these Scriptural books is a direct outcome on how the churchman does acts of charity. If the aspiring exegete has another interpretation of passages from Scripture other than that which leads him to love God and love neighbor, he will end up being angry at Scripture.¹⁹⁴ Or if he doubts Scripture, his faith will stagger. “If faith staggers, charity itself languishes.” *Porro fide titubante caritas etiam ipsa languescit.*¹⁹⁵

It is quotes like these that lead D. W. Robertson, Jr. to write in the

¹⁹¹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. VII, p. 39.

¹⁹² Ibid., Bk. I, chap. XIII, p. 14.

¹⁹³ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. VIII, p. 41

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. XXXVII, p. 31.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

introduction of his *de Doctrina Christiana* that what sets Augustine apart from the ancient classical world was an introduction of charity (*charitas*). “Underlying the specific techniques of both interpretation and exposition of Scripture the principle of first importance in St. Augustine’s mind is charity. The introduction and spread of this specifically Christian doctrine marks the decisive break between antiquity and the Middle Ages.”¹⁹⁶ But it is a charity that is supported by a faith in Scriptures. If faith in Scripture fails, charity fails. It is the movement toward God, the highest good, and in loving Him one loves one’s neighbor.

The More Difficult the Passage the Greater the Appreciation

Yet, retaining the philosophical approach to Scriptures, Augustine seeks to find in Scriptures hidden truths, much like when he found in the order of things at Cassiciacum a meaning to life beyond what the senses could give. Then, he used the Platonic dialogue method, now he discards that method in favor of the lecture method. He acts as a bishop who makes authoritative pronouncements to the aspiring young exegetes. For Augustine the Jewish people do not know how to do this. They are

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. x.

subject to temporal things and in such a way the One God is served.¹⁹⁷

This principle holds true in the understanding of places like the pool of Siloe, where the Lord commanded the man whose eyes he anoints with clay made of spittle to wash. This Augustine suggests could mean some form of mystery, i. e., baptism.¹⁹⁸ This also holds true in understanding a serpent. It exposes its whole body in order to protect its head from those attacking it. This illustrates the sense of the Lord's admonition that we are to be as serpents.

That is, for the sake of our head, which is Christ, we should offer our bodies to persecutors lest the Christian faith be in a manner killed in us, and in an effort to save our bodies we deny God. It is also said that the serpent, having forced its way through narrow openings sheds its skin and renews its vigor. How well this conforms to our imitation of the wisdom of the serpent when we shed the "old man," as the Apostle says, and put on the "new"; and we shed it in narrow places, for the Lord directs us, "Enter ye in at the narrow gate."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Cf. *ibid.* Bk. III, chap. VI, p. 84.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* Bk. II, chap. XVI, p. 50

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. XVI, pp. 50-51.

A Sign Causes us to Think of Something Beyond

This interpretation sounds strange and unbecoming to our ears, it would not have irritated Augustine's philosophical leanings. The allegorical method of interpretation fits his way of finding the truth behind the events of life as well as fits the manner in which Scripture becomes for him that which held the Truth behind the words, events, and characters.

. . . A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon our senses. Thus if we see a track, we think of the animal that made the track; if we see smoke, we know that there is a fire which causes it; if we hear the voice of a living being, we attend to the emotion it expresses; and when a trumpet sounds, a soldier should know whether it is necessary to advance or to retreat, or whether the battle demands some other response.²⁰⁰

Augustine says numbers found in the Scriptures should be understood with intelligence. After working through his Scriptural numbers, we still wonder what he has in mind. But, as Peter Brown

²⁰⁰ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. I, p. 34. . . . *Signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire: sicut vestigio viso transisse animal, cuius vestigium est, cogitamus, et fumo viso ignem subesse cognoscimus, et voce animantis aufita adfectionem animi eius advertimus et tuba sonante milites vel progredi se, vel regredi, et si quid aliud pugna postulat, oportere noverunt.*

points out, different numbers are important to the educated pagan man. The number nine, which is not one of the major numbers dealt with in the Scriptures, is important in the Roman world. It is the number of Muses that inspire the poets. Every educated Roman from childhood knows this.²⁰¹ Augustine argues, “We must not listen to the superstition of the pagans who profess that the nine Muses are the daughters of Jove and Memory. They are refuted by the historian Varro, . . . I know of no one more eager and learned in such matters.”²⁰² Augustine relates what Varro told about a certain city that contracted three sculptors to do three statues of the Muses. The best three would be placed in the temple of Apollo. The city leaders find that each set of three Muses is beautiful, and all nine figures please the city leaders. And all of them are bought and dedicated in the temple. The poet Hesiod names all nine of them, preserving the superstition of the number nine.

Augustine points out to his aspiring church leaders that the number three is embedded in nature, for the city does not come upon the number three because any one has seen three Muses in a dream,

²⁰¹ Brown., p. 269.

²⁰² Augustine, *de Doctrina Christiana*. Bk. II, chap. XVII, p. 53.

but (as Varro says) because it is easy to see that all sound which furnishes material for songs is of a threefold nature. It is either produced by the voice, like the sound made by those who sing from the throat without instrumental accompaniment, by the breath, like the sound made by trumpets and flutes, or by striking, like the sound produced by harps, drums, or other percussion instruments.²⁰³

Augustine, by quoting Varro, is trying to come up with what he thought is a scientific explanation or scholarly support of why there are three Muses, stripping the Roman world of superstition connected with the number nine, a non-Biblical number.

Augustine counters the number nine with the Scriptural number of ten, which, of course, is the number of the commandments as well as the number of plagues Moses delivers unto the Egyptians. But Augustine sees the number ten in many more Scriptural references.

. . . Again the number ten signifies a knowledge of the Creator and the creature; for the trinity is the Creator and the septenary indicates the creature by reason of his life and body. For with reference to life there are three, whence we should love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds; and with reference to the body there are obviously four elements of which it is made.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Ibid. Bk. II, chap. XVII, pp. 53-54.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XVI, p. 52.

As twentieth-century Scriptural readers, have we, by reading this passage from Augustine, gotten any closer to understanding the number ten in Scripture? We do not think so, but this would not have been true for Augustine. His point here wasn't a deeper understanding of the number ten. His point was that he had replaced the Roman number nine with a more Scriptural number, the number ten. The fact that his explanation of the number ten was obscure would not have bothered him, for he was convinced that an obscure meaning brought one closer to God. He argued in order to strip the Roman world of its superstitions and led it to the authority of philosophical thinking and Scripture. The aspiring exegetical mind that has been exercised to think in this manner has drawn closer to God. He has also been led to think more scientifically, less fatalistically. After Augustine, *Moir*a or *eventus* will not have as tight a grip on the Roman world as it once had.

Things of music, too, may halt and impede the reader. Music was used at the Roman theater to arouse the emotions of the audience as they celebrated the immorality of the gods. But, since musical instruments were used in Scripture, anything that the aspiring exegete can learn from the world of music that could be used to understand

Scripture, in fact, should be used.²⁰⁵

Wherever the Christian Found Truth, It Was the Lord's

Augustine's principle for determining what the Scriptural exegete could use and what he should discard was determined by what he found to be true, for "wherever he [the Roman] may find truth (*veritatem*) it is the Lord's." The pagan Roman, ensnared in his superstitions, thought he had truth, but it was a truth that preempted the Truth of God. For Augustine the pagan Roman wasn't filled with the love and enjoyment of the One, immutable God for his own sake nor filled with enough charitable acts toward his neighbor. He was filled too much with wretched pagan superstitions.

The Study of Astrology Was Rooted in Fate-filled Notions

Many of these superstitions centered around astrology, especially the ones called *genethliaci*, which has to do with birthdays, or commonly, *mathematici* [judicial astrologers]. Augustine's criticism ran deep.

Although these men may seek out and even find the exact position of the stars at the time someone is born, yet when they seek to predict on that basis either our actions or the outcome of our actions they err greatly and sell unlearned men into a miserable servitude. For

²⁰⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. XVII p. 54.

a man who is free when he goes to such an astrologer gives his money that he may leave him as the servant either of Mars or of Venus, or rather of all the stars to which those who first erred in this way and passed their error on to posterity gave names of beasts because of the resemblances or names of men in an effort to honor men. . . . To desire to predict at birth, on the basis of such observations, the habits, actions, and fortunes of men is a great error and a great madness.²⁰⁶

Augustine refuted these astrological superstitions by pointing out that all these predictions are based on the opinion of wretched men. And secondly, these predictions can be disproven by the observation of what happened to the Scriptural twins, Jacob and Esau.

Thus we know that Esau and Jacob were born twins in such a way that Jacob, who was born last, was found holding with his hand the foot of his brother who went before. Certainly, the day and hour of birth for these two could not be otherwise noted except in such a way that the constellation for both should be the same. Yet what a difference there was in the manners, deeds, labors, and fortunes of these two men the Scriptures, now accessible to all men, testifies.²⁰⁷

Augustine's felt that such superstitions led to useless falsehoods and reflect "pacts and contracts with demons."²⁰⁸ Evidence of "pacts and

²⁰⁶ Ibid. Bk. II, chap. XXI, p. 56.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXII, par. 34, p. 58.

contracts with demons” was that people who predict the future of an individual based on the stars seldom agree. Augustine suggested that when men agreed among themselves a practice or an institution became useful. “For all practices which have value among men because men agree among themselves that they are valuable as human institutions . . .”²⁰⁹

But the useful and necessary institutions established by men with men include whatever they have agreed upon concerning differences of dress and the adornment of the person useful for distinguishing sex or rank, and innumerable kinds of signs without which human society could not or could not easily function, including weights and measures, differences of value and impression in coinage appropriate to specific states and peoples, and other things of this kind. . . . But all this part of human institutions helpful to the necessary conduct of life is not to be shunned by the Christian; rather, as such institutions are needed, they are to be given sufficient notice and remembered.²¹⁰

Therefore, instead of turning to Julius Caesar, who was said to have had his many fortunes in life because he was born at the time of the appearance of a comet, Augustine lifted up these two Biblical characters to refute the very deep notions of fate (*moira*) in Roman culture. Jacob and Esau were not governed by a common fate. And finally, he refuted

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXV, par. 38, p. 61.

²¹⁰ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXV, pars. 39-40, p. 62.

the practice of astrology by pointing out that no two interpretations agreed.

Moreover, they imply a pestiferous curiosity, an excruciating solicitude, and a mortal slavery. They were not noticed because of any innate validity, but they were made to have validity through being noticed and pointed out. Thus they seemed different to different people in accordance with their thoughts and presumptions.²¹¹

One thing meant one thing among the Romans and another thing among the Greeks. “Therefore, just as all of these significations move men’s minds in accordance with the consent of their societies and because this consent varies, they move them differently, nor do men agree upon them because of an innate value, but they have a value because they are agreed upon.”²¹²

Yet, Augustine encouraged the scientific study of astronomy. If one knew the present position of the stars, it was possible to trace their past courses according to a rule. Therefore, one can predict the future according to the same rule. This was not superstitious and portentous but certain and fixed by calculation. There was no lesson for life here.

²¹¹ Ibid. Bk. II, chap. XXIV, p. 60.

²¹² Ibid. Bk. II, chap. XXIV, p. 60-61.

“We do not seek to learn here any application of our deeds and fates in the manner of the ravings of the astrologers but only information that pertains to the stars themselves.”²¹³

Augustine’s criticism of astrology went deeper. It was based on astrology’s violation of the first commandment. Astrology named constellations and planets, which originally had no names, after men and gods and overlooked the God who created the stars and ordered them.²¹⁴ But his criticism was also based on science. Astrology failed to see the order that God has placed in the motion of the stars; and therefore, Roman pagan culture, by clinging to such superstitious notions, had kept the Roman world from truth.

Truth of an Institution Depended upon Common Agreement

How can one tell whether a custom or an institution can be trusted or not? Here Augustine sounded strikingly modern. Like astrology and other superstitions which produced a variety of interpretations so Augustine was against variety in institutional practices. These came from the devil. These were to be eradicated from the Christian’s mind. It was

²¹³ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXIX, p. 66.

²¹⁴ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXI, p. 56.

a common agreement of men, like the rule of the majority, that made a practice, custom, or institution trustworthy or not. “Some of these are superfluous and extravagant, others useful and necessary.”²¹⁵ He was especially critical of the variety of ways in which signs were interpreted. These were not valid except by common consent. (*Nisi consensus accedat*)²¹⁶

But the useful and necessary institutions established by men with men include whatever they have agreed upon concerning differences of dress and the adornment of the person useful for distinguishing sex or rank, and innumerable kinds of signs without which human society could not or could not [sic] easily function, including weights and measures, differences of value and impression in coinage appropriate to specific states and peoples, and other things of this kind. . . . But all this of human institutions helpful to the necessary conduct of life is not to be shunned by the Christian; rather, as such institutions are needed, they are to be given sufficient notice and remembered.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXV, p. 61. *Quorum partim superflua luxuriosaque instituta sunt, partim commoda et necessaria.*

²¹⁶ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXXI, p. 68.

²¹⁷ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXV, p. 62. *Sed haec tota pars humanorum institutorum, quae ad usum vitae necessarium proficiunt, nequaquam est fugienda Christiano, immo etiam quantum satis est intuenda memoriaque retinenda.*

Logical Truth Was Found in Scriptures

Augustine saw a similar logic embedded in the Scriptures. Or he seemed to be saying, “the Scriptures themselves are logical.”

“ . . . the truth of propositions is a matter to be discovered in sacred books . . . ”²¹⁸ Augustine drew upon the writings of St. Paul in the 15th chapter of I Corinthians to show how false inferences can be drawn from a true proposition. The true proposition was that Christ was raised from the dead; the false inference is that the dead shall not rise. Sometimes it did happen that true inferences can come from false premises. “However, the truth of valid inference was not instituted by men; rather it was observed by men and set down that they might learn or teach it.”²¹⁹ Drawing from the same premise as in *de Ordine*, Augustine wrote in *de Doctrina Christiana*, that “. . .it is perpetually instituted by God in the reasonable order of things. Thus the person who narrated the order of events in time did not compose that order himself . . . ”²²⁰ When a consequent was false, it was necessary that the antecedent upon which it

²¹⁸ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXXI, p. 68.

²¹⁹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXXII, p. 68.

²²⁰ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXXII.

was based be false also. This can be found in St. Paul's defense of the resurrection of the dead in I Corinthians 15.

Those whose error the Apostle wished to refute had set forth the antecedent that there is no resurrection of the dead. But the consequent follows from this antecedent that there is no resurrection of the dead that "then Christ is not risen," but this consequent is false. For Christ arose, so that the antecedent is false that there is no resurrection of the dead. It follows that there is a resurrection of the dead. This may be put briefly as follows: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, neither was Christ resurrected. But Christ was resurrected. Therefore there is a resurrection of the dead." The principle that if the consequent is false the antecedent must also be false was not instituted by men, but discovered. And this rule applies to the validity of inferences, not to the truth of propositions.²²¹

Knowledge of Scriptural Languages Aided the Discovery of Truth

Even though Augustine was said to have been a "poor" Greek student in his school days, he encouraged the aspiring Scriptural exegete to be proficient in the Scriptural languages. ". . . he will become the only Latin philosopher in antiquity to be virtually ignorant of Greek."²²² However, a thorough knowledge of Greek could have helped Augustine to explain unknown words and locutions. He would have been closer to an

²²¹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. XXXII, pp. 68-69.

²²² Brown, p. 36.

understanding of the original text and would have been able to explain the ambiguities of the Scriptures, as in the following passage in which Augustine did reflect some knowledge of the Greek language.

Not only ambiguities of this type but also those which do not depend on punctuation or pronunciation should be treated in the same way. Consider the passage from Thessalonians: “Therefore we were comforted, brethren, in you.” (I Thess. 3:7) It is doubtful whether “brethren” [Latin, *fratres*] should be read as a vocative [as in the translation above] or as an accusative [so as to read “on this account we have comforted the brethren among you”]. But in Greek the two cases do not have the same form, and when the Greek text is examined, the word is found to be vocative. But if the translator had been willing to say, *Propterea, consolationem habuimus, fratres, in vobis* [instead of *consolati sumus*], the translation would have been literal but also less doubtful as to meaning.²²³

Knowing the original Scriptural languages, the aspiring exegete will know more accurately whether the Scriptural words were to be taken figuratively or literally.²²⁴ This was an important skill to master for Augustine because not to know the difference between the literal and the figurative was to fail to demonstrate what distinguishes a man from a beast, which is understanding. When man was subjected to the “flesh” of

²²³ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. Bk. III, chap. IV, p. 83.

²²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. III, chap. I, pp. 78-79.

a word, Augustine assumed that he is less than a man.

For example , if he hears of the Sabbath, he thinks only of one day out of the seven that are repeated in a continuous cycle; and if he hears of Sacrifice, his thoughts do not go beyond the customary victims of the flocks and fruits of the earth. There is a miserable servitude of the spirit in his habit of taking signs for things, so that one is not able to raise the eye of the mind above things that are corporeal and created to drink in eternal light.²²⁵

Rhetoric Can Be Used in Service of Truth

In the fourth book of *de Doctrina Christiana* Augustine returned to the subject by which he once earned a living, the art of rhetoric. This time he handled it in a more balanced way than in *de Ordine*. Now he saw some usefulness in it for the aspiring Scriptural exegete. After all, its skills, which were “to learn the art of words, to acquire that eloquence that was essential to persuade men of your case, to unroll your opinions before them,”²²⁶ were being acquired and practiced in schools of rhetoric throughout the Roman Empire in Augustine’s day from Bordeaux to

²²⁵ Ibid., Bk. III, chap. V, p. 84.

²²⁶ Brown, p. 36. Brown is here quoting from Augustine’s *The Confessions*. Bk. I, chap. XVI.

Antioch.²²⁷ Being educated to be a complete Roman and being practiced in the art of rhetoric, he knew its power and effect on people when used as a teaching tool and realized that its first task was to teach before it could be used to delight and persuade. The aspiring exegete would have to teach the Scriptural truths he discovered, and he would have to do it in a delightful and persuasive manner. What he didn't like about the art of rhetoric was its natural inclination to puff up the one using it and even the one hearing it into thinking that the mere eloquence of words made the words true. They "place their own language above the language of our authors, not because of its greatness but because of its vanity."²²⁸ This was "often extremely injurious and profits no one."²²⁹ "For a man speaks more or less wisely to the extent that he has become more or less proficient in the Holy Scriptures."²³⁰

²²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

²²⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. Bk. IV, chap. VI, p. 124.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, chap. V, p. 121. Augustine quotes Cicero's *de Invent.* Bk. I, chap. I, par. I.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, chap. V, p. 122.

Rhetoric Should Not Be Taught *Per Se*

Augustine argued that if rhetoric can be used in either urging evil or justice, why should it not be used for good in the service of truth? Augustine's balanced approach to the use of rhetoric was based on the fact that rhetorically crafted speeches were heard in all public places throughout the Roman Empire. The Christian orator would naturally imitate them anyway. Yet, Augustine did not want the rules of rhetoric to be taught in his Christian schools, for the same reason that he once gave up the teaching of rhetoric years before--because it led to the pursuit of vain glory.

But first in these preliminary remarks I must thwart the expectation of those readers who think that I shall give rules of rhetoric (*rhetorica daturum*) here which I learned and taught in the secular schools (*scholis saecularibus*). And I admonish them not to expect such rules from me, not that they have no utility (*utilitatis*), but because, if they have any, it should be sought elsewhere if perhaps some good (*bono*) man has opportunity to learn (*discere*) them. But he should not expect these rules from me, either in this work or in any other.²³¹

²³¹ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. I, p. 118.

The Ecclesiastical Orator Was Unaware of His Eloquence

Augustine was convinced that the rules of eloquence should not be taught overtly, but they should be learned by reading and by hearing, by imitation. The ecclesiastical orator will have learned eloquence if he practiced writing, dictating, or speaking according to the rule of piety and faith. Even those who have learned these rules and spoke fluently and eloquently cannot be aware of the fact that they were applying them while they were speaking unless they were discussing the rules themselves.

Why can't men learn expressions of eloquence through imitation (*imitando*) rather than following rules of eloquence?²³² Learning by imitation wasn't anything new. The Greek tragic poets used it in their presentation of the tragic hero. The Greek hero was an imitator of an action, and the audience, as least in terms of emotions, imitated and identified with the hero, through his rise and fall. The audience's identification with the hero led to a keener sense of self-awareness and brought about a catharsis in the emotions of pity and fear.²³³

²³² Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. IV, chap. III, pp. 119-120.

²³³ Aristotle, *Poetics*. 1449, ch. 6, trans. by Ingram Baywater, *Introduction to Aristotle*. ed. Richard McKeon, (New York: The Modern Library, 1947), p. 631.

Scriptural Rhetoric Did Not Abandon Wisdom

Augustine's wise man was not so much schooled in the rules of eloquence but in the truths of the Scriptures, for Scriptures themselves abounded in examples of rhetoric. Augustine saw in St. Paul's passage in Romans 5:3-5 an example of *gradatio*, "where words or meanings are connected by proceeding one from the other."²³⁴ "But we glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience trial; and trial hope; and hope confoundeth not because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us." Within this passage we also found what the Latin rhetorians call *membra* (portion of anything) or *caesa* (short sentences). Augustine called a group of *membrae a circuitus* or a going around in a circle. This, too, is found in this passage. "But just as we do not say that the Apostle followed the precepts of eloquence, so also we do not deny that his wisdom was accompanied by eloquence."²³⁵ Augustine said the same rhetorical devices can be found in St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 11:16-30. Sensing in true Platonic fashion that the

²³⁴ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. Bk. IV, chap. VII, pp. 124-125.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, chap. VII, p. 125.

prophetic writings of the Old Testament were obscured by many tropes or figurative words, Augustine knew that the prophetic words became sweeter when the aspiring exegete explained them. He found in Amos 6:1-6 an example of a Scriptural writer, who while retaining the Wisdom that Augustine was looking for, did not abandon the use of eloquence.²³⁶

“Woe to you that are wealthy in Sion, and to you that have confidence in the mountain of Samaria: ye great men, heads of the people, that go in with the state into the house of Israel. Pass ye over to Chalane, and see, and go from thence into Emath the great: and go down into Geth of the Philistines, and to all the best kingdoms of these: if their border be larger than your border. You that are separated unto the evil day; and that approach to the throne of iniquity; You that sleep upon beds of ivory, and are wanton on your couches: that eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the herd; You that sing to the sound of the psaltery; they have thought themselves to have instruments of music like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with best ointments: and they are not concerned for the affliction of Joseph.”²³⁷

Augustine saw in this passage, which he took from Jerome’s Latin translation rather than the usual Greek Septuagint, six *membra* formed by three *circuitus*, starting with the repeating of “you’s”. The eloquence in this passage can not be sensed so much by reading this passage silently.

²³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. IV, chap. VII, p. 129.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129. Augustine quotes directly from Amos 6:1-6.

as by hearing this series of “you’s” read orally. The change and softening of the voice would come with the reading of “you that sing to the sound of the psaltery”,²³⁸ for the prophet was not speaking to the people but for the people. “A good listener warms to these words not so much by diligently analyzing them but by hearing them pronounced energetically.”²³⁹

Therefore let us say that our canonical authors and teachers were not only wise but eloquent in that kind of eloquence which is appropriate for such persons. . . . we [the aspiring Christian orator] must imitate them in that which they have spoken with a useful and healthful obscurity for the purpose of exercising and sharpening, as it were, the minds of the readers and of destroying fastidiousness and stimulating the desire to learn, canceling their intention in such a way that the minds of the impious are either converted to piety or excluded from the mysteries of the faith.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. VII, p.131.

²³⁹ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. VII, p. 132.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. VII-VIII, p. 132.

Augustine Used Cicero's Three-pronged Approach to Rhetoric

Using Cicero's three pronged use of rhetoric (to teach is a necessity, to please is sweetness, to persuade is wisdom), Augustine encouraged the Christian orator to communicate in such a fashion that he was understood. Often this was determined not so much by what was said as by the manner in which it was said. To teach was of first importance to the Christian orator, but to retain the interests of the listeners an orator must learn the art of delighting. Yet the highest form of eloquence was the art of persuasion, for persuasion was victory. People may be taught and pleased and still not consent. A listener, however, was to be persuaded

. . . if he loves what you promise, fears what you threaten, hates what you condemn, embraces what you commend, sorrows at what you maintain is to be sorrowful; rejoices when you announce something delightful, takes pity on those whom you place before him in speaking as being pitiful, flees those whom you, moving fear, warn are to be avoided; and is moved by whatever else may be done through grand eloquence toward moving the minds of listeners, not that they may know what is to be done, but that they may do what they already know should be done.²⁴¹

Such an orator would move people best if he lived what he spoke.

²⁴¹ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. XII, pp. 136-137.

But when that which is taught must be put into practice and is taught for that reason, the truth of what is said is acknowledged in vain and the eloquence of the discourse pleases in vain unless that which is learned is implemented in action. It is necessary therefore for the ecclesiastical orator, when he urges that something be done, not only to teach that he may instruct and to please that he may hold attention, but also to persuade that he may be victorious.²⁴²

Just as what we found Augustine saying about poetry in *de Ordine*, that poetic devices ought to be done in moderation, we found him urging that any one rhetorical device should not be used in excess. When oratory was spoken with “too much profusion it is displeasing.”²⁴³ Rather the Christian orator ought to accomplish more through the piety of his prayers than through the skill of his oratory, “so that, praying for himself and for those whom he is to address, he is a petitioner before he is a speaker.”²⁴⁴ “For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.” (Matthew 10:20) “He who sought to teach in speech what was good, spurning none of the three principles of rhetoric,

²⁴² Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. XIII, p. 138.

²⁴³ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. XIV, p. 139.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. XV, p. 140.

should pray and strive that he be heard intelligently, willingly, and obediently. When he does this well and properly, he can justly be called eloquent, . . .”²⁴⁵

Augustine Used Cicero’s Concern That Oratory Should Vary

Turning to the master Roman orator Cicero again, Augustine urged that oratory should vary according to the subject: small things in a subdued manner, moderate things in a temperate manner, and grand things in a grand manner. Augustine knew that the ecclesiastical orator has a grand subject, because it dealt with man’s eternal welfare, and therefore, we would think that he would urge that this subject would be delivered in a grand manner, but he urged that the grand subject of man’s salvation should be delivered in a subdued manner. Nevertheless, although our teacher should speak of great things, he should not always speak about them in a grand manner, but in a subdued manner when he taught.

Yet, within Scripture, there are found all three styles. In Matthew 25 where the Christian is urged to share a cup of water with another, this is to be spoken in a subdued manner, because a cup of cold water is

²⁴⁵ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. XVII, p. 142.

a small and most insignificant thing. The promise attached to it is also small and insignificant, too.²⁴⁶ Augustine sees in the twelfth chapter of Romans a moderate style, because almost all of it is exhortation. “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God.”²⁴⁷ (Romans 12: 1) And later in the same chapter he writes, “Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep.” And in the mighty eighth chapter of Romans, he speaks in a grand style when he speaks so convincingly of the love of God in Christ. “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)²⁴⁸

Variety in oral presentation is what Augustine urged for the Christian orator. “When those things which must be said in the subdued style have been interposed, we return effectively to those things which

²⁴⁶ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. XVIII, p. 145.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. XX, p. 148.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

must be said in the grand style, so that the impetus of our speech ebbs and flows like the sea.”²⁴⁹ Fit the manner of speaking with the subject matter. Know the subject matter beyond the words. Look behind them and find out how the original writer or speaker would have meant them to be spoken. There is a useful Platonic directive here. Find the thing (*res*) beyond the sign (*signum*).

Augustine said that the martyred church father Cyprian appropriately used the subdued style himself when discussing the sacrament of the chalice. There he resolved the question as to whether or not the Lord’s chalice would contain water alone or water mixed with wine.²⁵⁰ And he used the moderate style when addressing virgins who because of greater glory deserved greater care. And Ambrose did the same when he said, “She was a virgin not only in body but also in mind. Her sincere disposition was not stained by any traces of deceit.”²⁵¹ And Augustine himself used the grand style when he was dissuading the people of Caesarea in Mauritania from civil war--“for not only the citizens

²⁴⁹ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. XXII, p. 159.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. XXI, p. 153.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 155.

themselves, but relatives, brothers, even parents and children, divided themselves into two parts for several successive days at a certain time of the year and solemnly fought each other with stones and each killed whomever he could--I pleaded in the grand style . . .”²⁵²

Augustine summarized the use of Ciceronian principles by saying, “But is it true that all who are delighted are changed as in the grand style, all who are persuaded act, or in a subdued style all are taught know, or believe to be true, what they did not know before?”²⁵³ Not every style will bring its designated results. But the master orator has a sense when a style should be used. And Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, has a sense when the truths of the classical methodology should be used and when they should be discarded. The principle of charity governed all things as it governed the manner in which the aspiring exegete read his Scriptures.

One reason Augustine stood at an “Axial Period” in human history was because his educational philosophy helped free the western world from superstitions. For example, Augustine, as we pointed out previously, had no time for the belief that the stars hold the secret to one’s future.

²⁵² Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. XXIV, p. 160.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 161.

To desire to predict at birth, on the basis of such observations, the habits, actions, and fortunes of men is a great error and a great madness. For they observe the configurations of the stars which they call constellations at the time of birth of the one concerning whom these wretched men are consulted by those even more wretched.²⁵⁴

His strongest point, however, against astrology's accurate predictions is when he cited the example of Jacob and Esau. Their life stories differ, yet they were born under the same configuration of the stars.

And finally rhetoric itself, because it can be used to promote either justice or evil, should be used by the Christian. “. . . why should it not be obtained for the uses of the good in the service of truth if the evil usurp it for the winning of perverse and vain causes in defense of iniquity and error?”²⁵⁵ Reflecting still his distain for the vain-glory that the person gifted in rhetoric often sought, Augustine stated that the rules of rhetoric will not be taught in his school. “And I admonish them not to expect such rules from me, not that they have no utility, but because, if they have any, it should be sought elsewhere if perhaps some good man has the

²⁵⁴ Ibid., Bk. II chap. XXII, par. 33, p. 57.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., Bk. IV, chap. II, par. 3, pp. 118-119.

opportunity to learn them.”²⁵⁶

So we have come full circle, so to speak, from Augustine who rejected his talk-shop at the time of his conversation to Augustine seeing something useful in the goals of rhetoric, namely “to teach, to delight, and to persuade”. In *de Doctrina Christiana* it was apparent that some of the truths that Augustine thought were the Lord’s were the truths of what made human speech effective. Augustine has learned that the mature Christian still has to live in the world of words. Here the catholic Christian was to use God’s gift of speech wisely, but not arrogantly.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

Summary

Augustine of Hippo, as a young man, was a man of his times. True to the spirit of the 4th century Roman culture that nurtured and schooled him, the brilliant young Augustine pursued the most popular academic discipline of the day: rhetoric. This popular discipline fit his gifts to teach an abstract truth, to turn a Latin phrase in an interesting way, and to convince others, even if it meant making a lie look like a truth. Finding in Cicero's *Hortensius* a kindred spirit, Augustine recognized in himself at the early age of nineteen his life's passion--the pursuit of Truth. Given the Roman culture's fascination with rhetoric, it is not surprising that Augustine's deep-seated passion for Truth resulted in a conflict with this Roman fascination. The personal tensions that Augustine found within himself had been going on in Graeco-Roman culture since the days of Plato and Isocrates. In the Roman culture Isocrates' school of rhetoric won out; but spiritually Plato's philosophical principles were used to grasp the unchangeable, eternal Truth of God. This Truth finally possessed Augustine's soul.

The question for our purposes was--how much of the classical methodology of education, that reflected so much of what the 4th

century Roman society was, would Augustine retain and how much of it would he discard? Or how would Augustine work through the tension between his baptismal immersion into the Incarnated Word and the Roman culture in which he was also so thoroughly immersed?

In *de Ordine* we found Augustine with his young followers and mother working through an answer to the questions concerning the presence of evil in God's good creation. The setting was Cassiciacum near Milan. The atmosphere was relaxed and perfect for a philosophical examination of this difficult theological question. The time was soon after his conversion in the late summer of 386 and before his baptism on Easter of 387. He has thoroughly and premeditatedly given up his way of thinking as a rhetor and has thrown himself into the Platonic manner of thinking, in order to come up with a theological answer to the questions, does evil exist inside or outside of God's providence? Does God have a design that includes even the evil that is opposed to him?

In a Socratic manner he led his chief student Licentius to the conclusion that God did have an order that laid behind and beneath the hard cruelties of Roman culture. This order of God was like the design of a painter who painted with both dark and light colors or like the poet

who used barbarisms as well as accepted poetic techniques to compose a poem. The dark colors and barbarisms may appear at first to be bad (like evil) but in the greater design of the painting and the poem they fit. Augustine's answer to the presence of evil, arrived at through the perceptions of the soul, was convincing and useful for any thinking Christian who was forced to live with the harshness of life. There was an order behind all things. It was the providence of the one, unchangeable, immovable God who became incarnate in human flesh. This salvific act itself was part of God's order. And this divine order can be best seen by those who have been trained in the classical methodology of education: in letters and grammar, in the Greek and Roman classics, in the wondering about things, and above all, in the ability to question the cause of all things. This was what Augustine was training his students to do at Cassiciacum. Through it they would have an answer to the presence of the harsh cruelties in life.

Ten years later in *de Doctrina Christiana* Augustine was less philosophical and far more Scriptural. They were the Christian classics. Their truths were far more powerful than the truths found in the Roman and Greek classics. In this sense Augustine has distanced himself from his

Roman culture.

Now the question was, in what way did the Christian student of Scriptures find the meaning of its truths and how did he communicate them? Augustine's central hermeneutical principle was simple. If the Scriptures didn't speak about charity (*caritas*) to one's God and to one's fellow man, including one's enemies, then one did not read Scriptures correctly. Augustine still retained his propensity to Plato's impractical methodology of finding Truth, needing to find reality (*res*) behind the words (*signum*). Therefore, although the Scriptures spoke of charity, the discovery of the meaning of individual passages should be a difficult and Platonic one. The deeper the meaning of a given passage the closer the exegete will come to the throne of the one, immovable, unchangeable God. In *de Doctrina Christiana* the Scriptures may have replaced in Augustine's mind the Greek and Roman classics, yet he still used the Socratic method of Plato to derive their meaning.

Augustine retained another connection to Roman society when guiding the Scriptural exegete in practical manners of living. It was important for Augustine that the aspiring Scriptural exegete knew what truths in Roman society to participate in. The truths of astrology, based

on a secret meaning in the position of the stars at a given time (particularly at the time of a person's birth) were not to be trusted because the human interpretation of their meaning varied with the interpreter. Rather the Scriptural exegete should trust only the predictable movements of the stars, for where they will be in the future can be accurately predicted, and there was a common agreement on this among men. Augustine was helping the scriptural exegete to move away from participation in and reliance on the faulty notions of astrology. In the modern sense of the word, he was suggesting a far more scientific outlook on life for the Scriptural exegete and a far less superstitious outlook.

Augustine made a similar suggestion with regard to customs and institutions in Roman society. Those that were agreed upon by men were true and can be trusted. Augustine moved away from the purely impractical philosophical manner of looking at life when he urged his Scriptural exegetes to pursue those things that were useful. The prediction of the movement of the stars was useful; but astrology was not. He viewed now the principles of rhetoric in a similar way. Now ten years after his baptism, Augustine softened his approach to rhetoric. The

Ciceronian principles of rhetoric can be put to use by the Christian orator as long as he did not learn them *per se* from Augustine's school and as long as he was unaware of them when he used them. It was clear, that in spite of his resignation from his talk-shop and of the principles of rhetoric, Augustine knew the importance of godly words delivered well. Such skills can be put to use in the Catholic Church.

This brought us to Augustine's governing principle. Wherever the Scriptural exegete found truth, it was the Lord's. Augustine's perception of truth for the churchman was not limited to Scriptural truths, nor did the churchman participate and accept all society's truths. In retaining some of the classical methodology of education and rejecting other parts, Augustine has indeed reformed and renewed the classical methodology of education as he employed it for the services of the Catholic Church.

The question that remained was, which truths can be trusted. The history of the church in Western Civilization answered this question: it increasingly leaned away from the superstitious truths and toward the scientific truths. Augustine, participating in an "Axial Point" of history, had already begun the process of pointing the person of faith in the Incarnate Word toward what we now know as scientific truth.

Some Present Day Applications

Augustine wants his church leader to be a discerning person. He wants his church leader to have been trained in the best educational system of his day. His church leader doesn't get caught up in purely sensual perceptions but knows his soul and the God who created his soul. His church leader is gifted in words, in speaking, and in questioning the cause of things. He is a happy person. He knows the *beata vita* because he knows there is a divine design behind everything, including the evil things that happen in life. This divine design includes the coming of the one, immovable, unchangeable God in human flesh to save, heal, and rescue sense-driven mankind.

There are some vocations that the person of faith can not participate in like the uses of rhetoric that leads to vain glory or like acting in a theatre that celebrates the immorality of the gods. Yet, Augustine wants his church leader to speak well and to know what manner of speaking is appropriate on any given occasion. Such virtues would be an asset to a church leader of any age.

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