

An Ever Ancient, Ever New  
Guide to Education from the  
Teacher Who Inspired the Pope

Dr. Brett Fawcett

# Who I Am

I'm a secondary teacher at St. Isidore Learning Center (online outreach education) and Chesterton Academy (classical education) in Sherwood Park. My wife is a Kindergarten teacher.

I hold degrees in theology (with a philosophy minor), education, and law.



“I am a son of St. Augustine...”



Foreword by Thomas Joseph White, OP

Robert F. Prevost, OSA

# Pope Leo XIV

The Office  
and Authority  
of the Local Prior  
in the Order of  
Saint Augustine

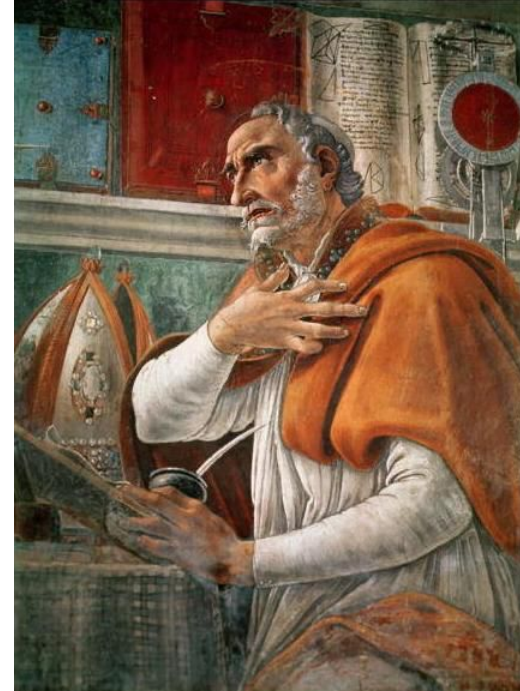
# What do you know about St. Augustine?

Pope Leo belongs to the Augustinian order, which is based on a rule for monks that Augustine wrote, so understanding Augustine is essential for understanding the Pontiff..



# St Augustine of Hippo

- raised by a pagan father and a Christian mother (St. Monica) who prayed desperately for his conversion
- was a successful rhetorician who worked in the imperial court at Milan and lived a hedonistic life; his mother constantly prayed for his conversion
- had a son out of wedlock named Adeodatus who was also very intelligent
- drifted through different belief systems (Manicheanism, the Academics, the Neoplatonists) but ended up being interested in Christianity because of the bishop St. Ambrose
- after a gradual intellectual shift, had a dramatic conversion to Christianity and eventually became a bishop and an extremely important theologian



“Late have I loved thee, beauty ever  
ancient, ever new...”

“...Thou hast made us for Thyself,  
and our hearts are restless till they  
find their rest in Thee.”



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SAINT AUGUSTINE

CONFESSIONS

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*Man doesn't find the truth.  
Man must let the Truth find him.*

# RESTLESS HEART

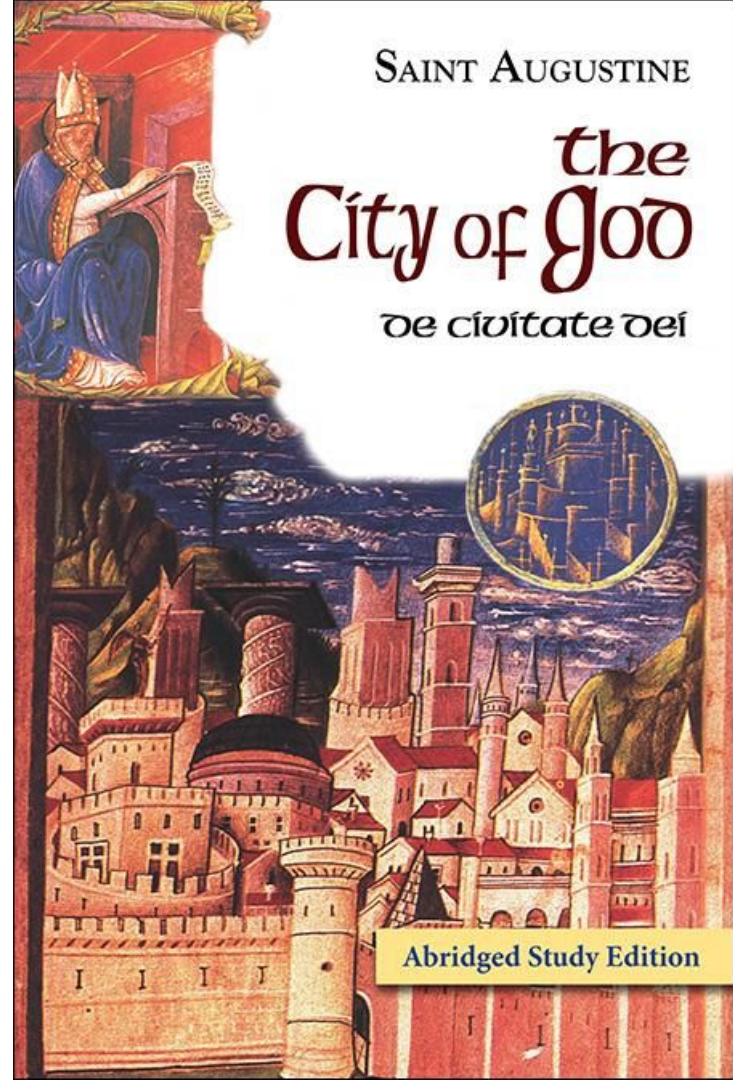
THE CONFESSIONS OF AUGUSTINE

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# He wrote a lot. (This isn't even everything and doesn't include his letters.)

He was, after all, an intellectual who wanted to make sense of his faith and explain it well to others using his rhetorical training.

Latin title	English translation	Approximate date
<i>Contra Academicos</i>	<i>Against the Academics</i>	386/7 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De Ordine</i>	<i>On Order</i>	386/7 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De immortalitate animae</i>	<i>On the Immortality of the Soul</i>	386/7 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>Soliloquiorum libri duo</i>	<i>Soliloquies</i>	386/7 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De Dialectica</i>	<i>On Dialectic</i> <sup>[4]</sup>	387 <sup>[5]</sup>
<i>De animae quantitate</i>	<i>On the Magnitude of the Soul</i>	388 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum</i>	<i>On the Morals of the Catholic Church and on the Morals of the Manichaeans</i>	388–389 <sup>[6]</sup>
<i>De musica</i>	<i>On Music</i>	388–390 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De magistro</i>	<i>On the Teacher</i>	388–391 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De libero arbitrio</i>	<i>On Free Choice of the Will</i>	388–395 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De utilitate credendi</i>	<i>On the Profit of Believing</i>	391–392 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De duabus animabus [contra Manichaeos]</i>	<i>On Two Souls, Against the Manichaeans</i>	391–392 <sup>[6]</sup>
<i>[Acta] contra Fortunatum [Manichaeum]</i>	<i>Acts or Disputation Against Fortunatus the Manichaean</i>	392 <sup>[7]</sup>

<i>De agone Christiano</i>	<i>The Christian Combat</i>	396–397 <sup>[11]</sup>
<i>De doctrina Christiana</i>	<i>On Christian Doctrine</i>	396/7–426/7 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>Confessiones</i>	<i>Confessions</i>	397–400 <sup>[12]</sup>
<i>De natura boni contra Manichaeos</i>	<i>Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans</i>	399 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De catechizandis rudibus</i>	<i>On the Catechising of the Uninstructed</i>	399 <sup>[6]</sup>
<i>De trinitate</i>	<i>On the Trinity</i>	399–419 or 426 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De fide rerum invisibilium</i>	<i>Concerning Faith of Things Not Seen</i>	400 <sup>[13]</sup>
<i>De opere monachorum</i>	<i>On the Work of Monks</i>	400 <sup>[14]</sup>
<i>Contra Faustum [Manichaeum]</i>	<i>Reply to Faustus the Manichaean</i>	400 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De consensu evangelistarum</i>	<i>On the Harmony of the Evangelists</i>	400 <sup>[6]</sup>
<i>De bono coniugali</i>	<i>On the Good of Marriage</i>	401 <sup>[6]</sup>
<i>De sancta virginitate</i>	<i>On Holy Virginity</i>	401 <sup>[15]</sup>
<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>	<i>Literal Commentary on Genesis</i>	401/2–416 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>Contra litteras Petiliani</i>	<i>Answer to the Letters of Petilian, Bishop of Cirta</i>	401–405 <sup>[3]</sup>

<i>De gratia Christi et de peccato originali</i>	<i>On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin</i>	418 <sup>[20]</sup>
<i>De continentia</i>	<i>On Contenance</i>	418–420 <sup>[21]</sup>
<i>De anima et eius origine</i>	<i>On the Soul and its Origin</i>	419/21 <sup>[22]</sup>
<i>De nuptiis et concupiscentia</i>	<i>On Marriage and Concupiscence</i>	419–420 <sup>[23]</sup>
<i>Contra mendacium [ad Consentium]</i>	<i>To Consentius: Against Lying</i>	420 <sup>[10]</sup>
<i>Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum</i>	<i>Against Two Letters of the Pelagians</i>	420 <sup>[24]</sup>
<i>Enchiridion ad Laurentium, seu de fide, spe et caritate</i>	<i>Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love</i>	421 <sup>[25]</sup>
<i>De cura pro mortuis gerenda</i>	<i>On Care to be Had For the Dead</i>	422 <sup>[26]</sup>
<i>De gratia et libero arbitrio</i>	<i>On Grace and Free Will</i>	424–427 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>De symbolo ad catechumenos</i>	<i>On the Creed: A Sermon to Catechumens</i>	425 <sup>[27]</sup>
<i>De correptione et gratia</i>	<i>On Rebuke and Grace</i>	426/7 <sup>[3]</sup>
<i>Retractationes</i>	<i>Retractions</i>	426–427 <sup>[28]</sup>
<i>De haeresibus ad Quodvultdeum</i>	<i>To Quodvultdeus, On Heresies</i>	428/9 <sup>[29]</sup>
<i>De praedestinatione sanctorum</i>	<i>On the Predestination of the Saints</i>	428/9 <sup>[30]</sup>

# Just a few ideas from Augustine:

- Evil has no positive existence; it is just a negation (like how a shadow is a negation of light). Anything that exists (has positive being) is good
- We are drawn towards the good, and sin is an inordinate preference for lower goods over higher goods
- The just war theory (war can only be justified under certain conditions)
- An unjust law is not a law at all (this was quoted by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his letter from Birmingham jail justifying his civil disobedience)



# Bob Dylan has a song about him.

## I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine

I dreamed I saw St. Augustine  
Alive as you or me  
Tearing through these quarters  
In the utmost misery  
With a blanket underneath his arm  
And a coat of solid gold  
Searching for the very souls  
Who already have been sold.

“Arise, arise,” he cried so loud  
In a voice without restraint  
“Come out, ye gifted kings and queens  
And hear my sad complaint  
No martyr is among ye now  
Whom you can call your own  
So go on your way accordingly  
But know you’re not alone.”

I dreamed I saw St. Augustine  
Alive with fiery breath  
And I dreamed I was amongst the ones  
That put him out to death  
Oh, I awoke in anger  
So alone and terrified  
I put my fingers against the glass  
And bowed my head and cried.



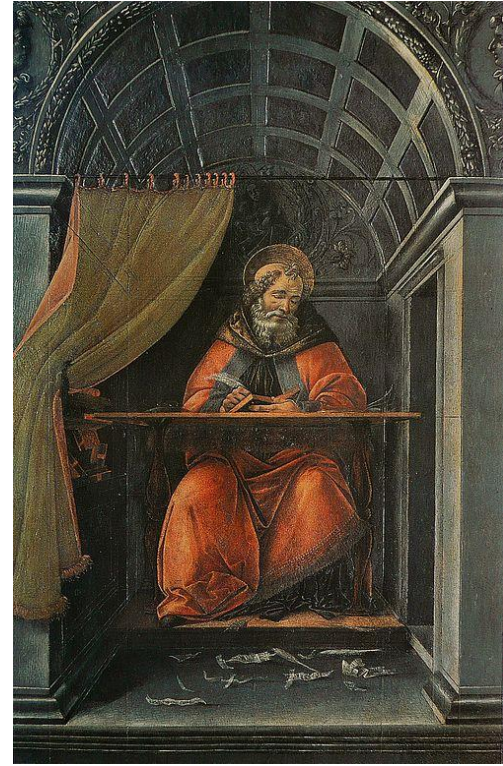
Augustine is extremely influential in the realms of theology, philosophy, and even psychology,

But his thought was also very important for **education**.

He had been a teacher who ran his own schools of grammar and rhetoric for over a decade before getting a job in the imperial court, so he was an experienced teacher himself, and has some wisdom on the subject that still holds today.

His major works on education are:

- The *Confessions* (describing his own experience of education)
- On the Teacher* (his philosophy of education)
- On Christian Doctrine* (his curriculum)
- On Catechizing the Uninstructed* (his tips on teaching)
- On the Trinity* (his psychology)



# Augustine's experience of education:

He had no love of learning, largely because he hated the punishments he received from his teachers.

The earliest prayer he could remember uttering was that he would not be beaten at school. This was why he never properly learned Greek: it didn't come to him easily and he was beaten for doing badly at it.

The first prayer he remembered uttering was that he wouldn't be beaten at school.

He explicitly says he was forced to learn against his will.



## But he noted:

“Time was, in my infancy, when I had known no Latin words either, but those I had learned by paying attention, without any fear or pain at all, amid the cuddles of my nurses, and teasing, and playful, happy laughter...”

He picked up Latin so that he could express the thoughts in his mind—he had a **desire** which motivated him to learn.

“It is evident that the free play of curiosity is a more powerful spur to learning these things than is fear-ridden coercion”  
(*Confessions* I, 23)

A **loving** atmosphere where Latin was made available to him was how he .



# What Augustine learned

Besides grammar, Augustine learned the stories of pagan mythology at school, where the gods are depicted indulging in all sorts of debauchery

He later complained that schools where parents expected their children to be prepared for adult life taught them stories where gods impregnate women against their will

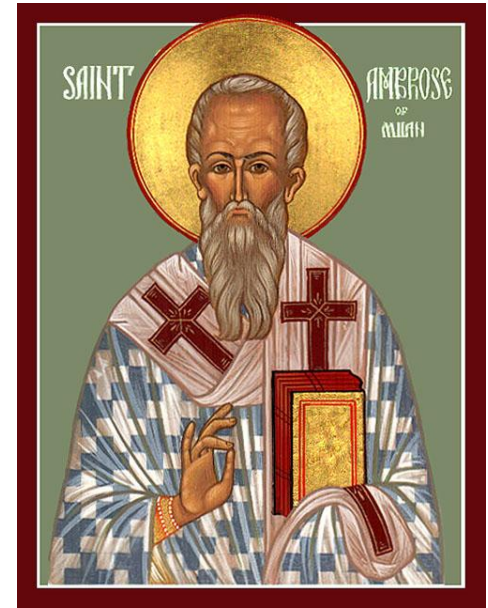


For a time, Augustine was drawn to the religion/heresy of Manichaeism. His mother Monica asked a Catholic bishop to talk to Augustine and talk him out of it.

The bishop declined because he saw that Augustine was “unteachable” at that time, but he assured Monica not to despair, saying:

*“But leave him alone for a time; only pray God for him; he will of himself, by reading, discover what that error is, and how great its impiety.”*

This was what happened when Augustine met the Manichean bishop Faustus, who was eloquent but whose teachings were shallow; in contrast, the bishop Ambrose was eloquent but also deep and impressed Augustine with his intelligence and holiness.



# So what does all of this mean for his views on education?

Let's start with what he thinks is going on between teacher and student.

*On the Teacher* records a dialogue that Augustine had with his sixteen year old son, Adeodatus, on the nature of language.

It's interesting that this is a dialogue—it's an example of exactly the kind of education Augustine supported.



# The discussion is complicated, but I'll do my best to summarize:

Language is an arrangement of signs.

You can't understand a sign unless you already know what that sign means.

Therefore, it's impossible to teach with signs.

## Semiotics: Decoding the Hidden Message



If you didn't already know what a cigarette was, could this sign tell you anything?



Would this sign teach you anything if you didn't know what traffic is?



# The point Augustine is making is:

Signs can't teach you what something is.

**Signs can only prompt you to think about something you already have in your mind.**

And he thinks language is a system of signs.

A teacher can only communicate to a student with signs.



Here's what he concludes:

It's impossible for you to teach anyone anything.

(and that's a good thing)

**“After all, who is so foolishly curious as to send his son to school to learn what the teacher thinks?”**



Here's what happens when a human teacher talks to you:

**They give signs that prompt you to reflect.**

But what you're really doing is **consulting your own mind to see if what you think they're saying is true.**



# Augustine gives this example:

If I told you I saw a man flying on my way here, my language would give you information, but it wouldn't give you knowledge. You'd still need to consult your own reason to decide whether or not you thought I was telling the truth.

And whether or not I believed you, that would still just be my opinion.

But if I told you that being wise is better than being foolish, you could consult your own mind and recognize that this is **true**.

So language, and humans, can teach opinions, but no human teacher can teach **truth**—you can only give a student **signs that prompt them** to think about and possibly realize truth on their own.



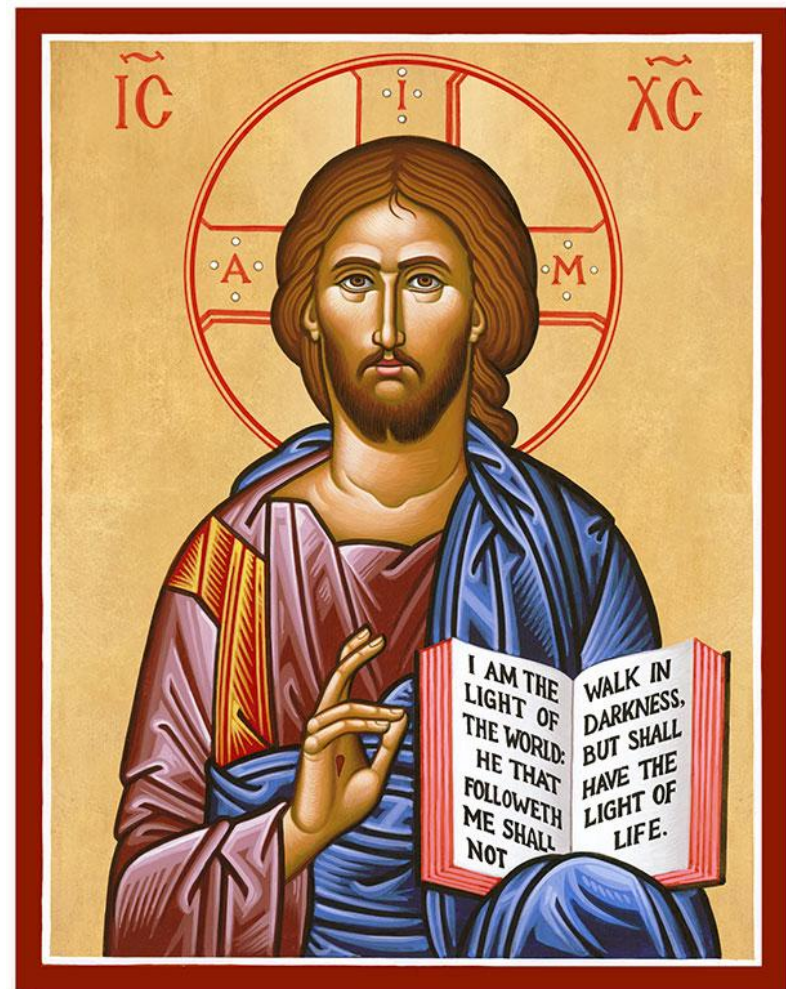
“When those called teachers make use of words to explain the subjects they profess, even those that deal with virtue and wisdom, those known as pupils consider within themselves whether what has been said is true.

Contemplating according to their own capacities, they ascertain whether what they have heard accords with the truth they find within. It is only then that they learn... However, they make the mistake of calling the exterior persons teachers when they are not that at all...because coming to learn from them follows quickly upon the suggestive force of the speakers’ words, they think that they have learned externally from the one who spoke those words.” (*The Teacher*, 14, 46)



For Augustine, the source of this inner illumination we consult is Christ, “the light that illuminates everyone” (John 1).

Therefore, Christ is the only true teacher (Matthew 23:8). .



But it's up to the student to choose to consult with this inner light.

“We all consult that Truth, but it is only revealed to us according to our inner capacity to grasp it, which in turn depends on our inner disposition towards it.”

*(The Teacher, 11, 38)*



What is a teacher looking for in a student?

1. Retaining information
2. Comprehending what it means
3. Joyful application

A student has to have the will to apply themselves to their studies.

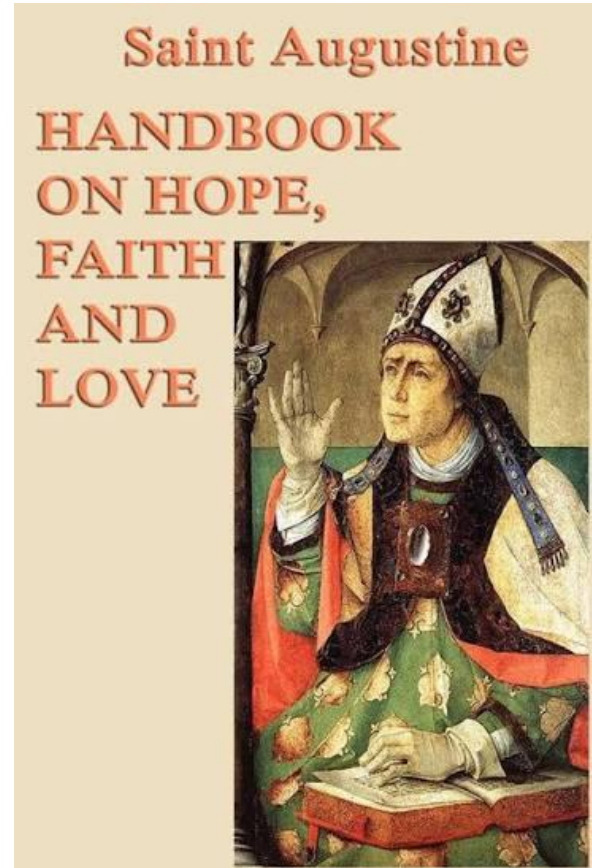
The mind thus consists of memory, understanding, and will

*For Augustine, this is an image of the Trinity: Father (Memory), Son (Understanding), and Holy Spirit (Will)*

**What moves a student to want to study? Love. And this comes from within their will.**



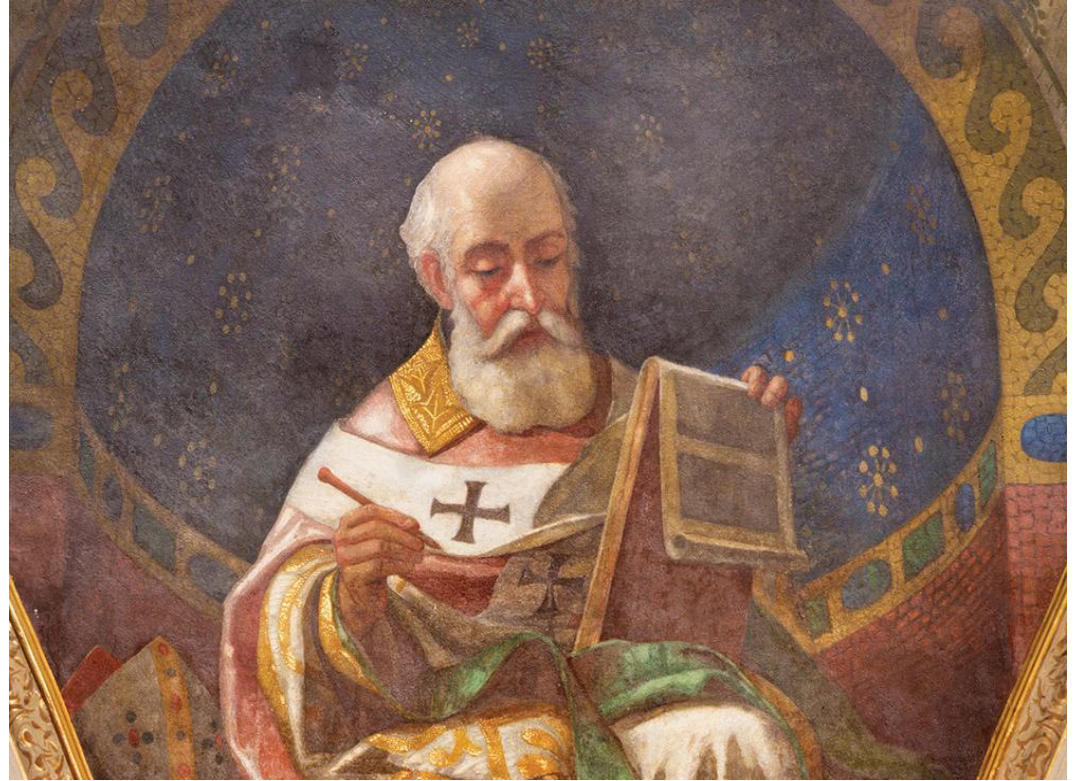
“One does not enter into the truth but through love” (*Contra Faustum* 32, 18)



So if humans don't teach anything,

Does that mean us teachers are useless?

Not at all.

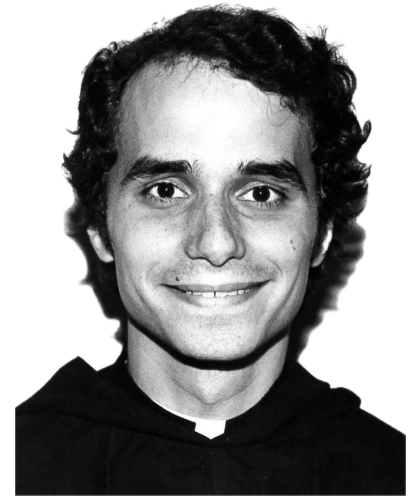


Pope Leo talked about this in his doctoral dissertation:

*“A teacher does not cause the student to think or to recognize the truth. A teacher can only stimulate the student to use his own talents, by use of illustrations and arguments. If the student is to see the truth for what it is, he needs an internal Teacher who shows truth directly to the minds of his students...”*

He goes on to say that a teacher should create “**an educational environment**” in which students are given as much “stimulation” as possible—one that’s filled with signs that point them towards truth.

Remember how Augustine learned Latin: by playing in an environment that was Latin-rich, which inspired him to take the initiative and learn Latin for himself. Remember what the bishop said to Monica: If Augustine is unteachable, don’t force the faith on him (like Greek was forced on him as a child). Let him pursue his studies; they will lead him naturally to find truth on his own.



“It is not the teacher who illuminates with light the student’s soul. Just as someone brings light to a house by opening the windows, so it is with the teacher.” (*Commentary on the Psalms*, 118, 18, 4)

So what content do we teach that can “open the windows” for students?



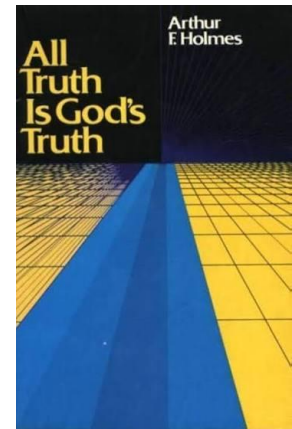
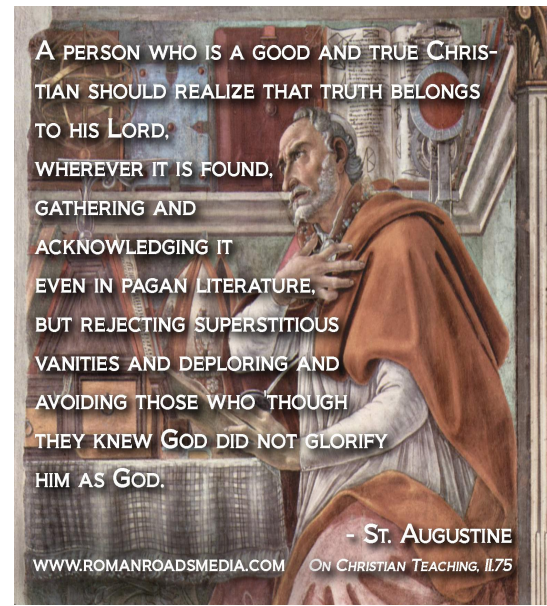
# On Christian Teaching

Here, Augustine lays out a “Christian curriculum.” He says that a teacher should use rhetoric, and the point of rhetoric is:

- To instruct
- To delight
- To move (i.e. to action, to virtue)

Instruction meant teaching the Scriptures (not the pagan myths of his youth), but also knowing the rules of language and interpretation as well as philosophy, mathematics, and science so the Bible can be rightly understood.

This meant using pagan wisdom sometimes. Augustine compared this to “the gold of the Egyptians” which the Israelites took with them when they left Egypt in the Exodus. This is what we should **instruct** students with so they can be **moved** to faith, hope, and love.



# *On Christian Teaching*

Augustine has a fascinating line in the introduction about why God has arranged it so we need to learn from each other:

*“Love itself, which binds humans together in the bond of unity, would have no means of pouring soul into soul, and, as it were, mingling them one with another, if humans never learned anything from their fellow-humans.”*

God wanted humans to teach each other so that we would have an opportunity to love each other.

A human teacher can move a student to want to consult the “inner teacher” and devote themselves to study if they model **love** to them.



## To make this concrete:

Deogratias, a clergyman and catechism from Carthage, wrote him for advice about teaching the Catholic faith to students

He wrote back *On Instructing Beginners* (or *On Catechizing the Uninstructed*). It describes some very relatable scenarios.



“The most significant complaint that I have heard you make is that you found our own address...to be so trifling and dull...this feeling can arise for various reasons...

...we [sometimes] prefer to hear or read something which has been better expressed and which can be delivered without effort or uneasiness on our part rather than to have to improvise and adapt our words to another way of thinking, without knowing beforehand whether the words we need to convey our meaning will come to us or whether they will be understood by our listeners to their advantage.

Or again, it may be that, because the subject matter to be introduced to newcomers has long been familiar to us and is no longer of vital importance for our own progress, it irks us to return to it over and over again, and our rather grown-up mind no longer moves with any pleasure in these so well-trodden and, as it were, childish paths.”

***Can you relate?***



“Another cause of the feeling of aversion in the speaker is passivity in the listener...the more we love those to whom we speak, the more we want them to find acceptable what is offered them for their salvation. And if this fails to happen, we feel discouraged and, in the very midst of the instruction, we begin to falter and feel ground down because all our efforts seem to be for nothing. “

***Can you relate?***



“It also occasionally happens that we are deflected from something that we want to do...

Thus we come with an agitated mind to a task which requires great tranquility, and it rankles with us that we are not permitted to keep to our own planned schedule and that we cannot manage to fit everything in.

And since it is from this very feeling of despondency that our address emerges, the words we speak are not that appealing, for, when words have to come up from the dry well of dejection, they do not flow easily.”

***Can you relate?***



## The first piece of advice: Love.

“There is nothing that invites another’s love more than to take the initiative in loving...”

“The soul which before was torpid is excited so soon as it feels itself to be loved... With what might of love the inferior kindles so soon as he learns he is beloved by his superior.”



“If we find it distasteful to be constantly rehearsing familiar phrases that are suited to the ears of small children, we should draw close to these small children with a brother’s love, or a father’s, or a mother’s, and **as a result of our empathy with them, the oft-repeated phrases will sound new to us also...**”

Isn’t this what generally happens when we are showing people who had never before seen them those impressive and beautiful sights, in the city or in the country, that we had grown used to passing by without the slightest pleasure because we had already seen them so often? In showing them to others do we not find that our own enjoyment is revived by sharing in the enjoyment that others derive from seeing them for the first time? And this we experience the more intensely, the closer our friendship with one another is, for the more the bond of love allows us to be present in others, the more what has grown old becomes new again in our eyes as well.”



## Rhetorical Purpose #2: To delight

“It also happens frequently that some who at the beginning of instruction listened with pleasure, then tire of listening or of so much time standing, and open their lips not to praise our words, but to yawn, or even to communicate a desire to leave. As soon as we realize this is happening, the right thing to do is to regain their attention by telling them something cheerful and entertaining, related to the topic with which we are dealing. We may also take account of their physical concerns by getting them to sit down or stand up...or we may focus on something which we know relates particularly to the person who is drowsy in order to re-arouse his attention...”



## More practical advice:

“It often happens, too, that someone who was listening in the beginning with pleasure later becomes tired either from the listening or from standing; he opens his mouth no longer to express approval but to yawn, and he makes it clear even despite himself that he wants to go away.

When we become aware of this, we should reawaken his attention by making a remark spiced with seemingly good humour and appropriate to the subject under discussion. Or we can relate something that arouses great awe and astonishment, or even grief and lamentation.

And **what we say should touch preferably on his own situation** so that, stung by solicitude for himself, he may become alert again.”



# More advice on **love**:

“When we see no reaction from our hearer, it is really tiring to continue speaking right to the end of the allocated time...

It may[ ]be natural shyness that holds him back. Or could it be that he does not understand what is being said or that he takes a poor view of it? Not being mind-readers, we are not sure, so in our address we should try everything that might possible serve to rouse him and, as it were, pluck him from his hiding place.

With gentle encouragement we should drive out the exaggerated fear that prevents him from making known where he stands, and we should temper his shyness by instilling in him the value of our **fraternal communion**. By asking questions we should try to find out whether he understands what has been said, and we should give him confidence to voice freely any objection he thinks ought to be raised.”



## **A teacher should love what they teach and love their students:**

"The sweetness of truth ought to invite us to learn, but the necessity of charity should compel us to teach." (*Response to the Eight Questions of Dulcitius*, q. 3)

## **Teach by your lifestyle:**

"If you are not blessed with great eloquence, at least make your manner of life an eloquent speech." (*Christian Teaching*, 4, 29, 61)

## **Humility of teaching:**

"As long as I am a good teacher, I will continue being a student." (*Sermon 244*, 2)

"The truth is neither mine nor yours, so that it can be yours and mine." (*Commentary on the Psalms*)

"In the school of the Lord we are all schoolmates." (*Sermon 242*, 1)

## Pray before teaching:

“...our Christian orator...will succeed more by piety in prayer than by gifts of oratory; and so he ought to pray for himself, and for those he is about to address, before he attempts to speak.

And when the hour has come that he must speak, he ought, before he opens his mouth, to lift up his thirsty soul to God, to drink in what he is about to pour forth, and to be himself filled with what he is about to distribute.”

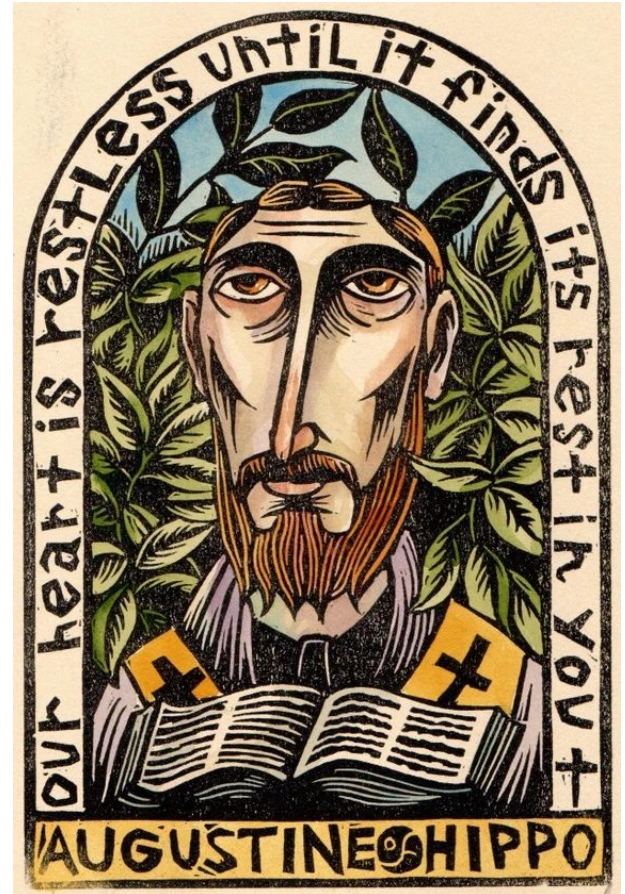
*(On Christian Teaching)*



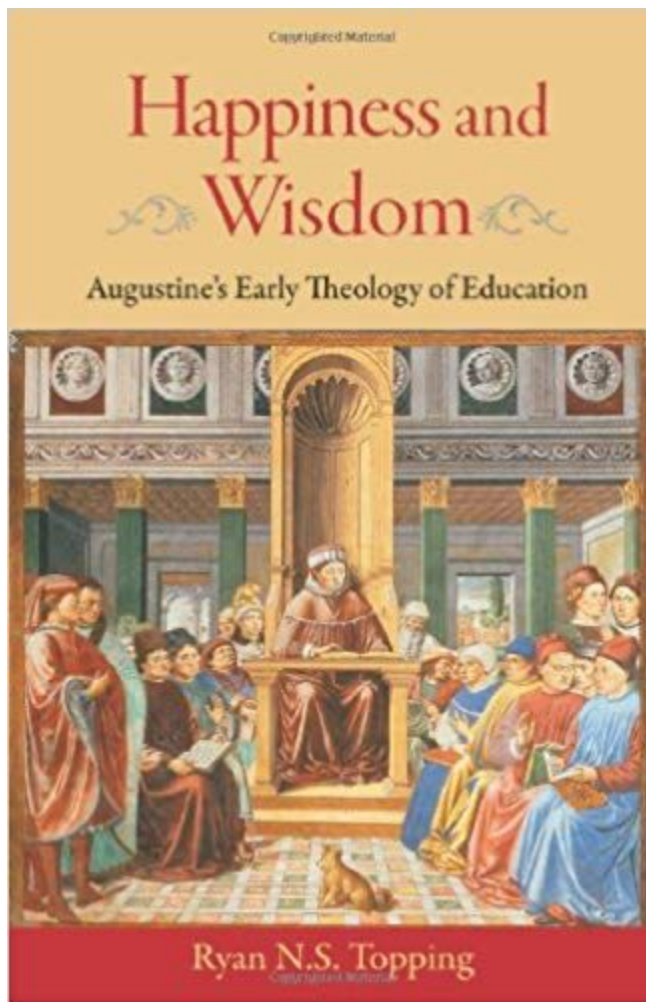
# In summary, for Augustine:

- Human teachers don't actually teach; they use signs (language) to prompt reflection in students, but they consult their inner light (which comes from God) to decide whether what they're hearing is true or not
- The human teacher directs the student towards love of God and neighbour through teaching Scripture and the secular disciplines are helpful for understanding it
- The human teacher can move a student toward loving truth, God, and neighbour by loving the student, which manifests itself in how they teach

**As educational insights, these are “ever ancient and ever new.”**



Thank you!



# BONUS QUOTES

“Nobody can judge the truth, but without the light of truth, nobody can judge rightly.” (*Free Will*, 2, 12, 34)

“Make use of knowledge like scaffolding that is used to help build the building of love; that building will last forever, even when knowledge has been dismantled.” (*Letter 55*, 21, 39)

“It is better to be a cripple on the right road than a great runner off it.” (*Sermon 154*, 8)

“The one that teaches should avoid words that do not teach.” (*Christian Teaching*, 4, 10, 24)

“Authority is like a door to education. Learning on the basis of authority may come first in time but ideally, reason should be placed first. Once the student has entered by authority, she or he best goes on to figure out, by means of reason, the principles accepted on the basis of authority.” (*Order*, 2, 26) **Is there an application here in classroom management?**

“Teach with happiness. Sadness darkens the atmosphere and withers our words.”  
(*Catechesis of Beginners*, 10, 14)

“The distinctive mark of a good teacher is to love the truth above everything and love [words] only in as far as they support the truth. What does it serve to have a key made of gold if it cannot open the door it wishes to unlock? Or what is wrong with a wooden key if it completes its task of opening what was locked?” (*Christian Teaching* 4, 10-11, 24-26)

“Instruction is completed by love.” (*Customs of the Catholic Church* 1, 28, 56)

“The good teacher knows what to pass on and what to hold in reserve.”  
(*Commentary on the Psalms*, 36, 1, 1)

“Love is received with greater appreciation when it does not chafe with the dryness of need but flows freely from the abundant stream of beneficence. For the former is born of wretchedness, the latter of compassion” (*Instructing Beginners in Faith*)

## Differentiation:

“I am a witness to you, as regards my own experience, that I find myself variously moved, according as I see before me, for the purposes of catechetical instruction, a highly educated man, a dull fellow, a citizen, a foreigner, a rich man, a poor man, a private individual, a man of honors, a person occupying some position of authority, an individual of this or the other nation, of this or the other age or sex, one proceeding from this or the other sect, from this or the other common error — and ever in accordance with the difference of my feelings does my discourse itself at once set out, go on, and reach its end. And inasmuch as, although the same charity is due to all, yet the same medicine is not to be administered to all, in like manner charity itself travails with some, is made weak together with others; is at pains to edify some, tremblingly apprehends being an offense to others; bends to some, lifts itself erect to others; is gentle to some, severe to others; to none an enemy, to all a mother.”

*(On Instructing Beginners, ch. 15)*