



Occasional Paper #2

*Love of God and Love of Neighbor:
Augustinian Values and Signs of the Times*

by

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When I was asked to make a presentation on Augustinian educational values and the signs of the times, the scope was obviously daunting. One way to approach such a task was to find a lens through which I could focus my ideas. In the face of the amount of writings by and about Augustine as well as my not being an Augustine scholar by training I was unsure of a direction. Yet, the fact of the limitations of my study of Augustine led me to the one text with which I am most familiar, *The Rule*. Here I found at its beginning my starting point, “Before all else, dear brothers, love God and then your neighbor, because these are the chief commandments given to us.”¹ No matter who is the author² of these words, their Augustinian character is undeniable. In exploring the concept of Augustinian values and the signs of the times, I kept being brought back to this text.

To apply love of God and love of neighbor in an educational setting we have to ask ourselves how these loves connect to what we teach and what we learn. To make the connection Lawless, in his work on the Rule and the concept *monachus* may be helpful. He reminds us “Two distinctive features of Augustine’s thought are worthy of mention: (1) its Trinitarian base, and (2) the felicitous balance between its eschatological and incarnational currents.”³ In connecting our Augustinian values and the signs of the times we should strive to strike an Augustinian balance between the eschatological concerns in reading the signs of the times and the incarnational development of our Augustinian values.

For Augustinian educators the familiar Trinitarian base to follow is memory, understanding and will. As Augustine tells us,

It is in three things that an image is recognized, namely memory, understanding and will. In this I mean the understanding we have as we think, that is, when things are recalled that were available in memory but not being thought about. Our thought is formed from such images. The will, or love, or esteem I mean is the one that joins the child (understanding) to its parent (memory) and is in a way common to them both.⁴

As means to frame an incarnational balance of Augustinian values in an educational setting with the eschatological directions and signs of the times I am following the Augustinian trinity of memory, understanding and will.

Memory

Preparing for this study was an activation of my own memory. In dealing with the teaching of social justice issues I have memories from more than 20 years ago. I remember well introducing students in the last year of high school to the ideas of Pope John Paul II on work⁵ as well as the U.S. Bishops pastoral letters on Peace⁶ and

¹ *The Rule*, I, 1.

² For a short review of the authorship of *The Rule*, see Augustine of Hippo (2004) *The Monastic Rules*, Boniface Ramsey (ed.). Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 23-49.

³ G. Lawless, O.S.A. (1987) *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 158.

⁴ *The Trinity*, XIV, 10.

⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*. Encyclical Letter September 14, 1981.

⁶ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response*. Washington, DC: The United States Catholic Conference, 1983.

Economics.⁷ My memories include the blessing of serving as Director of Justice and Peace for the Villanova Province from 1986-1992. It was a time where there was much concern for implementing Catholic Social Teaching. At the beginning it involved the U.S. Bishops pastoral letters. Toward the end it involved celebrating the 100th anniversary of formal birth of Catholic Social Teaching in Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

Reflecting on the signs of the times, more recent memories came to mind. I remember participating in the 2001 General Chapter of the Order. It was here on this very site that I heard about the September 11th World Trade Center tragedy. This news brought personal worry for my brother who had previously worked there and was supposed to have a meeting there on that day. Luckily, through another part of the sign of times, cell phone contact, I was able to find out that he was safe because his meeting had been moved to the previous day. Yet, I mourn with him that among the dead were more than 200 people he had worked with in his career.

From July to December of last year I was fortunate to have a sabbatical to explore Augustinian pedagogy, in particular I investigated how English-speaking schools conveyed Augustinian values. Apart from questions related to the purpose of my visits to various schools outside the United States, the most consistent questions I was asked in my sabbatical was whether George Bush really had a chance to be re-elected as President of the United States. Most people asking the question had difficulty understanding how Americans could accept the lack of evidence supporting the entrance into the Iraq war as a just war and vote for Bush. Since it was not their experience, I believe that the questioners had a hard time understanding my explanation of the impact on Americans of memories from September 11th. These memories have formed a deep concern among Americans for the value of security. On that value George Bush appeared to make the stronger case. I also tried to explain what we call "Red States" and "Blue States." Things that may appear to people outside of the United States as simply applying color to where political parties have majorities is, in fact, also a reflection of differing memories of the roots of American values. In "red" Republican-majority states one can find forces that see the roots of American values in our country's founders applying their Christian understanding of the Judeo-Christian scriptures. In "blue" Democratic-majority states one can find forces that see the roots of American values in our country's founders applying their desire for separation of Church and state. Having lived in both a "red" and a "blue" state for significant amounts of time, I know the deep impact of these differing memories on approaches to social justice.

Finally, another moment in which differing memories abound came to me from the response of so many to the death of Pope John Paul II. I watched from a distance as millions came to Saint Peter's Square just outside our doors. The outpouring stunned so many, even the cynical media. In having no explanation of their own, the media interviewed the pilgrims about their memories of John Paul II. The consistent answer was that the Pope was a messenger of hope and even love for them. What was remarkable to me was that only some of those present regularly attended Church. Those present who identified that they were not practicing Catholics felt free to express their differences of beliefs. Yet, their memories compelled them to honor their experience of

⁷ Draft versions of National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*. Washington, DC: The United States Catholic Conference, 1986.

hope and love, come to the Square and stand for many hours waiting for a momentary last glimpse of this remarkable figure.

The various memories I have been able to reflect on personally, are not in and of themselves memories that others have had. But, I believe that in the short time you have reflected with me, you have been able to identify with your own memories related to social issues. Maybe in the memories you have called to mind, like me you have remembered a particular loved one with whom you have shared the memory. In that incarnated love is a memory that Augustine would also see in eschatological terms. In an Augustinian reflection, Burt identifies the deepest impact of a memory of love in these words,

We are blessed if we have given our love to another human being because this prepares us to give ourselves in love to the Lord when he comes....Our love stretches us....Just as our heart and mind and spirit (nurtured by memory of time together that once was) can continue to live in the place of a lover now far distant, so, too, we can learn to live in a land of love that is our future, a land where we will walk forever in the embrace of our Lord.⁸

This type of reflection on memory is part of our dialogue with the Inner Teacher. As such it cannot remain purely interior. As Augustine admonishes us, “No one must be so committed to contemplation that, in contemplation, he gives no thought to his neighbor’s needs, or he is so absorbed in action as to dispense with the contemplation of God. It is the love of study that seeks a holy leisure and only a compulsion of love that shoulders necessary activity.”⁹ Such Augustinian thought supports Markus when he reminds us, “Reference to the eschatological Kingdom, the fully human community of love promised by God, discloses injustice and inhumanity in the best of social structures. The Christian hope is of its nature a searchlight which, turned on its social *milieu*, seeks out opportunities for protest.”¹⁰

Reflecting in the *Confessions* on the memories of his life, Augustine presents us with a prayer that takes us out from his dialogue with the Inner Teacher to the social *milieu* with a protest that wants to open the ears of those deaf to God’s message found in the world around them. He prays,

I love you, Lord,
with no doubtful mind
but with absolute certainty.
You pierced my heart with your word,
and I fell in love with you.
But the sky and the earth too,
and everything in them –
all these things around me
are telling me that I should love you;
and since they never cease to proclaim this to everyone,
those who do not hear are left without excuse.

⁸ D.X. Burt. (2004) *Reflections on a Dying Life*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 24.

⁹ *City of God*, XIX, 19.

¹⁰ R.A. Markus. (1970) *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of Saint Augustine*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 169.

But, you far above, will show mercy
to anyone with whom you have already determined
to deal mercifully,
and will grant pity to whomsoever you choose.
Were it not so,
the sky and the earth would be proclaiming
your praises to the deaf.¹¹

Memory, even when focused on the social *milieu*, does not provide for us the specifics needed for addressing the signs of the times. Memories can identify for us the importance of love of neighbor incarnated in our lives. Memory can, when we let it, point us to the eschatological love of God we experience in moments captured by our memories. For a fuller means for an Augustinian approach for addressing the signs of the time, we need to make an Augustinian shift from memory to understanding.

Understanding

Within our understanding there is more specificity. For more than 100 years a very direct way that the Church has responded to the signs of the times has been through its social teaching. However, this teaching has been called the Church's "best kept secret."¹² If one searches the world-wide web for the religious use of the expression "signs of the times" (in English) most of the findings result in sites that present Christian evangelical understandings about the end of the world. For Catholics, the religious use of this term should lead us to the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). Rather than an evangelical focus on the end of time, this document focuses on the signs of the times here and now when it begins, "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope and the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."¹³ While this document was crafted more than 40 years ago, it continues to stand the test of time. Paragraphs 3 -10 are a reading of the signs of the times that could easily have been written yesterday. If we look at the changes in the world and even in the Augustinian Order in the same period of time, this is truly remarkable.

In reading the signs of the times, the Church has advanced the understanding of its social teaching. Popes John XXIII, Paul VI and especially John Paul II have added significantly to the scope and depth of this teaching. This reading of the signs of the times has expanded to the point that it has recently been synthesized into a *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.¹⁴ Even though this is a synthesizing of the teachings, it is far from a summary. Its 583 paragraphs do not allow for a summary in 5 minutes. To provide some reasonable connection of this reading of the signs of the times to Augustinian values, I searched for a presentation of the major points of this doctrine. I

¹¹ *Confessions*, X, 6, 8. This translation and prayer format from Augustine of Hippo (2003) *Prayers from the Confessions*, J. Rotelle (ed.). Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 95.

¹² E.P. DeBerri *et al.*, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret*, 4th ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.

¹³ *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 1 in *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. A. Flannery, O.P. (ed.) Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1975, 903.

¹⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana (ed.) Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005.

found such a summary in *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*.¹⁵ Pertinent to a conference of educators, this document contains a summary as well as reflections of the United States Catholic Bishops on what needs to be done in educational programs to bring these teachings to the faithful, especially those of school age.

The United States Bishops identify 7 themes for consideration. They are:

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation
3. Rights and Responsibilities
4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
5. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
6. Solidarity
7. Care for God's Creation

Also woven across these major themes are understandings of economic justice, the common good, collegiality, subsidiarity, the role of Government and the promotion of peace. Any presentation of these seven themes must incorporate these cross-theme concerns in order to give as full an exposition of the themes as the bishops intended.

Connections of these themes to Augustine and Augustinian values can easily be seen. Yet in making connections we are only seeing roots in Augustine. Clearly Catholic Social Doctrine has developed since Augustine, especially during the last century and more. Making connections to Augustine, beyond seeing the roots, should also point us in the directions of ways to meet our contemporary obligations as heirs to the Augustinian heritage.

For the theme Life and Dignity of the Human Person an Augustinian connection lies in Augustine's conception of the human person as the image of God. Trapé reminds us,

The central point of Augustine's anthropology is that man [*sic*] is the image of God, of the triune God. We cannot stop to consider this point here. But I mention it because from it are derived two basic conclusions which intimately affect our argument; they are as follows: because man is created in the image of God, he is *capax Dei* and *indigens Deo*. These two expressions are of great importance in that they reveal the greatness of man who is the highest of all creatures and only inferior to God. Because he is *capax Dei*, man can be elevated to the immediate vision of the infinite God, though he is finite himself;¹⁶ on the other hand, because man in *indigens Deo*, he has a profound drive, an in-built dynamism which carries him towards God whether he realizes it or not,¹⁷ and which is not satisfied and never abates until he has found God face to face.^{18 19}

We can easily ask how does our educational programming convey such an Augustinian

¹⁵ U.S. Catholic Bishops. *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998.

¹⁶ See, *The Trinity*, XIV, 8, 11.

¹⁷ See, *Soliloquies*, I, 1, 2.

¹⁸ See, *City of God*, XII, 1, 3.

¹⁹ A. Trape, O.S.A. (1981) *The Search for God and contemplation in Searching for God: The Contemplative Dimension of the Augustinian Experience*. Rome: Augustinian Publications, 10.

understanding of the human person in a world that devalues human life. In an educational context, life and the dignity of the human person should also reflect the Augustinian conception of the centrality of the presence of the Inner Teacher within each person to any true understanding of the individual.

With respect to the theme of Call to Family, Community, and Participation, we only need to look to the Augustinian *Rule* to find the importance to Augustine of the elements of the theme as Augustinian values. In the *Rule* there is a clear call to community. For Lawless, Augustine's connection in *Commentary on Psalm 132*, § 6 of the *monachus* (one alone) to Acts 4:32 and a communitarian interpretation "possessed both originality and legitimacy."²⁰ The use of familial images to express the relations within the monastery always conveys a sense of the importance of these relations as experienced in their natural settings. So evident is the importance of family to Augustine, that Rubio Bardon is able to identify the Augustinian value of parents as teachers.²¹ The call to participation also can be clearly seen in the values of equality as well as nuanced interconnections that the *Rule* presents among the roles of superior (*praepositus*), priest and community member. These connections are just a taste of the presence of these themes in Augustine we should be reflecting in our approaches to education.

For the theme of Rights and Responsibilities, an Augustinian vision can enable us to see rights and responsibilities as intimately connected rather than as the separate phenomena much of our contemporary world treats them as. In any Augustinian approach rights and responsibilities derive from our being part of the Body of Christ. According to van Bavel, Augustine

refers time and again to Mt. 25:40 "Anything you did to the least of mine, you did it to me" and Acts 9:4 "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?". Augustine says: "He too is us. If it were not him, the sentence 'Anything you did to the least of mine, you did it to me' would not be true. If it were not him, the sentence 'Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?' would not be true. Consequently, we are him, for we are his members, we are his body, for he is our head, for the whole Christ is head and body."²² This idea confers a special dignity on every human being, whoever he or she may be. It emphasizes the universality of Christian love. At the same time, it is a summons to take care of the suffering, the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, the dying neighbor. It is an appeal to solidarity, to world consciousness, to common responsibility, to a more united humanity, and consequently to a more united world.²³

Where in our educational programming do we embody such expectations concerning rights and responsibilities?

Through Augustine's concept of *Totus Christus* the theme of Rights and Responsibilities can be directly connected to theme of Option for the Poor and Vulnerable. Canning in interpreting the use of the Saul persecuting image in Sermon

²⁰ Lawless, *Op. cit.*, 158.

²¹ See, P. Rubio Bardon, *Educación estilo agustiniano*. Madrid: Publicaciones Federación Agustiniano Española, 1996.

²² *Sermon 133*, 8.

²³ T.J. van Bavel, (1999) *Augustine's spirituality for the Church in the modern world* in *The Augustinian Family Prepares for the Third Millenium*. T. Cooney (ed.) Rome: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane – Curia Generalizia Agostiniana, 57. The italics are van Bavel's.

123, 4 writes,

How is Christ to be found here, then? Christ is still present in our midst as naked, hungry, and suffering from cold, in need and stranger. He really identifies himself with the poor and suffering and stands in their place. People living after the time of the Ascension, therefore, also still have the opportunity to make him welcome and to wait on him, just as Zacchaeus did. To say that the poor will always be with us is the same as to say that Christ will always be with us. When at the end of Matthew's gospel Christ reassures the apostles: "And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time" (Matt.28, 20), for Augustine this means that the poor person is Christ present until the end of time. He is always present there. The same Christ, who at the end of time will give eternal life to those who have been faithful to him, has seen fit to be in need wherever people are in need, and to receive himself whatever is placed in their hands.²⁴

Canning goes on further to note, "What gives warrant to the truth of this extraordinary claim that Christ is still present in the poor and powerless, thereby extending to us the opportunity to welcome and to be blessed by him, is the New Law, the New Testament, Christ himself."²⁵ How is our teaching of the New Testament reflective of the presence of Christ in the poor?

Long before Pope John Paul II brought the theme of The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers to new heights in *Laborem Exerens* Augustine saw work as something that was part of human nature even before the Fall in Eden. As Burt points out,

Augustine noted that even before they sinned, humans were given a little work to do. Commenting on the passage from Scripture, "And the Lord God took the man whom he had made and placed him in Paradise to cultivate and guard it" (Gen 2:15), Augustine comments: "The first man certainly was not being 'condemned' to labor even before he sinned. Whatever delight comes from cultivation of the earth must have been more powerfully present in that paradise as man enthusiastically helped God's creation bloom in joyful and abundant harvest." (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 8.8.15)²⁶

Burt analyzes Augustine's connection of the Garden of Eden to Augustine's own garden and work this way,

Augustine maintained that "any work that is done without fault and deception is good work" (*The Work of Monks*. 12.14). These words were addressed to a group of monks who seemed to believe that manual labor was beneath them. Augustine's message to them was that being Christian (even being a monk) was not an excuse for avoiding a bit of physical labor. He adds that he himself would prefer to work in the monastery garden than to spend his days settling the endless squabbles and disputes brought to him by the people of Hippo (*The Work of Monks*, 29.37).²⁷

To the question, "Why were humans called upon to cultivate and guard nature?"

²⁴ R. Canning. (1981) *In search of the neighbour and God in Searching for God*, Op. Cit., 167.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Burt, *Op. cit.*, 73.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

Burt's Augustinian answer is: "The only answer that makes sense is that God wanted human beings then and now to join in the development of the universe. The work of Creation occurred only once, but the work of developing Creation would go on till the end of time."²⁸ How do we honor the value of work in our directions toward education?

In finding Augustinian connections to the theme of Solidarity, I remind you of van Bavel's comment on solidarity in relation to the theme of Option for the Poor and Vulnerable given above. Brown in analyzing Augustine points out, "The Pelagian man was essentially a separate individual: the man of Augustine is always about to be engulfed in vast and mysterious solidarities."²⁹ For Augustine, these are the solidarities which lead him to continue to deal with the squabbles of Hippo rather than retreat into the monastery garden. They are the solidarities which enable him to reflect on his role as bishop this way,

My place as your head frightens me, but what I share with you comforts me. I am a bishop set over you, but together with you I am a Christian. The first is the title of the office I have assumed, the second is a grace; the first is a danger, the second is salvation. The office seems like a storm tossing us about in a raging sea. But when we remember who redeemed us by his blood, it seems we enter the safety of a harbor in the stillness of that thought. Even though this office is personally hard work, the common benefit gives us rest.³⁰

How does the way we organize the way we educate evidence our own belief in solidarity?

van Bavel identifies for us an Augustinian connection to the last of the themes - Care for God's Creation. His comments are akin to Burt's observation about the dignity of work noted previously. He observes,

A renewed theology of creation can here be a certain help. God has given us freedom and responsibility. He entrusted the world to human beings; they have a task to fulfil.[sic] According to Augustine, that fact that we are created by God is, at the same time, a vocation, that is to be co-creators, a call to bring the world to perfection and to improve it.³¹

Augustine respect for creation can also be seen in the way he saw it as a source of revelation, when he reported this dialogue in the *Confessions*,

And what is my God? I asked the earth and it replied, "I am not he." Everything in it said the same thing. I asked the sea, the deep abyss, and the crawling things that live in it. They answered, "We are not your God. Look above us." I asked the gentle breezes. The air and everything in it responded, "Anaximenes was wrong. I am not God." I asked the heavens, the sun, the moon and the stars. They told me, "We are not the God you seek." I said to all the sensory objects that gather around my body and make it react, "You talk of God and say you are not he." Then tell me something about him." They all cried out with a loud voice, "He made

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ P. Brown. (1988) *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 360.

³⁰ *Sermon 340*, 1.

³¹ van Bavel, *op.cit.*, 49-50.

us.” I questioned them by orienting my mind to them and their beauty was their answer.³²

In what ways are the venues of Augustinian education used to reflect our Christian belief in the Care for God’s Creation?

Whether it is the themes of Catholic Social Teaching themselves or connecting Augustinian values to them, much of our understanding may seem very positive and even simplistically easy to implement. In areas similar to our themes, Augustine knew that implementation always has its difficulties. Even though we can connect Augustinian values to a Call to Community and Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, Augustine had to deal with the real scandal of his community not living up to its ideal. In *Sermons 355* and *356*, Augustine reports the scandal and response related to members of his community failing to keep their vow to sell everything and give the money to the poor. He had to condemn his community for its failure and its greed. Paradoxically, he praised pagan Rome in the *City of God* for resisting avarice. Because of obvious virtues he found, “Augustine found himself in the position of not being able to either to condemn Old Rome or to commend it unequivocally.”³³ Rather, he noted, citizens of Rome “resisted the temptations of avarice. They acted for their country’s well-being with disinterested concern. They were guilty of no offense against the law. They succumbed to no sensual indulgence. By such immaculate conduct they labored toward honors, power and glory, by what they took to be the true way.”³⁴ Unfortunately, because of obvious failures, Augustine was not able at times to make a similar affirmation of the practices of his community.

Such a paradoxical reality evidences that understanding is never enough. No matter how clear it is. When we look at the Augustinian triad of memory, understanding and will, the third concept of the will can be an avenue of insight for interpreting the positives of Rome and the failures of Augustine’s community. For Rome a will used for good can make up to some extent for shortcomings. In Augustine’s community the best of intentions cannot make up for the lack of a good will.

Will

How Augustine understands the role of the will as crucial to its relation to memory and understanding as well as the relation between memory and understanding should not be a surprise to us. We should remember that he wrote, “Since a person’s character is deemed praiseworthy by how good and how learned it is, we take note of what he wills in addition to what he remembers and understands. We do not start with the strength of his will. Rather, we begin with what he wills, and then move to how strong his will is.”³⁵ We know that love is tied to will in Augustine. When he describes the Human City and the City of God he is talking about two loves. For Augustine, what one wills and what one loves are tied together.

As we try to deal with our understanding about the signs of the times and Catholic

³² *Confessions*, X, 6, 9.

³³ J. Pelikan. (1987) *The Excellent Empire: The Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 101.

³⁴ *City of God*, V, 5.

³⁵ *The Trinity*, X, 17.

Social Teaching the critical part of the education is educating the will to love rightly. Getting our wills to do the right things is not an easy task. But, if van Bavel is correct it can be a somewhat singular task – love of neighbor. Augustine sees love of neighbor, according to van Bavel as the “double face of love,”³⁶ that is love of God and love of neighbor united together. The singular task arises from the practical primacy of love of neighbor³⁷ which for Augustine is the entry way to love of God. In discussing the emphasis of love of neighbor in John, Augustine observes that John “seems to have passed over the love of God in silence. This he never would have done unless he intended that God be understood in brotherly love itself.”³⁸ van Bavel points out this commentary on John as well as similar commentary on Pauline thinking in both Galatians and Romans as bases for his interpretation.³⁹ While Augustine sees God as beauty, goodness and truth, van Bavel also reminds us, “We never encounter beauty as such, but we see a beautiful picture, or hear beautiful music. We never encounter goodness as such, but we encounter a good action or a good person. We never encounter truth as such, but we find an idea or an action that is true.”⁴⁰ Our encounter with God is in our neighbor.

How do we teach such love? How do we educate the will to know and act in response to the signs of the times as found in Catholic Social Teaching? For Augustine the answer is found in the Christian the works of mercy identified in scripture. He sees them as so important that he adds them to the works of necessity⁴¹ such as weaving, sowing, plowing, planting, sailing, milling and cooking.⁴² While the works of necessity involve activities that ensure people have the basics for living, Augustine sees the works of mercy, even as we now interpret them through Catholic Social Teaching, as the basics of the practice of Christian living. Since they are basic needs, any sacrifice connected to performing works of mercy is also part of the necessities of the practice of Christian living. According to Schuld, sacrifices, like those involved in performing works of mercy, are a means to solidarity emanating from Augustine’s understanding of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. As she interprets it,

Because “sacrifice” creates these bonds of unity, Augustine declares, the solidarity it shapes through imitative acts of self-emptying love always interacts with another solidarity that binds all persons together, inside and outside of the church — the solidarity of Adam. The community should thus form (and continually “re-form”) itself through sacrificial acts of compassion as an outwardly and not just inwardly looking body.⁴³

As I have noted elsewhere,⁴⁴ this understanding is the Inner Teacher thrusting us out from our inner life toward solidarity with others. This is a connection between

³⁶ van Bavel, T.J. (1986) *The Double Face of Love in Augustine*. *Augustinian Studies*, 17, 169-181.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁸ *The Trinity*, VIII, 8, 12.

³⁹ van Bavel, *op. cit.*, 171

⁴⁰ van Bavel, T.J. (1999) *Augustine’s spirituality for the Church in the Modern world in Augustinian Family Prepares for the Third Millennium*. T. Cooney (ed.) Rome: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, 58.

⁴¹ See, *Sermon 211A*, 1.

⁴² See also, *Sermon 84*, 1.

⁴³ Schuld, *op. cit.*, 122.

⁴⁴ G.N. McCloskey, O.S.A. *Threads to be woven: Characteristics of Augustinian Pedagogy*, July, 2005. <http://www.merrimack.edu/gmccloskey/pedagogy.htm>.

Augustine's description of Christ as the Inner Teacher and his understanding of the Whole Christ (*Totus Christus*) which is the underlying reality of van Bavel's concept of the double face of love. Burt calls this solidarity "practice in loving God."⁴⁵ He also goes on to describe the experience of love of neighbor this way,

In this life, as in the next, the foundation is love. (*Commentary on Psalms 33/2*, 19) Thus, when we are sick and it seems that our desire for a healthy life is frustrated, there can be some peace from knowing others are sorry for our troubles. Even though we are failures in the eyes of a world that sees no *meaning* in our lives, we can still feel important if we are loved by someone. Our desire for *love* is indeed central to our lives, and luckily, it can be nourished by even the least bit of affection expended and received. Though a fervent love that binds us tightly to another may seem to the outsider to threaten our desire for *freedom*, we know that it does not. Indeed, it fulfills the desire. No one is more free than those who are "imprisoned" in the arms of their beloved.⁴⁶

Along the lines of van Bavel, Canning provides further amplification of an Augustinian understanding of the unity of the love of God and love of neighbor,⁴⁷ particularly around Augustine's interpretation of Matthew 25. He reminds us that Augustine sees the works of mercy as the "crucial criterion"⁴⁸ In terms of the importance of love of neighbor through works of mercy, Augustine interprets the Letter to the Galatians in these words, "Since the love of God is not so frequently put to the test, people can deceive themselves about it. In love of neighbor, however, they can more easily be convinced that they do not possess the love of God, if they are unjust towards other people."⁴⁹

Besides reminding us of the "crucial criterion," Canning follows the direction of Augustine's use of the expression in Matthew 25, "one of least of mine,"⁵⁰ which gives us additional understanding of an Augustinian approach to humility.⁵¹ With love of neighbor connected to love of God, then the vulnerability of the poor and needy is an experience of the humility of God.

An Augustinian understanding of humility can be empowering to the poor and needy and an antidote to the false humility fostered by the world we live in. Falsely, society encourages under the name of humility, being shy and even knowing how to stay in your place if you are disenfranchised or powerless. Chappell captures the Augustinian meaning of humility as a humility that "impels us into the world so that we can share the vision we have discovered deep within, to share who we are and to share our many gifts and talents in service."⁵² Such "humility focuses on God and not on our independence,

⁴⁵ Burt, *op. cit.*, 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

⁴⁷ See in particular, R. Canning. (1993) *The Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbour*. Heverlee-Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁴⁹ *Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians*, 45.

⁵⁰ Canning, *op. cit.*, 331-420.

⁵¹ See, *Sermon 113*, 1, 1.

⁵² A. Chappell (2001) *St. Augustine on Humility in Elements of an Augustinian Formation*. Rome: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, 116.

autonomy, plans and practices.”⁵³ In our applications of Catholic Social Teaching we are experiencing the humility of God. In the poor and needy we experience over and over what it means that God became one of us and died for us. Schuld observes, “The ‘shame of the cross’ is not left behind or negated. It is ‘re-formed,’ along with the sinful, so as to structure their service back to the world. As an imitative self-emptying, self-giving, and self-forgetting love, *caritas*, Augustine declares, can only be ‘perfected in the weakness of humility.’^{54,55} Augustine prayed for such humility, this way,

Say anything you wish but heal my ears so that I may pay attention to what you say. Heal my eyes so that I may see you when you beckon. Heal my stupidity so that I may recognize you when you come. Tell me where to look to see you and then I will hope that I will have the strength to do what you want of me.⁵⁶

While this work of humility is a pastoral work, we should be assured that Augustine means this as a work of education. We need to remember that when he reflects on how far “the least of mine” extends he adds to the words of Jesus “When one of the least of mine learns, I learn.”⁵⁷ And, as Chappell reflects on Augustine’s thought,

In humility is Wisdom which the world cannot give: “It has been made clear to us where God wishes us to be humble to avoid pride, and he wishes us to be on high to grasp wisdom”⁵⁸ In the end, it is the humble who relinquish all that is not of God who will rise to the heights of wisdom and so come to “recall,” “contemplate” and “delight” in the Trinity.^{59,60}

It is from his recalling, contemplating and delighting in the Trinity that Augustine identified the triad of memory, understanding and will. While it is wonderful to rise to the Trinity, how do we get back to earth to address “the signs of the times” in our own educational situations?

Application

Recently Mark Ellingsen has published a study called, *The Richness of Augustine: His Contextual and Pastoral Theology*.⁶¹ In that work he has identified “An Augustinian Way of Theologizing.” I believe that this insight can be helpful in framing an Augustinian values approach to address the signs of our times. According to Ellingsen, “To appreciate the richness of Augustine’s theology is to receive guidance not just about what to say, but about when to say it.”⁶² In our context it is to receive guidance not just about what to do, but when to do it.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

⁵⁴ *The Trinity*, IV, 1, 2.

⁵⁵ Schuld, 121.

⁵⁶ *Soliloquies*, 1, 3 and 1,5.

⁵⁷ *Tractate on the Gospel of John* 21, 7, 2.

⁵⁸ *Commentary on Psalm 130*, 12.

⁵⁹ *The Trinity*, XIII, 19, 24.

⁶⁰ Chappell, *op. cit.*, 124.

⁶¹ M. Ellingsen. (2005) *The Richness of Augustine: His Pastoral and Contextual Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 5.

Ellingsen also believes that such an understanding of Augustine provides a broader, more pastoral framework. In addressing the signs of our times, we should remember that *Gaudium et Spes* is the Pastoral Constitution on the Church. As Ellingsen posits,

Much contemporary theology, due to its dependence on Systematic models, is not flexible enough to address the full range of pastoral concerns that emerge from every day life...reading Augustine and other prominent leaders of the Church, who like him employed an occasional, contextual theological approach, provides today's pastors with guidance when (for pastoral purposes) each of the various formulations made available by the Augustinian heritage is best employed.⁶³

For those of us in educational areas where people are less and less involved in the Church, such an Augustinian approach to religious education may be very helpful. Dealing with the problems of the world may enable our students both to experience the love of God through love of neighbor and to learn ways to enact such an approach to love. It may also help us as educators to see the limitations of our education when we follow directions that derive only from systematic theology. We must realize that contemporary systematic theology can be limited by the academic venues where it is largely developed. In describing Western Civilization, O'Malley points to four cultures of the west:⁶⁴ Prophecy and Reform; The Academy and the Professions; Poetry, Rhetoric, and the Common Good; Arts and Performance. The Academy is only part of one of them. Catholic Social Doctrine and Augustine's theologizing speak about all four of these cultures. Thus, using Augustine may provide a fuller religious understanding and experience.

If I return to two memories that I shared at the beginning, I see an Augustinian direction as a fruitful approach. The first memory is the image of the "red state" and "blue state" division in America. In analyzing this situation, the evangelical preacher Jim Wallis sees it one that demands a new vision for faith and politics in America.⁶⁵ He finds that we are being "Co-opted by Right and Dismissed by the Left"⁶⁶ Using Augustinian experiences I would see that the right (conservatism) is somewhat Donatist and the left (liberalism) is somewhat Pelagian. One is trying to narrow religious teaching and the other is trying to eliminate the need for it. However, following Augustine's understanding of the double face of love as a lens for Catholic Social Teaching could provide an antidote to both of these problematic ways of thinking. For the left, it can provide a challenge to understand that love of neighbor is more than a personal value and is grounded in the transcendent nature of human beings. For the right, it can provide the challenge that belief in God must go beyond conceptual theology and private belief and must be evidenced in how we live our lives in the real world.

The second memory image that I want to recall from the beginning of this presentation is the death of Pope John Paul II. Following his death, the impact it had on

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁶⁴ J.W. O'Malley. (2004) *Four Cultures of the West*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

⁶⁵ J. Wallis. (2005) *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

so many was a feeling of loss not only of a leader but also of direction. The following election of Pope Benedict XVI has been hailed by some of his former students as a time for rejoicing after loss because he stands for things like the return of the worshipping community, including the priest, and the church buildings to face in an eastern direction. In this joy they ignore the fullness of Pope Benedict's teaching, such as the problem of the current Iraq War in the light of Church teachings or recent developments in the Church's teaching on capital punishment. Here, as well, an Augustinian approach to Catholic Social Teaching would challenge them to teach the fullness of the Gospel message over against an individualism and selective thinking that masquerades as the tradition of the Church.

This presentation sees an Augustinian values approach to reading the signs of our times as helpful and bringing a greater fullness than we currently have. Yet, such an expansion comes with its cost. The first cost is that there are no easy answers. It involves our own as well as our students' engagement in struggling with the questions and problems of the world. It also involves finding and espousing answers that others will find troubling. Dodaro describes his experience of the struggle this way:

The more I read him [*Augustine*] and read studies about him and about his times, the more that two conclusions, apparently disjunctive, continue to strike me more forcefully. First, I find it increasingly difficult to 'domesticate' Augustine, that is, to make him appear 'at home' in our times. Secondly, I find his theology and his approach to various pastoral issues increasingly more relevant for our times. On the one hand, I am saying that Augustine's church and the times in which he lived – late Roman antiquity – have to be seen as strange, as alien to our own times, between his church and our church. And, secondly, in spite of the fact that I continue to reach this difficult conclusion, I continue to see the urgency of Augustine's theology and his pastoral responses for the Church in our times.⁶⁷

Such an experience is Augustinian in that it does not try to reduce the reality of paradox in our lives to some simplistic jargon. Stevenson in speaking more generally of paradox in Augustine reminds us that

Augustine's value to our modern era lies not in his "doctrine." Although he, more than any other figure in Western history, first linked war, love and judging into what appeared to many to be an integrated whole, the appearance of wholeness dissolves rapidly upon close examination. For Augustine's "theory" is filled with paradoxes: the "cause" for right war is "just peace," but there is in the world neither true justice nor lasting peace; one ought to evaluate war but one can not; one's power is the mark of one's authority, but the powerful are not finally authoritative; one ought to obey one's earthly superiors, except when one ought not; love includes war, but true love is the absence of war; one ought to love rightly but one can not."⁶⁸

⁶⁷ R. Dodaro. (1999) *The courage to be intolerant: crisis, dialogue and diversity in the pastoral theology of Augustine of Hippo* in T. Cooney (ed.), *op.cit.*, 76.

⁶⁸ W.R. Stevenson. (1987) *Christian Love and Just War: Moral Paradox and Political Line in St. Augustine and His Modern Interpreters*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 150.

In undertaking an Augustinian values approach to reading the signs of our times, the greatest gift we may give our students is the ability to live and grow within the paradoxes of the world that we are impelled to address but have no power to resolve fully. As we teach them to deal with paradox we may also be teaching them to live with paradox which Malony calls the “genius of double vision.”⁶⁹ Isn’t Augustine, when he presents the paradoxical double face of love – love of neighbor as the measure of our love of God – asking us to read the signs of our times with a double vision? Is this not truly the genius of Augustine that we need to impart to our students?

⁶⁹ See, H.N. Malony (1998) *Living with Paradox: Religious Leadership and the Genius of Double Vision*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.