

THE EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

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Saint Augustine ranks among the most profound and influential of the Fathers of the early Church. He completed the doctrinal work of his predecessors and handed it forward to the schools of Christendom. Indeed he is the teacher who has formed the intellect of Christian Europe. However he did not start as a teacher of the Christian doctrine. First he had as his aim in life the wordly career of a rhetorician, for the sake of which he received a typical Roman education. He was trained in Latin grammar and rhetoric and became a professor of rhetoric, practicing in Carthage, Rome, and Milan. But this very fact places him among people of the teaching profession, to which he remained in some way related throughout his life, as his *De Catechizandis Rudibus* and *De Doctrina Christiana* bear witness.

After his conversion, Augustine withdrew from academic life, but «his resignation from the chair of rhetoric at Milan did not necessarily mean that he left the field of education and his teaching profession. The contrary is the case. He entered more fully and directly into it than ever, and indeed began his extensive literary career as a result of his profound plan for educational regeneration and renewal».¹ The first four years of his life as layman in the church were dedicated to practicing the new life and teaching the christian doctrines². More than ever Augustine wished to be a teacher and a leader. But no longer would he instruct his pupils in vain eloquence; rather he would lead them on the road to Truth. That was the field of education on which he sought to build a system of education «a system of right thinking, and of reasoning on the facts of the objective world and human experience which was acceptable to

1. E. Kevane, *Augustine the educator*, (Westminster, Maryland, 1964), p. X.

2. Possidius, *Life of St. Augustine*, c. III, translated by F. R. Hoare, *The Western Fathers*, (London, 1954), p. 196.

the schools of the empire, and sound also in fundamentals and principles where these touch higher truths of revealed religion»³.

We may therefore look upon Augustine not only as a great philosopher and theologian, but as an educator too, who «provided as much of a philosophy of education as has ever developed within Roman Catholic thought»⁴. Such a view immediately opens wider possibilities in understanding Augustine's interests in education «as a consistent feature of his entire life» and his philosophy as arising from his educational experience and his practical pedagogical work»⁵.

It will be our task therefore to examine here Augustine's views and the suggestions he makes on education as well as his philosophical concept of education, as it is derived from his works.

Augustine by his entrance into Christianity repudiated his former sins but not his education in pagan thought. Several times he recalls that he had studied pagan literature from his childhood⁶ and had been trained in liberal arts.⁷ His former experience, schooling, reading and employments had moulded his character and even after his baptism continued to be operative all his life. In fact, he ever remained grateful for the education he had received outside of Christianity. He was a student of «the Platonists»⁸ (Plotinus and perhaps Porphyry), whose teachings had brought him to Christianity, and he admired Cicero. At the age of nineteen, Augustine read Cicero's treatise called Hortensius which had an immediate effect on him: «In the regular course of study I came upon the book of a certain Cicero... that book of his contained an exhortation to philosophy. It was called Hortensius. In fact that book changed my mental attitude, and changed the character of my prayers to Thyself, O Lord»⁹. The works of the Neoplatonists exercised strong influence on Augustine. Their unexpected agreement with Christian doctrine surprised him: «Therein I read, not, indeed,

3. F. A. T o u r s c h e r, St. Augustine, the Christian Schoolman, in Augustinian studies, Saint Augustine's College, Catholic University, (Washington D. C. 1937), p. 7.

4. K. P r i c e, Education and Philosophical thought, (Boston, 1965), p. 112.

5. E. K e v a n e, op. cit. p. XI.

6. Epist. 104,3. Letters of St. Augustine, translated by J. G. Cunningham (Edinburgh, 1875), p. 65.

7. Epist. 34,6. J. H. Baxter, St. Augustine, Select letters with an English translation, (London, 1930), p. 101.

8. Confessions, VII, translated by V. J. Bourke, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 21 (New York, 1953), p. 190.

9. Confessions, III, »V, 7, p. 54.

in these very words, but quite the same thing, supported by means of many and manifold reasons, that: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. Furthermore, I read that the soul of man, though it gives testimony of the light, is not itself the light, but the Word, God Himself, is the true light, that enlightens every man who comes into the world... Again, I read there that the Word, God, was born not of the flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of flesh, but of God¹⁰.

But since the pagan culture was of such a great importance, the question which arose was how should we treat it after our conversion to Christianity. Should we use the pagan writings any more? Were they beneficial to Christians or should we reject them? This problem was faced by the Fathers of the Church before Augustine and as is known, «although they insisted upon the dangers inherent in pagan literature and philosophy, they recognized in Greek and Roman traditions a providential preparation for the time when Christian intelligence, seeking a synthesis of faith and reason, would need the sharp weapons forged in the Vulcanian workshop of pagan thought¹¹». Saint Basil, some years before Augustine, in his address to Young Men on Reading Greek Literature, urges young students to take from the writers of antiquity whatever is beneficial for them in understanding the Scriptures; any affinity between the two bodies of teaching, profane and sacred, might be useful¹². Augustine's view on this subject coincides with that of the earlier Fathers i.e. «whatever is true and useful in the intellectual disciplines cultivated by pagan teachers may be incorporated into our Christian program of studies, because it is ours of right¹³. Accordingly, the liberal disciplines are useful for instruction and indispensable for the right understanding of Scripture. Therefore they must be included in the program of Christian education. «If those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, have said things by chance that are truthful and conformable to our faith, we must not only have no fear of them, but even appropriate them for our own use from those who are, in a sense, their illegal possessors». The pagan authors have of course «superstitious notions and oppressive burdens» which each one of us «ought

10. Ibid. VII, IX, 13-14, p. 177-178.

11. D. A. Gallagher, *Some philosophers on Education*, (Milwaukee, 1961), p. 57.

12. For Saint Basil's Address, see Migne, P.G. vol. 31, cols. 563-581.

13. Gallagher, *op. cit.* p. 46.

to consider abominable and shun». However, «they also contain liberal instruction more adapted to the service of truth and also very useful principles about morals; even some truths about the service of the one God Himself are discovered among them. These are, in a sense, their gold and silver. They themselves did not create them, but excavated them, as it were, from some mines of divine Providence which is everywhere present»¹⁴. We should not avoid the pagans because of their superstitions wherever we can take from them «anything useful for comprehending the sacred Scriptures». Moreover, «every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he discovers truth it is the Lord's»¹⁵.

The revelation of truth was an act of «divine Providence» which worked not only in Christianity exclusively, but even before among pagan philosophers. Therefore even in their writings truth may be found. Augustine, being a student of theirs and now a Christian teacher, took his disciples through the whole schooling in which he himself had been educated, making the pagan arts the introduction to Christian doctrine.

However Augustine did not keep the same view towards classical tradition all his life. Thus, while in the years immediately following his conversion he was liberal and enthusiastic about pagan writings, in later life he became much less tolerant. And even when he did not completely condemn the reading of pagan works, Augustine was severe in his censure: «For what else can we say to those who, although wicked and and ungodly, believe themselves to be men of a liberal education, except what we read in the book that is truly liberal; if the Son has made you free, then shall ye be free indeed? For it is by His gift that what ever, even those disciplines that are termed liberal by men who have not been called unto liberty, contain that is liberal can be known at all. For they contain nothing consonant with liberty, unless what they contain is consonant with truth. That is why the Son Himself says: And the truth shall make you free»¹⁶. Augustine's most severe denunciation of pagan culture is found in his letter to Dioscorus, a young man who requested the Bishop to send him explanations of a number of passages in Cicero. But while he was concerned with getting a reputation for his scholarly attainments, he received in reply a letter containing severe remarks on

14. *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, c. 40, n. 60. translated by J. J. Gavigan, *The Fathers of the Church, Writings of St. Augustine*, vol. 4, New York, 1947), p. 112

15. *Ibid.* II, c. 18, n. 28, p. 87.

16. *Epist.* 101,2. J. H. Baxter, *op. cit.* p. 191.

the emptiness of human praise and the futility of ambition. Let the young man picture himself with his Ciceronian criticism solved and his inquiries satisfied. What then? Augustine points out to Dioscoros that he sees things out of all proportion. The essential thing is the way of Salvation, the Christian Truth. The main thing is the knowledge of truth... Dioscoros must learn not to be ashamed to say he does not know... Let him be prepared to say of many minor matters, I do not know. If asked, «what then do you know?» let him reply, «I know how a man without his knowledge can be blessed»¹⁷.

Saint Augustine goes on further to say that classical learning may corrupt morals; he expresses his aversion to this in the following way: «Woe unto thee, O flood of human customs! Who will resist thee? How long will it be before thou driest up? How much farther will thou roll the sons of Eve unto that great and fearful sea, over which those can hardly pass who embark upon the wood of the Cross? Did I not read in thee of Jove both thundering and committing adultery? Both these things, of course, he could not have done, but it was contrived so, that there might be justification for real adultery, false thunder playing the pander.

Who, among these begowned teachers, can listen undisturbed when a man from their own dust declaims, saying: Homer invented these fictions and transferred human traits to the gods; I should prefer that divine ones be given to us. It is more truly said that he did, indeed, make up these fictions, yet thereby attributed divinity to disgraceful men, so that their disgrace would not be regarded as such, and that whoever did likewise would seem to be imitating the gods in heaven rather than abandoned men.

Yet, O hellish flood, men's sons are thrown into thee, with their tuition fees, so that they may learn these things. This is an important business, when carried on publicly in the forum, in full view of the laws governing the payment of salaries over and above fees»¹⁸.

Augustine warns the Christian again and again not to be seduced by classical learning. Classical studies are full of error and falsehood and overemphasize man's rational powers. There is no value therefore in investigating the theories of pagan philosophers¹⁹. Witchcraft is evil,

17. Epist. 118, 11. W. J. Sparrow-Simpson, *The letters of St. Augustine*, (London, 1919), p. 52-3.

18. *Confessions*, I, 16, p. 25.

19. Epist. 118, 26. tr. by Cunningham, op. cit. p. 113.

and all the arts of the necromancers are prohibited to the Christian; for Augustine directs that such parts of human learning «which concern alliance with demons must be completely cast off and abhorred»²⁰. It was to such a contemptuous view towards the pagan tradition that he turned in his later years, though the writings of Plato, Cicero, and Vergil, never lost their charm for him.

Having thus overthrown the pagan culture, Augustine makes it his business in *De Doctrina Christiana* to substitute for it a new culture; a new training, the objective of which is conversion to Christianity²¹. This conversion terminates in the awareness of God together with the possession of a Christian character. «Conversion may be accomplished in two ways: and there are, consequently, two recommendations subordinate to the ultimate goal. The work of conversion should proceed both through the Church and through the instrumentalities of academic training. The Church ought to propagate the Gospel through society at large. Except for its work, no one can come to be aware of God and of His law. But conversion ought also to be sought in the teaching of youth, for the study of liberal arts as well as of philosophy and theology lends itself readily to this purpose»²². Among the matters of secular culture there are parts of learning which are of value to the Christian. Augustine therefore initiates «a review of the corpus of the arts and sciences known to his day, and he shows us in what way they may be made useful»²³. All liberal arts take an important place in his program. In the list of educational subjects «the forms of letters», «languages» and «shorthand characters» are included, because «these are useful forms of knowledge and they are not learned in a forbidden manner or connected with any superstition. Nor do these forms weaken us through any excess, provided that they engross our attention only to the extent that they are not a hindrance to nobler things which they ought to help us acquire»²⁴. We ought to know languages, particularly those in which Scripture was written or translated, because only «after a certain intimacy with the

20. *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, 26, p. 97.

21. As. J. H. Randall points out, «Saint Augustine was a man converted to Christianity, and hence his whole philosophy, like that of Saint Paul, is a philosophy of conversion». The manifold experience of Augustine, in the *American Scholar*, vol. 38, winter 1968-69. No I, p. 132.

22. Z. Price, *op. cit.* p. 123.

23. Gallagher, *op. cit.* p. 60.

24. *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, 26, p. 97.

language of the Holy Scriptures has been achieved» may we begin a thorough understanding of them»²⁵.

The liberal arts, according to Augustine include history, the natural sciences, dialectics, grammar, rhetoric, mathematics and even philosophy. «These subjects constitute what came to be known as the seven Liberal Arts; and while this course of study had its beginning in Plato's Republic, Augustine borrowed the concept quite fully developed from Varro, whose work on the subject is not extant»²⁶. All these subjects are of value for the students but they are not to be studied as ends themselves; they are only preludes to the study of the Scriptures. Therefore as the people of Israel fleeing from the land of Egypt took with themselves gold and silver and left behind them the idols of the Egyptians, in the same way the Christian students will take from secular learning whatever is useful to them in understanding and following the church doctrines²⁷. However, they are not to expect to glean much from their secular studies, for the treasures they take from secular learning to the study of the Scriptures are as nothing compared with the riches they will find there. With Augustine the disciplines of the arts and sciences are domiciled in the household of Faith. His point is that «the study of these arts reveals to the student that divine law or order of both the physical and social world, conformity to which is necessary for virtuous conduct, and awareness of which is of assistance in coming to know God»²⁸.

Saint Augustine illustrates the use that may be made of secular learning. The student of history should know that «whatever that science called history teaches us about the order of past events is a very important help to us»²⁹. But the discipline of history is not distinct from sacred history, embodying a contrary wisdom; it is rather a science subordinate to the study of the Sacred Page, since it is «through it that we are aided in understanding the sacred Books, even though we learn it outside the Church through our study as children»³⁰. History is a narration of facts which have actually taken place, the *res gestae*. These are seen as a complex of contingent facts, not in chaos, but «in the order

25. Ibid. II, 9, p. 72.

26. K. Price, op. cit. 123.

27. De Doctrina Christiana, II, 40, n. 60. p. 112.

28. Price, op. cit. p. 123.

29. De Doctrina Christiana, II, 28, n. 42. p. 98.

30. Ibid.

of time, whose creator and administrator is God»³¹. Throughout history the will of God is revealed. The reality of the Church, «the vine which continued to spread its fruitful branches throughout the world», the martyrs who «died for the true faith in countless numbers throughout all lands», the conversion of the kingdoms and the falling away of the heretics is a continuous demonstration of the truth of His word.³² The fulfilment of all things foretold in the Scriptures encourages us to look ahead with the confidence «that the things, likewise, which yet remain, shall come to pass»³³. Thus «history and revelation merge into one symmetrical pattern, in which the believer has his own stable place, fixed in the eternity of God's beneficent purpose»³⁴. Under such an understanding the discipline of history is restored in a new place» a separate and distinct place which it did not have in the classical *paideia*»³⁵.

In the natural science Augustine includes «everything that has been written about the location of places and the nature of animals, trees, plants, minerals, and other bodies». The knowledge of all these things is valuable in explaining the mysteries of the Scriptures» and distinguishing between superstition and «the lawful and unrestricted knowledge». By way of illustration, he says: «it is one thing to say: If you drink the juice crushed from this herb, your stomach will not pain you; and quite another to say: If you hang this herb around your neck, your stomach will not pain you. In the first instance, a suitable and salutary mixture is recommended; in the second, a superstitious token deserves censure»³⁶. Augustine deals extensively with the creation of the world in his work *De Genesi ad Letteram*. In this work, his theory about the composition of the physical and spiritual realms of the universe is found;³⁷ that is, his astronomy and cosmology. The work is an apologetic one against the «malicious pagans who have used arguments based on such things to criticize the story of Genesis and the dogmas arising from it. His aim is

31. *Ibid.* II, 28, n. 44, p. 100.

32. *De Catēchizandis Rudibus*, 24, 44, translated by J. P. Christopher, *The First Catechetical Instruction*, Westminster, Maryland, 1946), p. 75-76.

33. *Ibid.* 24, 45, p. 76.

34. W. Green, *Augustine on the teaching of history*, University of California Publications in Classical Philology, vol. 12, No. 18, pp. 315-32. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1944, p. 325.

35. E. Kevane, *op. cit.* p. 237.

36. *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, 29, n. 45, p. 100.

37. Cf. T. J. Bourke, *Augustine's Quest of Wisdom*, Milwaukee, vls. 1945) p. 224.

not to add to the natural sciences but to remove objections against faith raised in the name of those sciences. It was important to show the Scriptures as neither contradictory nor absurd, and as in accordance with accepted data on the workings of nature»³⁸.

The study of mathematics may be helpful in understanding the Scriptures. For Scripture is full of number symbolisms which cannot be interpreted without the knowledge of the science of numbers. It is because of the «ignorance of numbers that many things expressed figuratively and mystically in the Scriptures are not understood». Only Mathematics enable the student of the Scriptures to understand all those «mysteries which are expressed in the Sacred Books in numbers and arrangements of numbers»³⁹. According to Kevane⁴⁰, Augustine in his order of studies gives «an indispensable place to mathematics, astronomy, and the natural sciences, which leads *per corporalia ad incorporalia*, upward toward a definite body of philosophical knowledge. This in turn is prerequisite for human insight and understanding on God and the soul».

The mechanical arts, although of a minor interest compared to the other liberal arts, should also be added to the curriculum of studies, because they cannot be considered altogether useless and because they enable us to understand certain figurative expressions which Scripture takes from these arts⁴¹.

Grammar is the science which, as its name indicates, «knows letters» and deals with syllables and words, their sounds and their construction and thus «produces art»⁴². Grammar leads to dialectics because the instrument of the reason by the use of grammatical rules, «its tools and machines», «brings into being that discipline of disciplines which is called dialectics». The science of dialectics «teaches both how to teach and how to learn. In it, reason itself exhibits itself, and reveals its own nature, its desires, its powers. It knows what knowledge is; by itself, it not only wishes to make men learned, but also can make them so»⁴³. It teaches the art of defining and dividing the matter in question, and

38. H. I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la cultura antiga* (Paris 1938).

39. *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, 16, n. 25, p. 83-85.

40. Kevane, *op. cit.* p. 175.

41. *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, 30, p. 102.

42. *De Ordine*, II, 12, n. 36-43,38 translated by R. P. Russel, *The Fathers, of the Church. Writings of Saint Augustine*, vol. I, (New York, 1948), p. 314-15.

43. *Ibid.* II, 13, p. 315.

without this no exposition of truth is possible⁴⁴. Moreover, dialectics is absolutely indispensable because this «science of reasoning is very valuable in penetrating and answering all kinds of disputed points which are found in the sacred writings»⁴⁵.

Yet in order to convince the «unwise men» about «the things which are rightly commended as useful and upright» we have to use rhetoric. By this art men are «aroused as to their emotions» and when its charms are scattered to the crowd, the latter may «deign to be influenced for its own good». ⁴⁶ Rhetoric may be used either for good or bad «since persuasion both to truths and falsehoods is urged by means of the art of rhetoric», but to a Christian it may be a very useful tool for making the truth convincing. «The power of eloquence—so very effective in convincing us of either wrong or right—lies open to all. Why, then, do not the good zealously procure it that it may serve truth, if the wicked, in order to gain unjustifiable and groundless cases, apply it to the advantages of injustice and error?»⁴⁷

The cycle of studies is crowned by philosophy, «the science of virtue and wisdom»⁴⁸. Philosophy is «a certain exalted branch of learning». It is a divine science which holds its propositions more clearly than the science of mathematics grasps its object⁴⁹. As a subject of learning it is relevant to all levels of education: «for it is philosophy from whose bosom no age can complain that it is excluded»⁵⁰. Christian philosophy has its origin in God: «this science is the very law of God which, ever abiding fixed and unshaken with Him, is transcribed to the souls of the wise»⁵¹. As a purified knowledge, it brings to the human spirit a twofold benefit: the knowledge of ourselves and of the Supreme Being: «To philosophy pertains a twofold question: the first treats of the soul; the second, of God. The first makes us know ourselves; the second, our origin. The former is the more delightful to us; the latter, more precious. The former makes us fit for a happy life; the latter renders us happy. The first

44. De Doctrina Christiana, II, 31, n. 48-49, p. 102-104.

45. Ibid. II, 31, n. 48, p. 102.

46. De Ordine, II, 13, p. 315-16.

47. De Doctrina Christiana, IV, 2, p. 169.

48. De Magistro, 14,45, translated by G. C. Leckie: Concerning the Teacher, New York, 1938), p. 55.

49. De Ordine, II, 7, n. 24, p. 300.

50. Contra Academicos, 1,4, translated by M. P. Garvey: Against the Academicians, (Milwaukee, Wis. 1942), p. 16.

51. De Ordine, II, 8, n. 25, p. 301.

is for beginners the latter, for the well instructed. This is the order of wisdom's branches of study by which one becomes competent to grasp the order of things and to discern two worlds and the very Author of the universe, of whom the soul has no knowledge save to know how it knows Him not⁵². Truth, the central concept of Saint Augustine's thought, is to be found only in this orientation.

The method of teaching the liberal arts proceeds in a «twofold order» of which «one part pertains to the regulating of life, and the other pertains to the directing of studies»⁵³. Here we have two aspects of the method of teaching; a negative and a positive one. The first is expressed in Augustine's injunction to beware of the dangers of sense. The student's energy would naturally expend itself in unprofitable play, on lascivious literature, or on sex. It is the teacher's duty to prevent, so far as possible, that energy from flowing in its natural course and to direct the student to «a fitting and decent manner of living»⁵⁴. For, it is through education that one can get rid of the «plight of ignorance and folly». Education is the means which «can keep the light of learning lit even in the darkness of our native ignorance». But there is no learning, he says, without punishment. «That is why we have tutors and schoolmasters with their ferules and straps and canes, and why, in the training of a child we love, we use the authority of Holy Writ to beat his sides... lest he grow stubborn (Eccli. 30,12)—else he may become too wild ever to be tamed. The point of all such human punishment is to help dispel our ignorance and to bridle our untamed desires—the double birthmark with which we come into this world»⁵⁵.

After «the studious youths have resolved to live after the manner described above»⁵⁶, the positive teaching follows. That again proceeds «in a twofold manner» which is «by authority and by reason». In this procedure authority comes first, since «it happens that for those who seek to learn great and hidden truths, authority alone opens the door»⁵⁷. Authority is divided into divine and human. The first is the authority of Christian revelation which «leads a man onward» and bids him «to soar

52. Ibid. 11,18, n. 47, p. 324.

53. Ibid. 11,8, p. 301.

54. Ibid. p. 301-2. Cf. *The city of God*, Bk. XXII, c. 22, tr. by G. C. Walsh and D. J. Honan. *The Fathers of the Church, Writings of St. Augustine*, vol. 8, New York. 1954), p. 474.

55. *The city of God*, Bk XXII, 22, p. 475.

56. *De Ordine*, 11,9, n. 26, p. 303.

57. Ibid.

upward to the intellect». The second is the authority of those men «who propose proofs for their teachings» and live in the way «they prescribe that one ought to live»⁵⁸. After the student «has entered» belief, then «he will come to know: (a) how much wisdom is embodied in those very precepts that he has been observing before understanding; (b) what reason itself is which he—now strong and capable after the cradle of authority—follows and comprehends; (c) what intellect is, in which all things are, or rather, which is itself the sum total of all things; (d) and what, beyond all things, is the source of all things»⁵⁹.

Augustine's views on teaching and learning are clearly enunciated in the early dialogue *Concerning the Teacher* (*De Magistro*). The question which Augustine and his son Adeodatus faced was: does a student really learn anything from his teacher? It is a difficult one. According to the dialogue, every human teacher is concerned with instruction in signs and symbols. Words are the usual type of teaching signs,⁶⁰ though others, such as gestures and things, may be used. Teaching therefore is the use of language for the purpose of increasing knowledge. But do verbal signs convey truth to the mind, truth which one did not know before? Augustine's answer to the question is that «we learn nothing through those signs which are termed words»⁶¹ unless they refer to things which are before our minds and of which they are names. «For when a sign is given me, if it finds me not knowing of what thing it is a sign, it can teach me nothing»⁶². But again the question is «if it finds me knowing the thing of which it is the sign, what do I learn from the sign»⁶³? The answer is that «if we know, then we remember than learn, but if we do not know, then we do not even remember, though perhaps we are prompt to ask»⁶⁴. The words therefore «possess only sufficient efficacy to remind us in order that we may seek things, but not to exhibit the things so that we may know them»⁶⁵. The words we hear do not convey the ideas of those who use them; they merely awaken our own within us; we are only given what we already have. If there is any meaning which the words are to convey to the mind of hearers it must

58. *Ibid.* 11,9, b. 27, p. 304-305.

59. *Ibid.* 11,9, n. 26, p. 303.

60. *De Magistro*, 11,3, p. 6-7.

61. *Ibid.* X, 34, p. 45.

62. *Ibid.* X, 33, p. 43.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*, XI, 36, p. 46.

65. *Ibid.*

be present in those minds beforehand; these minds clothe the words they hear in the meaning they have beforehand, and only so do the words they hear become intelligible. For example, one can understand a story about three youths in the fiery furnace because he already knows what «three», «youths», «fiery» and «furnace» stand for; but no words can make me acquainted with the individuals involved.⁶⁶

Thus we are forced to the conclusion that we never learn anything. But this *nusquam discere* (to learn under no circumstances) does not mean that teaching is a waste of time. It rather means that we have to look upon teaching and learning as two distinguished arts. Masters explain, with the help of words, the disciplines they profess to teach; they speak and, as a rule, with no lapse of time we understand them. We learn inwardly as soon as the words are uttered outwardly, and conclude from this that they have taught us something. And yet it is not their thoughts we learn. The learner is not a passive recipient of knowledge from his human teacher. Various attitudes are actively assumed by the student in regard to the thoughts suggested by the words of the teacher; these may be attitudes of agreement, disagreement or doubt.⁶⁷ The student considers within himself whether what the teacher says is true.⁶⁸ It is by consulting a truth which he finds within and above his own mind that the student learns. Thus to the extent of his abilities he establishes for himself that the things told him are true. Who then is the real master? Our teacher is precisely the one we apply to for instruction—namely Christ «who is said to reside in the interior man» (Ephesians III, 16-17) and who «is the unchangeable excellence of God and His everlasting wisdom, which every rational soul does indeed consult. But there is revealed to each one as much as he can apprehend through his will according as it is more perfect or less perfect. And if sometimes one is deceived, this is not due to a defect in the truth which he has consulted any more than it is a defect of external light that the eyes of the body are often deceived; yet we confess that we consult this external light about visible things in order that it may show them to us in so far as we have the power to discern»⁷⁰. And «when things are discussed which we perceive through the mind, that is, by means of intellect and rea-

66. Ibid. p. 47.

67. Ibid. XII, 40, p. 51.

68. Ibid. XIII, 41, p. 52.

69. Ibid. XII, 40, p. 49.

70. Ibid. XI, 38, p. 47-8.

son, these are said to be things which we see immediately in that interior light of truth by virtue of which he himself who is called the interior man is illumined, and upon this depends his joy. But then our hearer, if he also himself sees those things with his inner and pure eye, knows that of which I speak by means of his own contemplation, but not through my words»⁷¹.

This is Augustine's classic statement of the essence of the illumination theory. Illumination is a God-given assistance to man's understanding, enabling man to know the eternal truth in any field. This is the light of God's wisdom, who is Christ. Christ reveals one and the same truth to the mind of speaker and hearer alike.⁷² This is what God tells us in the Gospel: One is your Master, Christ (Matthew XXIII, 8-10)⁷³. No matter what subject they try to learn, all men are in the same school and fellow students of one and the same master. The Word is the inner master and through Him the union of men in one and the same truth becomes possible.

71. *Ibid.* XII, 40, p. 49.

72. *Ibid.* XII, 40, p. 49.

73. *Ibid.* XIV, 46, p. 56.