

St. Augustine: A Role Model for Christian Business Faculty

Steve VanderVeen, Calvin College

Brian E. Porter, Hope College

Abstract

Contemporary Christian scholars, in an attempt to define work from a Reformed point of view for Christian business faculty, frequently depict St. Augustine as a *straw man*. That is, St. Augustine may serve as a reference point with which to compare their offerings. For example, Chewning et al. criticize Augustine for being too antithetical:

A certain amount of tension between business and Christianity seems always to have existed....St. Augustine, a fifth-century Christian bishop, wrote "Business is in itself evil." Most Christians today, however, would disagree. All around the world, in a wide variety of political and economic systems, Christians are involved in business. Some see business merely as a way to make a living. Others...see it as an integral part of God's plan for meeting the needs of people. If you agree with Augustine, you can stop reading now (Chewning, Eby, and Roels, 1990, p. 4).

Unfortunately, Augustine's contributions to the thinking of work are frequently derided or misrepresented. Yet, arguably, Augustine's view of work and style of writing are reformed. In fact, rather than a negative example, Augustine may be more correctly perceived as a role model for Christian business faculty, one that we should pattern ourselves after. Augustine sees a significant antithesis between what God demands and what exists. He emphasizes God's providential plan, and he notes the importance of contemplation, reflection on God, and meeting the needs of the poor. Further, he writes with a style that not only heals and directs the body of Christ to do the work God expects, but also spreads the Gospel. Given that Christian business faculty teach that work, and business in particular, is a viable calling of God, it is useful to reexamine Augustine as a role model for us and our students.

St. Augustine: A Role Model for Christian Business Faculty

17th Annual Christian Business Faculty Association Meeting, 2001

September 14, 2001

Authors: Steve VanderVeen, Ph.D.
Brian E. Porter, Ph.D.

e-mail: porter@hope.edu

School Address: Hope College
Department of Economics and Management
VanZoeren Hall
Holland, MI 49422
(616) 395-7572

Please address all correspondence to Brian Porter at Hope College

St. Augustine: A Role Model for Christian Business Faculty

Introduction

Contemporary Christian scholars, in an attempt to define work from a Reformed point of view for Christian business faculty, frequently depict St. Augustine as a *straw man*. That is, St. Augustine may serve as a reference point with which to compare their offerings. For example, Chewning et al. criticize Augustine for being too antithetical:

A certain amount of tension between business and Christianity seems always to have existed....St. Augustine, a fifth-century Christian bishop, wrote "Business is in itself evil." Most Christians today, however, would disagree. All around the world, in a wide variety of political and economic systems, Christians are involved in business. Some see business merely as a way to make a living. Others...see it as an integral part of God's plan for meeting the needs of people. If you agree with Augustine, you can stop reading now (Chewning, Eby, and Roels, 1990, p. 4).

Unfortunately, Augustine's contributions to the thinking of work are frequently derided or misrepresented. Yet, arguably, Augustine's view of work and style of writing are reformed. In fact, rather than a negative example, Augustine may be more correctly perceived as a role model for Christian business faculty, one that we should pattern ourselves after. Augustine sees a significant antithesis between what God demands and what exists. He emphasizes God's providential plan, and he notes the importance of contemplation, reflection on God, and meeting the needs of the poor. Further, he writes with a style that not only heals and directs the body of Christ to do the work God expects, but also spreads the Gospel. Given that Christian business faculty teach that work, and business in particular, is a viable calling of God, it is useful to reexamine Augustine as a role model for us and our students.

Augustine's Content

To see the unique contribution of Augustine, it is necessary to understand the contribution of his contemporaries. Homer (8th century B.C.?) was one of the first authors of the Classical period while Augustine¹ (4th –5th century A.D.) was one of the last. Augustine's opinion of Homer was not highly favorable. One complaint of Augustine was that Homer contributed mightily to the river of human custom.

Was it not here, in this stream of custom, that I read of Jupiter thundering at one moment and committing adultery the next? Undoubtedly he could not do both these things; but the idea was this: that a false notion of thunder should be used as a bawd to give countenance to real adultery.... Certainly these were fictions of Homer, but his method was to give something of the divine to wicked men, so that crimes should not be called crimes and that whoever is guilty of such things might appear to be following in the footsteps, not of abandoned men, but of the heavenly gods (St. Augustine, 1963, p. 34).

Clearly, Augustine would think more highly of Homer had he not perceived Homer to be accommodative to human custom. In addition to condoning adultery, Homer has a positive view of work: work can be good if it's done out of free will. For example, Odysseus could build a boat and Penelope could weave – but this type of activity was freely chosen (Marshall, 1980, p. 4). But the most significant complaint against Homer was that he made humanity the center of all things: Odysseus's

¹ St. Augustine was born Thagaste of Numidia (present day Algeria) in 354 A.D. His father, Patricius, was a pagan, belonged to the influential classes, and seemed to be lively, sensual, hot-tempered, and unfriendly to Christianity. His mother, Monnica (spelling according to some manuscripts), was an honorable, loving, self-sacrificing, Christian. Augustine received his education at Thagaste, then neighboring Madaura, and then Carthage (Tunis). Between Madaura and Carthage, Augustine had a year's sabbatical from education so that his family could accumulate money for his tuition. During this time and at Carthage, he "drank from the cup of sensual pleasure." However, he remained ambitious toward discovering the truth, and was greatly impressed by the writing of Cicero. After finishing his studies, Augustine taught grammar in his home town. Still searching for the truth, and being disappointed by Manichaeism cosmology and metaphysics, Augustine moved to Rome and then to Milan, where he taught rhetoric. Still searching, Augustine was attracted to the eloquent preaching of Ambrose, a Catholic bishop. In 387 A.D. Augustine was baptized by Ambrose; in 395 Augustine became the Bishop at Hippo. While serving the Catholic Church, Augustine wrote two of his most famous works: *Confessions* and *City of God*. Augustine died in 430 A.D.

homecoming was written from the perspective of man: what he thought, how he felt, how he explained reality.

Hesiod (7th century B.C.?) is also anthropocentric: in *Works and Days* (“Pandora”) he explains that humans work hard as a punishment for the gods. For instance, the gods gave humanity Pandora, because Prometheus (a god) stole fire from Zeus (another god)! Like Homer, Hesiod blames divinity for the origin of evil. However, Hesiod did not explore human emotion.

Virgil (1st century B.C.), on the other hand, examines both human thought and emotion. He also sees the gods in a slightly different light: the gods have a plan for humanity. Life is better if humans discover what this plan is and adhere to it. At the same time, there are penalties for recklessness (as there are in Homer’s writing). If humans have failed to live according to the Roman code, they will have to pay a price in Hades (Virgil, 1990, pp. 185-186): they may be beaten until they confess. But again, man (literally) is the center of all things: there is no sense that man is totally dependent on whatever is divine; there is no sense that all humanity has something to confess or that all of humanity has a problem with pride. In fact, Virgil is trying to create pride among the Romans by saying that they were destined to be a great nation. But unlike Homer, he sees that greatness comes with a price (see below).

Like Virgil, the biblical writer Luke (1st century A.D.) writes about a god’s plan for humanity. But the god of Luke is a different kind of god: he is a God who promised to send his son to become man and to be a sacrifice for all of (believing) humanity (as opposed to the men being sacrificed to the gods). Luke implies that work is an activity used to support the spread of the gospel, or the “good news” about God’s plan of

salvation. In Acts, for example, it is implied that, though Paul was a tentmaker, his main objective was not to make tents but to spread the gospel of Christ (Acts Chapter 18).

Augustine has a similar view of God's plan for humanity, and he speaks extensively of it in *City of God*. He also has a view of work that is similar to the writers of the Classical period. For instance, he sees something wrong with work: in some ways he sees the needs of the body as a hindrance to a higher form of life. For example, in his *Confessions*, he displays a negative view of marriage.

Or certainly I ought to have listened with greater heed to the voice from those clouds of yours: "Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh, but I spare you. And, it is good for a man not to touch woman. And, he that is without a wife thinketh of the things of God, how he may please God; but he that is married thinketh of the things of the world, how he may please his wife" (sic) (St. Augustine, ibid., p. 41).

Augustine also senses that there is a God who controls the fate of humanity and that humans are servants to larger causes, such as building kingdoms. On the other hand, Augustine's views are quite different from his contemporaries'. First, he sees work as being directed toward God or away from God; in other words, he sees work in the context of a thesis/antithesis, similar to the way Abraham Kuyper would describe it in the 20th century.

Kuyper proclaimed that there existed an "antithesis" between the church and the world. Although he never completed the metaphysical and anthropological background of this motif, he did intimate in this vein a complete and antagonistic dichotomy. The redeemed lived out of one principle – love for God – and everyone else lived out of the opposite, however it might be expressed. Between themselves the two groups comprised the entire human race; there was no one uncommitted, or committed to a third principle, and no middle ground on which to stand (Bratt, 1984, p. 18).

Second, Augustine sees God's hand in his life, a hand that provides good things to an undeserving recipient, a hand that leads in secret until the recipient is ready to follow,

and a hand that ultimately leads to the transformation of the world from within (using a different kind of army). Finally, Augustine sees this kingdom working via contemplation of God and through meeting the needs of the poor.

First, Augustine sees an antithesis: he sees that much of work is a distraction, a game.

But what we liked to do was to play, and for this we were punished by those who were themselves behaving in just the same way. But the amusements of older people are called “business,” and when children indulge in their own amusements, these older people punish them for it....I doubt whether any good judge of things would say that it was a good thing for me, as a boy, to be beaten for playing some ball game simply on the grounds that by playing this game I was impeded in my studies, the point of which was that I should be able to perform, when I grew older, in some game more unbecoming still (ibid., p. 27).

He also sees that much of work is frivolous.

And to the temptations of the eyes, men themselves in their various arts have made innumerable additions: clothes, shoes, vases, products of craftsmanship; pictures too and all sorts of statues – far beyond what is necessary for use, moderate or with any religious meaning. So men go outside of themselves to follow things of their own making, and inside themselves they are forsaking Him who made them and are destroying what they themselves were made to be (ibid., p. 244).

Further, Augustine observes that, for most of his contemporaries, being successful is more important than how one gets there. That is, success is an end, not a means, and ends may not be ethically consistent with means.

For I was not disobedient because I was making some better choice, but only because I loved playing; I loved feeling proud when I won and I loved having my ears tickled by false stories, so that they might itch all the more. The same or an even greater curiosity sparkled in my eyes, when I looked at the shows and the games of my elders. And those who organize and pay for these games are so very greatly honored and admired for it that nearly all the spectators would wish their own little children to be like them, which does not prevent them being quite pleased to have their children beaten if, by spectacles of this sort, they are kept away from those studies which, so the parents hope, will result in their being able to produce such spectacles themselves someday (ibid., p. 28).

St. Augustine notes that the end of work is wealth, a wealth which is poverty.

For my teachers had no idea of how I was to use the education which they forced upon me except for satisfying the insatiable desires of that wealth which is poverty and of that glory which is shame (ibid., p. 30).

Yet, despite all of these negative feelings toward work, as presented by his teachers and contemporaries, Augustine believes that all things are good. Evil is the absence of good (ibid., p. 151), and things have to be good to exist. To become good again, things must be used to praise God by those who use them. Those who use them will be directed in the right way by way of confession (O'Donnell, 1985); the proud cannot find God (ibid., p. 92). In other words, work is good if it has the right object: according to the universality principle of love, the direction of love is either toward God or toward the world (Jaspers, ibid., pp. 95-96). If a person loves God, then what s/he does will be less corrupted by evil because it will be used in a more proper way. Since everything created was originally toward God, it was originally good.

Second, Augustine emphasizes the role of providence, a providence that can become evident to believers through contemplation.

In the normal course of study I came across a book by Cicero, a man whose style, though not his heart, is almost universally admired. This book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy; it is called Hortensius. Now it was this book which altered my way of feeling, turned my prayers to you, Lord, yourself, and gave me different ambitions and desires. Every vain hope suddenly became worthless to me; my spirit was filled with an extraordinary and burning desire for the immortality of wisdom, and now I began to rise, so that I might return to you (St. Augustine, ibid., p. 56).

Through contemplation God calls humans to his "army" (ibid., p. 168), an army quite different from that described by Homer and Virgil. This army does not conquer the world by destroying its inhabitants, it transforms the world by redirecting the souls of

humans. In fact, “Augustine not only describes, but illustrates in his own person, the work of Christ as converter of culture” (Niebuhr, *ibid.*, p. 208) – Augustine supports his work through humbleness and prayer (St. Augustine, *ibid.*, p. 114). Through prayer, God’s plans are made known to his children (*ibid.*, pp. 211, 212) and through prayer, his children are healed (cf. James 5:16).

Third, Augustine emphasizes that this transformative work requires reflecting on God and meeting the needs of the poor.

*Go, root out those rough thickets of avarice; sell what thou hast, and be filled with fruit, by giving to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and follow the Lord if thou wilt be perfect... (St. Augustine, *ibid.*, p. 331).*

On the other hand,

*suppose I have the strength to declare all this [the fact that God called him to be a preacher of the word and a dispenser of sacraments] in order, yet the drops of my time are too precious, and for long I have been full of a burning desire to meditate on thy law and to confess to you both my knowledge and my lack of skill in it...And I am reluctant to spend on anything else the hours that I can find free from the necessities of refreshing my body, intellectual labor, and the services which we owe to others or, even if we do not owe them, which we give to others. My Lord God, listen to my prayer and let your mercy give ear to my desire; it does not burn for myself alone, but wishes to be of use in the service of brotherly charity, and you see in my heart that this is so (*ibid.*, p. 258).*

In short, Augustine advocates the passive versus the active life: work is good but work is to be endured (Marshall, 1980, p. 7) for the sake of reflection: things were to be used, not enjoyed. On the other hand, Augustine may have considered reflective musings to be his life’s work, his form of evangelism:

Why do I bother to let men hear my confessions?... Yet still, my inmost Physician, I beg you to make clear to me what advantage I get from doing this. You have forgiven and covered up my past sins, blessing me in you and changing my soul by faith and by your sacrament; yet when the confessions of these past sins are read and heard, they rouse up the heart and prevent it from sinking into the sleep of despair and saying “I

*cannot.” Instead they encourage it to be wakeful in the love of your mercy and the sweetness of your grace, through which the weak is made strong when, thanks to this grace of yours, he becomes conscious of his own weakness. Also, good men are pleased when they hear of sins done in the past by people who are now free from them; they are pleased not because of the sins themselves, but because what were sins have now ceased to exist (St. Augustine, *ibid.*, pp. 211, 212).*

To summarize, Augustine’s view of work is different from that of his contemporaries. First, he sees work as inherently good but corrupted. Second, Augustine sees God’s providential hand in his life (and in the life of the world): this hand leads him to contemplation, confession, prayer, and reflection on God so that he could pursue God’s plan for his life – which involves being an example to others. Third, Augustine sees Christ transforming culture via reflection and meeting the needs of the poor.

At the same time, Augustine’s view of work is similar to that of the reformers, which can be summarized adequately by the Heidelberg Catechism.²

The Heidelberg Catechism (1975) emphasizes many of the same things Augustine does in his *Confessions*. First, the Catechism describes the antithesis in work: it notes that humans have a natural tendency to hate God and their neighbor (Q&A 5) and describes them of being incapable of doing good unless they are regenerated by the Spirit of God (Q&A 8). Given that most people are not regenerated, work must be corrupted; this is because its ends are directed primarily toward mammon.

Second, the Catechism understands the importance of knowledge (contemplation and reflection on God). It states that there are three things to know in order to live and die in the joy of the comfort of belonging to Jesus Christ: how great the individual Christian’s sins are, how individual Christians are set free, and how they are to thank God

(Q&A 2); in other words, individual Christians must contemplate reality: they must know how desperate they really are (Hagemen, 1963, *ibid.*, p. 6) and they will not know how desperate they are unless they reflect on God and his law.³ The Catechism also focuses on providence (Q&A 1, Q&A 27), or how God does what is beneficial for salvation.

Third, the Catechism emphasizes service (i.e., good works) as a *response to salvation* as opposed to service as a *means to gaining salvation*. It, like Augustine, focuses on conversion or regeneration or redirection. It states that doing good includes those things that “arise out of true faith,” conform to “God’s law,” and are “done for [God’s] glory; and not that which is based on what [they] think is right or on established human tradition” (Q&A 91). The Catechism expands on what is required in God’s law; for instance, it expands the meaning of the Eighth Commandment (“You shall not steal”) to include doing whatever can be done for the good of neighbors and to work faithfully to share with those in need” (Q&A 111).

In contrast to Augustine and the Catechism, some contemporary writers connected with the reformed faith seem to neglect the antithesis in work and emphasize to a greater extent the notion of “common grace,” a notion made popular by the Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper (20th century).

As if to counter these flaws [spiritual arrogance and abuse of principle analysis], Kuyper brought forth his second principle, the idea of common grace. [The first principle was the idea of the antithesis, in which he meant the redeemed lived out of one principle – love for God – and everyone else lived out of the opposite. Its application was separate Christian organizations in every field.] God’s grace, this doctrine suggests, works not only upon the elect to the salvation of their souls but

² Frederick III of the Palatinate commissioned Caspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus to write a catechism to unite various strands of Protestantism. They published their work in 1563. The followers of Calvin (Bucer), Luther (Melancthon), and Zwingli were involved.

³ As John Calvin so eloquently states, “without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God” (Calvin, 1975, p. 33).

touches all men, all creation, by restraining the power of sin and by enabling knowledge and virtue to flower in the absence of true religion....Common grace honored earthly existence by describing it in the worthiest terms of the orthodox vocabulary. It encouraged the redeemed to respect the good remaining in the world and to strive to augment it. Even more, it made many elements of human culture...not just products by means of grace....Finally, it legitimized a certain amount of cooperation between the redeemed and unbelievers that to some extent they shared a sense of the good...(Bratt, 1984, pp. 19-20).

For instance, given that Christians participate (i.e., work) in business without reservation, Chewning et al. conclude that business must not be evil. Hardy also believes work is less corrupted as does Augustine. This accommodative attitude toward work is the curse, not blessing, of Kuyper. It seems that not only have Christians responded negatively to the antithesis/thesis motif by separating themselves and acting arrogantly toward others; they have also responded negatively by overemphasizing the good in culture. Augustine rightly saw that Christians are in the midst of two cities, the thesis (church) and the antithesis (unbelieving world), uncomfortably straddling both, situated between the times of redemption (Christ's first coming, death, and resurrection) and consummation (Christ's second coming, when he makes all things new). Augustine and the writers of the Heidelberg Catechism seem to see that the only response to this dilemma is confession and redirection toward evangelism and meeting the physical needs of the poor. Augustine and the early reformers see that without perceiving the world and the work of the world (including its structures) as part of the antithesis, humans are not motivated to be regenerated. If they do not perceive the antithesis and their part in it, they will not be humbled by confession. Without confession, there is no regeneration or

prayer.⁴ If there is no regeneration and prayer, they will not heartily attempt to pursue God's providential plan, even though the benefit is joy (well-being) (St. Augustine, *ibid.*, p. 317).

Augustine's Style

Related to content is style of writing; in other words, the way an author writes says much about what s/he says. Content can be communicated in style: a picture can be worth a thousand words and a face can launch a thousand ships! Augustine communicates much in terms of the style of writing he chose. While his style is similar in some ways to the classical writers of his period, it is also distinct. At the same time, it shares some characteristics with the writing by the reformers in the Heidelberg Catechism.

As stated earlier, Augustine claims that Homer gives something of the divine to wicked men, so that crimes should not be called crimes and that whoever is guilty of such things might appear to be following in the footsteps...of the heavenly gods (St. Augustine, 1963, p. 34). If this is in fact what Homer is doing, what style of writing would make crimes not appear to be crimes? It would seem that writing which is very descriptive and entertaining and positive would be the appropriate strategy to entice the reader. For instance, Homer is much more entertaining than Virgil when he writes about war. Consider the words used in the following two passages:

Athena breathed enormous strength in the old man./He lifted a prayer to mighty Zeus's daughter,/brandished his spear a moment, winged it fast/and hit Eupithes, pierced his bronze-sided helmet/that failed to block the bronze point tearing through --/down Eupithes crashed, his armor

⁴ It should be noted that neither confession, repentance, or prayer is mentioned by Chewning et al. or Hardy, even though the former speaks of business from the perspective of faith and the latter speaks of finding one's vocation.

clanging against his chest./Odysseus and his gallant son charged straight at the front lines,/slashing away with swords, with two-edged spears and now/they would have killed them all, cut them off from home/if Athena, daughter of storming Zeus, had not cried out/in a piercing voice that stopped all fighters cold,/"Hold back, you men of Ithica, back from brutal war!/Break off-shed no more blood—make peace at once!" (Homer, 1996, pp. 484-485).

Fierce under arms, Aeneas/Looked to and fro, and towered, and stayed his hand/Upon the sword-hilt. Moment by moment now/What Turnus said began to bring him round/From indecision. Then to his glance appeared/The accursed swordbelt surmounting Turnus' shoulder,/Shining with its familiar studs – the strap/Young Pallas wore when Turnus wounded him/And left him dead upon the field; now Turnus/Bore that enemy token on his shoulder -- /Enemy still. For when the sight came home to him,/Aeneas raged at the relic of his anguish/Worn by this man as trophy. Blazing up/And terrible in his anger, he called out:/"You in your plunder, torn from one of mine,/Shall I be robbed of you? This wound will come/From Pallas: Pallas makes this offering/And from your criminal blood exacts his due."/He sank his blade in fury in Turnus' chest./Then all the body slackened in death's chill,/And with a groan for that indignity/His spirit fled into the gloom below (Virgil, 1990, pp. 185-186).

Whereas Homer's Odysseus and Virgil's Aeneas seem to be following in the footsteps of the gods, Homer uses positive words to describe war and Virgil negative. For instance, Virgil uses words like "criminal," "fury," "chill," "groan," "indignity," and "gloom" whereas Homer uses words like "enormous," "mighty," "brandished," "winged," and "gallant;" in other words, Homer's hero is put on a pedestal, while Virgil's hero leaves the reader wondering just how heroic he is.

Hesiod has a different agenda. His goal is to explain why humans have to work so hard. Humans already knew they were working hard -- they wanted an explanation and this is how Hesiod responds:

For the gods have hidden and keep hidden/what could be men's livelihood./It could have been that easily/ in one day you could work out/enough to keep you for a year,/ with no more working./Soon you could have hung up your steering oar/in the smoke of the fireplace,/and the work the oxen and patient mules do/would be abolished,/but Zeus in the anger

of his heart hid it away/because the devious-minded Prometheus had cheated him;/and therefore Zeus thought up dismal sorrows/for mankind (Hesiod, 1993, p. 188).

Whereas Homer and Virgil use sophisticated language (death has a “chill,” Turnus’s spirit “fled,” fighters stopped “cold,” etc.), Hesiod comes straighter to the point. The Lyric Poets, on the other hand, were self-expressing. For example, Sappho (6th century B.C.?) is one of the first to write in the first person (recall also the point of being anthropocentric).

“Honest, I want to die,” she said to me./She was in tears when she went away,/Said to me not once but many times: “Sappho, why must we suffer so?/It’s not by choice; I don’t want to leave you here.”/And I, this is what I said to answer her:/ “Farewell. Go in peace. But remember me./Don’t ever forget how well I took care of you (Sappho, 1993, p. 227).

St. Augustine seems to be the first classically educated person to write a significant amount in the first person: “Augustine wrote the first true autobiography” (Jaspers, *ibid.*, p. 103). But why? Much of the reason has to do with how style relates to content. For instance, Augustine’s purpose for writing the *Confessions* is to evangelize.

But to whom am I relating this [his break from study, his time before going to school in Carthage]? Not to you, my God. But I am telling these things in your presence to my own kind, to that portion of mankind, however small it may be, which may chance to read these writings of mine. And my object in doing so is simply this: that both I myself and whoever reads what I have written may think out of what depths we are to cry unto Thee (sic). For nothing comes nearer to your ears than a confessing heart and a life of faith (St. Augustine, *ibid.*, p. 42).

Like St. Luke, who was classically educated and wrote for a similar purpose, Augustine’s utilized paradox (see above where he describes wealth as poverty) and metaphor. In addition, Augustine freely quoted the Bible in his work. Clearly he knew it well, having likely memorized large portions of it due in part to the oral tradition in which he lived (Bratt, 2001).

For with wisdom and folly the same thing holds good as with wholesome and unwholesome food. You can have silver or earthenware dishes on the table, just as you can have a decorated or undecorated use of language; either kind of food can be served in either kind of dish (ibid., p. 97).

Augustine also writes the *Confessions* as a prayer (O'Donnell, ibid.). In his prayer Augustine is self-expressing, existential, and teaching-oriented. But what sets Augustine apart was the way he evangelizes and talks about work. He, in essence, shows how to empty oneself of oneself so that God's plan can take hold.

In like manner, the reformers' style of writing as seen in the Heidelberg Catechism is similar. Like Augustine, its purpose is to strengthen the faith of believers, its style is that of a "spiritual biography" (Hagamen, ibid., p. 11), and it is not afraid of using paradox (one has new life by being born again by the Spirit of God). It also leaves a lot of questions unanswered. On the other hand, contemporary writers connected with the reformed faith seem to have adopted a third-person, scholarly, at arms' length form of writing, ironically building on Augustine's off-quoted phrase "faith seeking understanding" (St. Augustine, ibid., p. xiv). But this is ironic given that Augustine's faith seems to transcend or immerse his understanding: his faith was not static, it was more than a building block of understanding. Even though Augustine used his faith as a basis to redefine everything, he also seemed to see it as something that took over where understanding left off. One can't forget that Augustine's *Confessions* laid the foundation for Soren Kierkegaard's theistic existentialism (Bourke, 1963, p. xiv), an existentialism in which Christians take "leaps of faith" because of understanding's limits.

But the lesson, ultimately, is that content is related to style. First, Augustine is telling the reader the benefits of confession. Second, he's telling the reader that confession is a form of praise: it's a form of humbleness that is necessary for prayer.

Third, he is saying that confession leads to a pursuit of God's providential plan. Finally, Augustine is explaining that confession is a response to perceiving the antithesis in self and in the world – including the limits of human understanding. Given that Augustine is saying all these things, the only way he can be credible is to write an autobiography in the first person, and this he does in fine fashion.

Conclusion

To summarize, Augustine's content is unique. He sees the antithesis between what is and what is supposed to be. He sees work as perverted. He sees humans at fault. He sees the need to confess and the relationship between confession and praise. He knows that God has a plan, a God that does not accommodate to humanity's evil but a God that alone is good. He senses that part of this plan is to satisfy the needs of the poor.

Augustine's style is also unique: he alone sees the power and necessity of confession as a strategy for evangelism, worship, and transformation. He demonstrates that content is related to style. He exemplifies James 5:16: a community of believers can't grow together nor do God's will without first humbling itself. Ironically, this leads Augustine to make public a private prayer, as if he were a Pharisee; but clearly Augustine is not, because in his prayer he humbles himself.

Thus, contemporary writers should not imply that Augustine is too Greek or too antithetical. Augustine may have been influenced by Greek thinking; on the other hand, contemplation is not the only thing he is interested in: he is interested in transforming society through the individual mind and through charity done by individuals. He wants others to pursue God's providential plan and revitalize themselves as he himself did. Augustine may see evil in work, but it is unlikely that he saw work as inherently evil;

rather, in most work he saw good corrupted or the absence of good. But he sees how work could be redeemed if it were directed appropriately.

Instead, contemporary business faculty should learn from Augustine's example. To heal each other and to build up the kingdom of God they should write about and share their confessions. They should write about how they are pursuing God's providential plan. Finally, they should re-conceptualize both the state of work and the purpose of work. In other words, they should concentrate on articulating work as it is in its corrupted state and think about transforming it so that it satisfies the needs of those in need. Of course, if they believe this, they must make it personal: they must get out of their offices from time to time and actually do works of charity! Ironically, business faculty, like all faculty, probably spend too much time in contemplation of wisdom that is not directed toward God, while accusing Augustine of spending too much time reflecting on God and his law and therefore failing to see the antithesis in what they are studying and teaching! To re-balance their lives, their thinking, and their work, business faculty, for their own well-being and the well-being of other Christians, should begin by emptying themselves in the presence of others. It would not hurt, therefore, to write in the first person and have a greater knowledge of scripture and its context -- as St. Augustine did.

Bibliography

- Bourke, Vernon (1963), "Introduction" in The Confessions of St. Augustine, Rex Warner (trans), New York: New American Library.
- Bratt, James (1984), Dutch Calvinism in Modern America, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Bratt, Ken (2001), Classical Literature class notes.
- Calvin, John (1975), The Institutes of the Christian Religion, John T. McNeill (ed), Ford Lewis Battles (trans), Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Chewning, Richard, John Eby, and Shirley Roels (1990), Business Through the Eyes of Faith, San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Hageman, Howard (1963) "Guilt, Grace and Gratitude," in Bruggink, Donald (ed.), Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude, New York: Half Moon Press: pp. 1-19.
- Hardy, Lee (1990), The Fabric of This World, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Hesiod (1993), "Pandora" in Bernard Knox (ed.) The Norton Book of Classical Literature, New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Homer (1996), The Odyssey, Robert Fagles (trans), New York: Penguin Books.
- Jaspers, Karl (1962), Plato and Augustine, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Marshall, Paul (1980), "Vocation, Work, and Jobs," in Marshall (ed.), Labour of Love: Essays on Work, Wege Publishing: pp. 1-19.
- Monroe, Kent (1990), Pricing: Making Profitable Decisions, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Niebuhr, H.Richard (1951), Christ and Culture, New York: Harper and Row.
- O'Donnell, James (1985), Augustine, Twayne World Authors (Articles accessed via "http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine/twayne.html.")
- St. Augustine (1963), The Confessions, Rex Warner (trans), New York: New American Library.
- Sapho (1993), "Pandora" in Bernard Knox (ed.) The Norton Book of Classical Literature, New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- The Heidelberg Catechism (1975), CRC Publications.

Virgil (1990), The Aeneid, Robert Fitzgerald (trans), New York: Vintage Books.

Yancey, Philip (1997), "A State of Ungrace," Christianity Today: February 3, pp. 31-37.

St. Augustine: A Role Model for Christian Business Faculty

Steve VanderVeen, Calvin College

Brian E. Porter, Hope College

Abstract

Contemporary Christian scholars, in an attempt to define work from a Reformed point of view for Christian business faculty, frequently depict St. Augustine as a *straw man*. That is, St. Augustine may serve as a reference point with which to compare their offerings. For example, Chewning et al. criticize Augustine for being too antithetical:

A certain amount of tension between business and Christianity seems always to have existed....St. Augustine, a fifth-century Christian bishop, wrote "Business is in itself evil." Most Christians today, however, would disagree. All around the world, in a wide variety of political and economic systems, Christians are involved in business. Some see business merely as a way to make a living. Others...see it as an integral part of God's plan for meeting the needs of people. If you agree with Augustine, you can stop reading now (Chewning, Eby, and Roels, 1990, p. 4).

Unfortunately, Augustine's contributions to the thinking of work are frequently derided or misrepresented. Yet, arguably, Augustine's view of work and style of writing are reformed. In fact, rather than a negative example, Augustine may be more correctly perceived as a role model for Christian business faculty, one that we should pattern ourselves after. Augustine sees a significant antithesis between what God demands and what exists. He emphasizes God's providential plan, and he notes the importance of contemplation, reflection on God, and meeting the needs of the poor. Further, he writes with a style that not only heals and directs the body of Christ to do the work God expects, but also spreads the Gospel. Given that Christian business faculty teach that work, and business in particular, is a viable calling of God, it is useful to reexamine Augustine as a role model for us and our students.

Biography

Steve VanderVeen, Calvin College

Dr. VanderVeen is a Professor of Marketing at Calvin College. He earned his Ph.D. for the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC).

Brian E. Porter, Hope College

Dr. Porter is an Associate Professor of Management at Hope College. He earned his Ph.D. from Indiana University in Operations Management.