

“Augustine, Modernity, and the Recovery of True Education”

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In the Western world there is a rich tradition of the life of the mind. Much of the emphasis on the life of the mind in the West flows from our Christian inheritance, as seen in the biblical documents, and in key thinkers of the West (e.g., Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Calvin, among others). As the modern world has jettisoned its Christian intellectual inheritance, there has been a corresponding confusion about the value of the mind, and indeed, even of the possibility of knowledge at all, whether of God or of the created order.

In terms of reflection upon the nature of the intellectual life, I would suggest that one of the most pressing tasks for contemporary Christians would be the recovery and cultivation of the inextricable link between the Christian faith and the intellectual life, or the intellectual endeavor. In order to engage in such reflection, I take up the relationship of Christianity and the liberal arts, and in particular seek to draw from Augustine as we reflect upon this relationship.

There has always been a number of Christians who have voiced strong opposition to the liberal arts and who saw no real use for the liberal arts for Christians. The liberal arts were seen by many as pagan in origin, and were simply seen as not useful or appropriate for the Christian. Other Christians, like Augustine, affirmed that Christians could make a particular use of the liberal arts. Augustine argued that the liberal arts, particularly those arts dealing with language (primarily the trivium), were helpful in giving one the skills needed to interpret Scripture. Augustine makes this case for the liberal arts in his work, *On Christian Doctrine*. If this use should be circumspect and

cautious, so be it. Augustine borrows imagery from Exodus and the account of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Just as the Lord had told Israel that He would make the Egyptians favorably disposed towards the Israelites, and thus the Israelites would be able to "plunder the Egyptians," Augustine asserts in *On Christian Doctrine* that Christians should "plunder the Egyptians"—the "goods" being plundered are the liberal arts—and press them into service of particularly Christian goals and aspirations.¹ It is common to hear of three options on how Christians might relate to secular or pagan culture. Origen or Clement of Alexandria are often presented as exemplar of those who went too far in accommodating to secular thought, perhaps by accommodating Christian theology to platonic categories. Tertullian, with his maxim, "what does Athens have to do with Jerusalem,"² is usually presented as one who too quickly and radically rejected any meaningful use of, or interaction with, secular culture. Then, with the two radical (and "wrong") positions to set up the golden mean, Augustine is introduced as one who sought the balance between two wrong-headed schemes. Augustine, then, is held up as the progenitor of Christian schooling, of worldview thinking, of Christian higher education, etc. One can do worse in trying to get a hold on these sorts of issues than this type of three-fold schema. But a close reading of Augustine, particularly *On Christian Doctrine*, reveals that Augustine's affirmation of the liberal arts is cautious and circumspect. Yes, the arts can be helpful tools in preparation of interpreting Scripture, but one does not—at least in *On Christian Doctrine*—find the justification for the practice of reading pagan texts, for engaging in analysis of pagan texts, for the good of studying, analyzing, and reflecting upon various texts and upon the created order, with the goal being the

¹ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* II.60.

² Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* VII.

discovery of the unity of all truth under God, or simply for the joy of knowing God's world, or for the joy of intellectual discovery under God. It is striking when one reads Augustine to see how much like Tertullian he is on this point. There is much of Tertullian in Augustine, and the development of a more full-orbed defense of learning will have to wait development in Christian thought.³ In *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine's advocacy of the liberal arts is almost solely as preparation for interpreting Scripture. Augustine had planned a whole series on the liberal arts. Unfortunately, all we have are works on music and dialectic.

However, even if Augustine did not flesh out his approach to education in as full-fledged manner as we might like, I think the case can be made that the seeds for such a case are already fully present in Augustine's writings, and that therefore it is ultimately not a mistake to see Augustine—in a very real sense—as the spiritual forbear of a Christian understanding of the nature of liberal education. We may find ourselves drawn to later thinkers like Hugh of St. Victor (b. 1096), who could say that the goal of the liberal arts is “the true restoration of man,” and that each of the seven liberal arts were important in order to “restore God's image in us.”⁴ Hugh of St. Victor could also write: “Learn everything; later you will see that nothing is superfluous.”⁵ In this essay I will attempt to outline the ways in which Augustine might help contemporary Christians

³ For a similar reading of Augustine, see Kevin L. Hughes, “The ‘Arts Reputed Liberal’: Augustine on the Perils of Liberal Education,” in Kim Paffenroth and Kevin L. Hughes, ed. *Augustine and Liberal Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), 94-107. An entire volume of essays devoted to *On Christian Doctrine* addresses some of these same issues: Duane W.H. Arnold and Pamela Bright, ed., *De doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

⁴ Hugh of St. Victor, *The Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, translated by Roy J. Deferrari (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), Prologue, VI. Cf. Josef Pieper, *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 94.

⁵ Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, translated by Jerome Taylor (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1991), 6.3

recover true education, and I will do so by giving attention to three key themes: (1) Augustine and the cross; (2) Augustine and love; and (3) Augustine and the *telos* (or “end”) of true education.

Augustine, the Cross, and True Education

Augustine—like virtually all theologians—forged his thought in the crucible of conflict. Whether with the pagans—culminating in the *City of God*, or with Pelagius, in his understanding of grace seen in the pages of his voluminous anti-Pelagian writings, Augustine’s theology was hammered out via key conflicts of his day. Related to the topic at hand, Augustine wrestled with the doctrine of the Trinity in *De Trinitate*. We can set aside certain debates for the time being—such as whether *De Trinitate* was more of an exploratory work or a polemical work. We certainly affirm that Augustine was trying to explicate something he already believed—that God is one God in three persons. 1 Corinthians 13:12 serves as a type of theme verse for *De Trinitate*: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.” Thus, Augustine believes he will one day see this Trinitarian God face to face. The question is—what will this Trinity be like that I am going to one day see face to face? Thus, an eschatological vision serves as the impetus for Augustine’s theological deliberations and probings, and for the numerous analogies that arise through the volume. But something interesting happens on the way to the eschatological vision. Augustine spends virtually two (of fifteen) books (books/chapters four and thirteen) exploring at some length the Christian doctrine of the atonement. Why? Why in a book seeking to understand what God is like does Augustine apparently

“digress” into lengthy reflection upon the atonement? The answer is fascinating and provides us with one of Augustine’s most helpful insights into the nature of the intellectual life. Remember, Augustine’s goal is to explore what this God is like that he is going to see one day face to face. Augustine spends time on the atonement at least partially as a means to counteract the challenge of Neo-Platonism. The Neo-Platonists—generally—contended that it is possible to see God, or rise to God, by one’s own efforts. Having once been immersed in Neoplatonism (I realize it can be argued that Augustine never fully escaped Neoplatonism), Augustine seeks to argue for an explicitly Christ and gospel-centered understanding of the eschatological vision of God.⁶ Over against the neoplatonists, Augustine argued that one can only see God if one has had one’s mind purified by the cross. In the context of the cross of Christ, Augustine writes,

To sum up then we were incapable of grasping eternal things, and weighed down by the accumulated dirt of our sins, which we had collected by our love of temporal things, and which had become almost a natural growth on our mortal stock; so we needed purifying.⁷

And it is the cross which purifies us, so that we might one day see God face to face. Augustine writes that it would not be appropriate to "pass from being among the things that originated to eternal things, unless the eternal allied himself to us in our originated condition, and so provided us with a bridge to his eternity."⁸ Thus, the Word becomes flesh for our salvation, and through this fleshly Word we are led to see the eternal Word:

⁶ I am arguing here that Augustine, in *De Trinitate*, is engaging in a certain *anti*-Neoplatonic polemic. This general argument has been advanced by such prominent Augustine scholars as John Cavadini and Earl C. Muller. See John Cavadini, "The Structure and Intent of Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 103-23, and Earl C. Muller, "Rhetorical and Theological Issues in the Structuring of Augustine's *De Trinitate*," in *Studia Patristica XXVII*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 356-63. One can certainly argue that (1) Augustine at points engages in a certain polemic against Neoplatonism, while still conceding or even affirming that (2) Augustine labored under certain neoplatonic notions or ideas that may have influenced, or shaped, or marked him throughout most or all of his days.

⁷ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, translated by Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), IV.24.

⁸ *Ibid.*

"But there he was, manifest before their eyes; surely then it can only mean that he was offering the flesh which the Word had been made in the fullness of time as the object to receive our faith; but that the Word itself, *through whom all things had been made* (Jn. 1:3), was being kept for the contemplation in eternity of minds now purified through faith."⁹

E.C. Muller summarizes Augustine on this point: "This then is the key theological point which governs the rhetorical structure of the *De Trinitate*: *there can be no intellectus* [understanding] *apart from the concrete sacrificial act of Christ.*"¹⁰ In short, Augustine is trying to show that in order to be in the presence of God—in order to see God—one must go through the cross. As Muller argues, the reason Augustine seemingly "reverts" to a discussion of the death of Christ is because "*he refuses to deal with anything above the human mind without first purifying his mind in the sacrifice of Christ, the only way for sinful humans to obtain the eternal.*"¹¹ Muller goes as far as to argue that the death of Christ is virtually *the* key issue in the work, for what Augustine intended *De Trinitate* to be was "*an act of worship grounded in the one sacrifice of Christ.*"¹²

And here is perhaps one of Augustine's key contributions—often overlooked—to Christian discussions of the intellectual life. Augustine contends that one can only "get" to the knowledge of God via the cross. When this insight is taken, and extrapolation is made to apply it to every aspect of human knowledge, one has a powerful critique of autonomous human reasoning and intellectual inquiry—whether in its pre-modern or modern forms. That is, Augustine provides an example of, and a theology for, a gospel-

⁹ Ibid., IV.26.

¹⁰ Muller, "Rhetorical and Theological Issues," 359.

¹¹ Ibid., 362.

¹² Ibid., 363.

centered understanding of the intellectual life. To know is to know with a mind transformed by the gospel. To truly acquire knowledge—whether knowledge of God or knowledge of the created order—is to know via mind that has been transformed by the cross.¹³ It is important to note that I am here “extending” Augustine in hopes of bringing an Augustinian insight to bear on our own contemporary setting. Augustine’s main concern was to wrestle with who the Trinitarian God is that he already believes in due to Scripture and tradition. He has argued that we will one day see God face to face, and that to actually *see* God requires that our minds be cleansed by the cross itself. In affirming the centrality of the cross in a construal of the face-to-face vision, Augustine is distancing himself from any position (neoplatonist or otherwise) which would affirm the possibility of seeing God *apart from* the cross. My suggestion is that we might take Augustine’s basic insight (that seeing and knowing God—in the fuller sense—requires minds transformed by the cross), and *apply it to knowledge more generally*. It then might be argued that to know God and His world—at least to “know” or “see” it in a more truer

¹³ It is tempting here to “digress” on the relationship (or lack thereof) between Augustine and René Descartes. It is sometimes argued that Augustine is a type of forerunner of Descartes because Augustine, like Descartes, emphasizes the solitary and autonomous knower. Without glossing over whatever link there may indeed be between Augustine’s contribution to the western intellectual tradition and the emergence of Descartes, it should be noted that there is a rather stark difference between these two thinkers—a stark and significant difference. What is sometimes missed, I believe, in such accusations is the anthropological insights seen in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*. Augustine works through a number of Trinitarian analogies, most of which he abandons after he concludes they are ultimately not helpful. One *thinks*—in Book 14—that Augustine is going to be finally satisfied with the mind remembering, understanding and loving itself. This analogy seems to avoid some of the weaknesses of the others. But, Augustine shifts gears and says that this analogy is ultimately inadequate as well. The better analogy is that of the mind remembering, understanding, and loving *God*. And here we seek the stark contrast with Descartes. First, Augustine’s intellectual deliberations spring from a desire to understand what he already believes by faith—Augustine is seeking to explore what this God might be like that he is going to one day see face to face. This is quite unlike Descartes, whose impetus for inquiry seems to be fueled by a desire for certainty. Second, Augustine affirms a type of Trinitarian and relational anthropology—what it *truly* means to be human is not simply to “cogitate”; rather, to be human is to be related to the Triune God of Holy Scripture. To truly be human is not simply “to think,” but to reflect upon—to remember, understand, and love, God. If Descartes can say, *cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”), Augustine seems to say, *Deum amo, ergo sum* (“I love God, therefore I am”). For an extensive treatment of Augustine and his relationship to modernity and/or Descartes, see Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003). Cf. Jean Guitton, *The Modernity of St. Augustine* (Helicon Press, 1959).

and fuller sense—is to “see” or “know” God via a mind that has been transformed by the gospel.

Augustine, Love, and True Education

But Augustine brings something else to the intellectual endeavor which can help us think about an explicitly Christian understanding of the nature and meaning of education. Augustine, in *De Trinitate* and elsewhere, can argue that one must *love* what one *knows*. That is, the intellectual endeavor, the quest for knowledge, is not simply about the downloading of data. Rather, the intellectual endeavor is always—and without fail—related to one’s “loves,” or to the state of one’s heart. Thus, for Augustine the act of knowing is related to loving in that we really cannot *know* what we do not *love*. Thinking in Pauline and eschatological terms, we might say that one cannot *know* what one does not *love*, for it is only when we *love* something that we can begin to grasp what something is *really* like.¹⁴ Put differently, it is only when we love something or someone that we can begin to get a glimpse of who or what someone *really* is. Like the parent listening to a child clunk out notes on the piano, while the stranger hears only a discordant combination of notes, the parent hears—even within the combination of wrong notes, bad rhythm, and off-timing—what the child is *really* capable of, or at least what the parent *hopes* the child is capable of. That is, the parent—in a sense—has an eschatological vision of what might be, and in some cases, what might *really* be the case one day. For Augustine, only in *love* are we able to see—and hence *know*—what

¹⁴ My thinking along these lines was originally prompted, I believe, by A.J. Conyers. Conyers has discussed this idea in his essay, “Vocation and the Liberal Arts,” *Modern Age* (Spring 2003). Also see A.J. Conyers, *The Listening Heart: Vocation and the Crisis of Modern Culture* (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 2006).

something is *really* like, or at least of what someone or something is ultimately capable of being—or becoming. This kind of love, which loves—in a sense—someone for what they *will* be, is surely what Augustine has mind in *De Trinitate*, when speaking of God’s love for us: “It is through this faith that we come at last to sight, so that he may love us for actually being what he now loves us to that we might be; and that we may no more be what he now hates us for being, and what he urges and helps us not to want to be for ever.”¹⁵

But Augustine’s emphasis on love means that the liberal arts have an integrating and life-giving impetus often sorely lacking in the contemporary academy. That is, the liberal arts are a means of persons fulfilling their ultimate and true destiny. Again, some things (i.e., God) are to be “loved,” while all other things are to be “used”—i.e., viewed and related to in relation to that ultimate love. As Augustine writes, “Not all things, however, which are to be used are also to be loved, but only those which can be related to God together with ourselves in a kind of social companionship.”¹⁶ Rather than liberal education being construed as having simply a pragmatic or utilitarian end, Augustine can construe the intellectual life—the practice of the liberal arts—as a means by which man fulfills his ultimate destiny—to love. Perhaps this is why reading an Augustine is so much more *joyous* (at least for me) than reading so much of modern thought. Augustine construes the educational endeavor in explicitly love-drenched and love-driven terms. In reading an author closely, I am—in a sense—*loving* an author (even if deceased). In teaching well I am *loving* my students, for God might just see fit to use a phrase well-

¹⁵ Augustine, *De Trinitate* I.21.

¹⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, translated by Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), I.23. New City Press has decided to translate *De Doctrina Christiana* as *Teaching Christianity*. I have retained the traditional English title, “On Christian Doctrine” for clarity’s sake.

turned, or well-timed criticism as a means by which the student is shaped that much more into becoming all that they are destined to be.¹⁷

Interestingly, while Augustine is—in a sense—a part of the classical tradition, he also offers a radical re-structuring and re-construal—indeed, a radical *critique of*—classical culture. Reality is not simply to be “known,” it is to be *loved*—and in a proper and ordered sense. And in communicating, we are not simply trying to “persuade.” Rather, in communication—i.e., in *rhetoric*—we are trying to use words in such a way that words and signs find their proper *terminus*, or end, in the Triune God of Scripture. That is, while the non-Christian classical world would have been unable—ultimately—to provide a true and transcendent *telos* to which all language should be pointing and working, Augustine’s theological moorings provided him with a theological structure that allowed him to frame all use of language against its only ultimate end, the reality of loving and knowing the Triune God of Holy Scripture.

The genius of Augustine’s understanding of love as it is applied to the liberal arts is that the liberal arts come to be seen in a fundamentally *relational* way, and remind us that the learner or knower is never an “autonomous” reality, but that true learning—as centered in love and therefore in relationship—moves the knower outside of himself or herself. That is, in stark contradistinction to the modern notion of the “autonomous” knower, we come to see that we know *all the way down* as beings fundamentally *in* and *structured by* relationship. Given the centrality of love to all of Augustine’s thought, Augustine helps one to orient the intellectual quest against the larger backdrop of the love

¹⁷ Kevin L. Hughes points to the work of Paul Griffiths, who argues that the modern university works against *loving* an author and his or her writings, in that the contemporary scholar is often *using* and *manipulating* what he reads, not *reflecting upon* what he reads in hopes of becoming wise or virtuous. See Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

of God, and this emphasis on love can generate a construal of the intellectual life—of the meaning and purpose of true education—so often missing in the contemporary discussion.

Augustine, the End, and True Education

Additionally, Augustine—like all of the best of Christian thinkers—construes life in the world, including the endeavor of education, over against the believer’s ultimate destiny, the city of God. Thus there is a certain eschatological purpose—an ultimate end—which should serve as the ultimate goal of one’s intellectual deliberations. What the Christian faith “provides” is a way of thinking about all things—including the intellectual endeavor—in relation to ultimate purposes of causes. And if the Christian’s end is the vision of God, then man’s ultimate purpose is centered in joy and relationality. Thus, the “end” of education is not simply a job; it is not simply becoming a cog in the economy; it is not even a grander goal like the acquisition of knowledge. What Augustine—and the Christian tradition—provide is a way of thinking about education, about the life of the mind that orients the entire educational enterprise towards its ultimate goal, the vision and glory of God. Augustine can write in *Soliloquies* that faith, hope, and love, are necessary for the person to truly know, or see God. After affirming the importance of faith, hope, and love, Augustine can write: “the attentive view is now followed by the very vision of God, which is the end of looking; not because the power of beholding ceases, but because it has nothing further to which it can turn itself: and this is the truly perfect virtue, virtue arriving at its end, which is followed by the life of

blessedness.”¹⁸ As David Lyle Jeffrey has written, summarizing key insights from Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*, “the Christian student is one whose efforts always begin in desire to obey the Great Commandment: progressing in a process of patient and laborious refinement of insight, they end in obedience as well.”¹⁹ As noted earlier, Augustine makes a distinction between *enjoying* something and *using* something. Ultimately, only *God* is to be *enjoyed*, while all other things are to be *used*. But Augustine does not mean “use” in a mercenary or manipulative way. Rather, *all things* are to be related to *in their proper ways and in a way that moves one to love and relate to that which is the ultimate object of our affections—God*. Thus, for example Augustine can write, “there are some things which are meant to be enjoyed, others which are meant to be used, yet others which do both the enjoying and the using. Things that are to be enjoyed make us happy; things which are to be used help us on our way to happiness, providing us, so to say, with crutches and props for reaching the things that will make us happy, and enabling us to keep them.”²⁰ Augustine continues, “Enjoyment, after all, consists in clinging to something lovingly for its own sake, while use consists in referring what has come your way to what your love aims at obtaining, provided, that is, it deserves to be loved.”²¹

By way of illustration, it is worth looking at the term, *artes liberales*, or “liberal arts.”²² This term is still fairly commonplace, and many colleges even today refer to themselves as “liberal arts” colleges. In fact, in the contemporary academy, the liberal

¹⁸ Augustine, *Soliloquies* I.13 (NPNF, First Series, vol., 7, p. 541).

¹⁹ David Lyle Jeffrey, *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 87.

²⁰ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* I.3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I.4.

²² The best volume I know of on the history of the liberal arts is David L. Wagner, ed., *The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986).

arts have often either (1) been *effectively* abandoned—even if the term “liberal arts” is somehow used in a generally positive way within a particular institution, or (2) more explicitly rejected or abandoned in favor of professional or technical training. The *liberal* arts, as they were developed in the Christian West, were construed in contrast to the *servile* arts. The *liberal* arts were “liberal” in that they were the arts of the “free” person (the Latin *libera* means “free), in the sense of the person “free” from other responsibilities, and thus free to contemplate the good, true, and beautiful. The *servile* arts, on the other hand were the arts of the “practical” person. The *servile* arts were those arts that prepared one for certain trades or for business, for the life of being an “unfree” person. Thus, the liberal arts were *not* primarily “skills” or “techniques” that could be pressed immediately to service in the market place, or used to advanced quickly in the world of commerce, etc. Rather, the liberal arts were *first* and *foremost*—and intentionally—“useless.” They were not first and foremost for “use” at all. These arts were—in the temporal realm—seen as a way of forming a certain *kind* of person. And both Christian and non-Christians saw the liberal arts as a means to form wise and virtuous persons. In the eternal (or heavenly realm), Christians believed that the liberal arts indeed had an eternal purpose. The liberal arts were a way of training the mind, so that one could one day contemplate God in eternity. Thus, a *school* was a place of “leisure.” As Joseph Pieper, in his book *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, originally published in 1948, has written, the *school* was indeed a place where one should—for a time—be useless. As Pieper notes, the Latin term *schola*, from which we get our English word “school,” actually means “leisure” or “rest.” Thus, the “school” was a time to practice the art of leisure, or rest, or contemplation. Indeed, man’s *ultimate* purpose is

not to work. While work is a creation ordinance, and it is fundamentally a *good* thing, it may not be an *ultimate* thing. Thus, the liberal arts were a way of preparing for our ultimate “rest”—the eternal contemplation of, and vision of God. And, as Pieper notes, the term *intellectus* (“understanding” or “knowledge”) is more of a type of passive understanding, not an active or “working” understanding.²³

What are the implications of all this? Simply this, that in the pre-modern and Christian way of viewing education, or the intellectual life, education or learning had an ultimate goal—the contemplation or vision of God. Thus, in pre-modern times, Christians explicitly understood and construed the intellectual life in eschatological and heavenly terms. This is not to say that the intellectual endeavor was “only” preparatory, or that there was no purpose “here and now” for the intellectual life. Both the *trivium* (“verbal” arts—grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (“mathematical” arts—geometry, arithmetic, music, astronomy) were seen to form a certain *type* or *kind* of person—the wise, virtuous, and eloquent person. And even in this temporal realm this person was one who reflected upon—and was marked by attention to—truth, goodness, and beauty. But this person was at the very same time being prepared for his or her ultimate destiny—the vision and contemplation of God.

²³ This section owes much to Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 1998), especially chapter 2. See also Marion Montgomery, *The Truth of Things: Liberal Arts and the Recovery of Reality* (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 1999). We should note that in the New Testament there are other images besides “rest” or “contemplation” to describe the future state. The Bible speaks of worship, feasting, etc. I suspect that if these additional themes were teased out, they would *strengthen* rather than *hinder* the trajectory of this essay. The main point I am arguing is that in the best of Christian thought, education or learning was construed against the reality of our eternal destiny, which can be described in terms of seeing God “face to face” (1 Cor 13:12), worship (Rev 5:9; 7:9ff.), the wedding feast (Rev 19:9), etc.

Conclusion

It is certainly no surprise that in an age which has effectively rejected ultimate causes and transcendent destinies there should be a corresponding confusion about the nature and importance of the liberal arts, arts that became fully developed in the Christian west. For indeed, the liberal arts developed against the backdrop of the affirmation of eternal purposes, destinies, and goals. This eschatological backdrop was one of the key contributions of the Christian faith to the development of education. It is no surprise, then, that the liberal arts long ago lost any meaningful place in our colleges and universities. Even in Christian colleges and universities that use the term “liberal arts” there is often no real understanding of the historical development and purpose of the liberal arts. Even in “Education” schools and departments, the liberal arts often have no real lodging or welcome. If the liberal arts are to survive in our day, it will likely be because of small and/or creative schools and study centers, or the diligence of autodidacts who spend their evenings discovering, retrieving and reading the great books of western culture that have little meaningful place in the modern college and university. And indeed, it may be that only with the Augustinian emphasis on love and joy can such habits of reading be retrieved and reclaimed in our own day. For indeed, if one is only reading to get a job, to maneuver politically, etc., then one has lost the Christian vision of things that can provide the necessary impetus to read and learn. Alasdair MacIntyre quipped at the end of *After Virtue* that the barbarians were not at the gate, but were already inside the city, and in control. He further suggested that it might just take a new St. Benedict to help us see that the barbarians are in control.²⁴ The imagery is potent, and

²⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, revised edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 263.

not—on my view—overstated. But I wonder if we might need another St. Augustine as well, to provide help with: (1) the recovery of the centrality of the cross as crucial to true understanding, (2) the recovery of seeing the intellectual endeavor as a type of love—loving authors (whether living or dead), loving truth, goodness, and beauty, and loving God and neighbor, and seeing our love of the educational endeavor as a subset of the life of discipleship, and (3) the recovery of an eschatological vision that frames our intellectual endeavors, and gives them a transcendent purpose, hope, and goal. I suspect it will be an understanding inspired by the Augustinian vision of the liberal arts, of an Augustinian vision of the life of the mind, that will be necessary if we are to see any real, meaningful, and lasting recovery of true education in our day.