

# Meditations impart insight on education

By C.S. Morrissey  
Special to The B.C. Catholic

Ryan Topping's new book on St. Augustine is not so much a book about this famous saint as it is a treasury of insightful meditations on the state of higher education, especially Catholic higher education, and what the future of Catholic studies may be.

Topping starts off by pointing out that Augustine is relevant for all educators, not just Catholic ones, because his educational philosophy is universal. One need not share Augustine's religion, says Topping, to find his educational philosophy persuasive. This is because Augustine trains his thought on those universal aspects of experience recognizable by all.

Topping offers Augustine's introspective autobiography, the *Confessions*, as a prime example of the sort of engaging meditative practice accessible to any reader of good will.

True, Augustine thinks Christianity supersedes ancient philosophy as the best way of life, but it's the reason why he does so that is so important for Augustine's contribution to educational thought: his uncompromising search for truth. Augustine desires to be personally transparent before the truth, and to take truth alone as the standard against which to measure himself.

Topping points out that August-

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tine's impact on Western educational thought is due to his stress on the *unity* of all truth. Truth cannot contradict truth, and therefore real education must adopt this universal, catholic, integrating approach.

What characterizes Christianity is what, for Augustine, commends it as the best way of life: "the Christian welcomes truth wherever it may be found."

Pagan wise men therefore can learn something of the highest importance from Christianity. The possibility that claims of revelation are true is so serious a matter that a rigorous investigation of these claims give properly vital integrity to education.

Augustine's own conversion illustrates this lively educational truth.



Saint Augustine, by Philippe de Champaigne, in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. C.S. Morrissey writes that Ryan Topping's new book about the saint is a "treasury of insightful meditations."

In his own experience Augustine learned to embrace revelation as something "given" whose truth is se-

riously probed and considered.

Yet mere education is not enough for a Christian, because grace is re-

quired. Famously, Augustine treats this problem by a highly detailed examination of the many ways the human will is held captive and the human mind enslaved to the passions.

For this and many other similarly monumental contributions to theology, Augustine is justly revered (in the words of St. Jerome) as "the second founder of the faith."

Augustine knows, from classical tradition, that happiness is the result of virtue. Educational discussion about the nature of happiness is something publicly accessible and pursuable by all, since rational argument is by its nature publicly accessible.

Still, love, not wisdom, is the highest virtue for Augustine, even though he knows we cannot properly order our loves without God's help. Proper order, though, embraces an objective order, and talk about what this objective order of goods might be is rationally and publicly accessible and therefore a preeminent project of education.

Education thus needs to consider the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance) in an Augustinian spirit, as four forms of love. The genius of Augustine's vision of the human person may be found in his integral approach that sees that the "virtues are various forms of the love of God."

The ultimate aim of education is therefore highly complex, since it must embrace manifold personal dispositions. But the whole person is ordered quite simply by the love that best structures and unifies all the virtues. This love is the treasure that we are searching for.

Topping thus characterizes Augustine's view of the pursuit of happiness in general with a metaphor that I think works quite well as a mission statement for education in particular: "We are more like treasure hunters than expressionist painters."

Topping details the acute manner in which Augustine cautiously endorses the project of liberal education: namely, with *guarded optimism*. What remains salutary within such a project is its openness to universal truth: whatever reason can discover, that is a truth that grace can then elevate into a higher integrated view of the whole of truth.

If this sounds like an impractically elevated understanding of education, Topping reminds us that this is precisely why we need to read Augustine still today, to challenge our mediocre prejudices.

Augustine's passionate intensity for the fullness of being in the true, the good, and the beautiful exposes (by contrast) the sad fact that education today all too often hopes for too little. But high hopes are demanding and cannot be attained by shortcuts: "Truth brings joy, but joy requires knowledge."

All the more reason why we should turn again to Augustine today and defend the catholic ideal of liberal education in its etymological sense: drawing forth for our souls a knowledge of the truth that will set us free. Such treasure is a gift, not willed, but discovered.

C.S. Morrissey is an assistant professor of philosophy at Redeemer Pacific College. □

## Letters to the Editor

### Shame on those bishops

Re: "Attendance plummets at Alberta's March for Life" in the May 23 issue.

Shame on the bishops of Alberta for their decision not to participate in the pro-life march this year. They, by their short sightedness, have given nominal pro-lifers an excuse not to turn out for this cause.

They also must have given great joy to the pro-abortion movement. There is nothing they like better than to see open dissension in the pro-life ranks; and of course they certainly do not want people to see the truth of abortion.

Abortion will not end until the victims are identified and seen by all.

Pray for our bishops; they can be wrong.

Carol Gray  
Chilliwack

### Latin helps faith

Regarding "Universae Ecclesiae":

I welcome Pope Benedict XVI's counter-revolution aimed at restoring the Latin Mass. Vatican II never called for the elimination of Latin. The Pope's decision to have it taught in all seminaries is meant to foster a more comprehensive and profound understanding of the Church's liturgy.

Latin is the official language of the Catholic Church. It is a "dead" language that prevents Church liberals from translating words into the vernacular using ambiguous and inclusive terms that undermine Church doctrine.

The universality of Latin also makes it conducive to all believers experiencing more fully the mystery of the Mass. It im-

bues a heightened reverence and sense of the sacred. It compliments well the Latin rite's traditional Gregorian chant, with its moving meditative cadence that touches the depths of the soul.

The Latin Mass is also more uniform and consistently Catholic in its theological and Christian-cultural aspects. The Pope has previously said, for example, how in the new Mass the "turning of the priest toward the people no longer opens out on what lies ahead and above [but] has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle."

Both the priest and people should be facing east. The Pope also prefers that all people receive Holy Communion kneeling and on their tongue, a staple of the Latin Mass.



Carmelite Father Casimir Borcz elevates the chalice during a Tridentine Mass at the Carmelite monastery in Munster, Ind.

The Eucharist is the all-encompassing source and summit of Christian life. A wider implementation of the Latin Mass will no doubt be an effective means of preserving the Church's faith and identity while at the same time allowing her to carry out her mission of evangelization.

I hope the Pope's new directive will encourage bishops throughout the world actively and aggressively to promote the Latin Mass.

Paul Kokoski  
Hamilton, Ont.

### Respect, respectfully

Let's stop the talking in church, unless demanded by necessity. Some people talk, even laugh out loud, before, during, and after Mass.

There are others who are praying, or want to, before and after Mass, respectfully in the Presence of God Himself in the tabernacle.

When did it become okay to talk in church?

Marlene Vanderhoek  
Abbotsford

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