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Educating for Wisdom

Theological Studies as a Spiritual Exercise

Abstract: Augustine set the goal of human life as knowing, loving, and enjoying God forever. He also set the practical task of theology as knowledge of God seeking the wisdom of God. Theology is to enable wisdom. The fourfold curriculum now focuses primarily on mastering information and technical ministerial skills. If Augustine is correct, however, the various theological subdisciplines, now generally divided into guilds, share a sacred calling that transcends their various subject matters and methods. If teaching, scholarship, and learning aim at wisdom, then teachers, scholars, and students pursue a common goal. Theological students want to become wise in God, and their teachers are there to help them. Informing students about history, literary tropes, various construals of doctrines, and the skills of preaching and counseling is a necessary but preliminary step in helping students grow spiritually.

Augustine of Hippo set Latin-speaking Christianity to believing that the purpose of human life is to know, love, and enjoy God as much as possible in this life now and perfectly and forever in heaven.[1] Enjoying God is both a calling and a reward. Many centuries later, Calvinists revised that vision to argue that the purpose of human life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.[2] The shift from loving to glorifying God is significant, but that cannot detain us here.

Augustine set the goal not only of the Christian life but also of the theological endeavor that is to abet that goal. Theology is not an end in itself but a

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1. His earliest extant work establishes the point. "The Happy Life" concludes, "This is the complete satisfaction of souls, that is, the happy life: to know precisely and perfectly Him through whom you are led into the truth, the nature of the truth you enjoy, and the bond [of love] that connects you with the Supreme Measure!" Augustine, "The Happy Life," in *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings*, ed. Mary T. Clark, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 193.

2. Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms, question 1.

means of enabling Christians to achieve their God-given calling. The *De Trinitate*, usually considered Augustine's greatest dogmatic work, embodied this theological endeavor. Its fifteen books are structured as a chiasma, two arms connected by a hinge (book 8), with each book of the first part corresponding to each book of the second. Both parts portray a form of knowledge. Reading left to right, the left arm of the chiasma recounts history or *scientia*, temporal knowledge in all its forms needed for daily life. The right arm recounts the wisdom that knowledge of the first part aims for, namely, unchanging knowledge of truth.[3] For Augustine, information about God (he has Scripture in mind here) is not an end in itself but a means to wisdom, the very truth that is God. Knowing about God through the scriptural narrative is for the sake of becoming wise, good, and beautiful in God. *Scientia* serves *sapientia*. The biblical story that informs the reader about the activities of God is not salvific in its own right but only as it edifies the soul, shaping believers into the goodness, wisdom, and beauty that are the truth of God.[4]

These two notions—the purpose of human life and the theological endeavor—are not separable but hierarchically linked. Theology is to enable people to advance in the spiritual life. Spiritual advancement is the driving force behind all of Augustine's works. Theories about God and the things of God (i.e., doctrines) are important and wanted, but they are to a further end: to enable people to know, love, and enjoy God better and thereby to flourish. For Augustine, as for all Christian theologians until modernity, knowledge of God and the works of God is for our growth in the wisdom of God. Information about the doctrines and the history of debates about them become theological education when the learner grows in wisdom from learning them.

Theoretical and Practical Theology

Western theology is footnotes to Augustine. On his terms, theology is a spiritual exercise, not a scientific discipline undertaken for the sake of the care of souls beginning with himself. Contemporary theological studies have strayed

3. The pattern repeats within the right arm of the grand chiasma. Books 9–11 attempt to construct the image of God in us but fail, while books 13–15 repair and perfect that image. Book 12 is the hinge of the second chiasma that delineates both the lower and the higher forms of knowledge as both necessary for a fruitful life.

4. Calvin seems to understand this: "For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 79.

so far from this norm that "spirituality" as yet another academic field, "spiritual formation" as another set of skills for ministerial students to master, and "spiritual direction" as an extracurricular activity must now be added to theological curricula alongside all the others. Indeed, so silenced is the sapiential calling of biblical studies, history, theology, ethics, and the rest that the addition of the texts and spiritual practices is of little concern to those in "other fields." Augustine would be appalled if he knew of this development. The way we conduct our theological business today usually misses his point that all theological endeavor, all theological teaching and reflection, is to enable learners to know, love, and enjoy God better.

A recent article by Serene Jones discloses the depth of the problem. She makes painfully clear just how far academic theology has strayed from its practical task. "Practical Theology in Two Modes" is an admission that systematic theology needs practical theology by its side as a separate field of study, although she knows that "everything we do in the divinity school is practical; it's about faith and people's lives."[5]

She accepts the divisions of the nineteenth-century theological encyclopedia from which, as a systematic theologian, she is cut off and lacks the "habits of mind" to help students think theologically about life events. This hit home to her when she felt inadequate to help her students deal with the Columbine High School shootings theologically and called her pastoral counseling colleague to help her. Her candor is admirable.

Jones opens the article with the admission that all theological education is or ought to be practical and says that "I have defined myself as a very practical systematic theologian." Nevertheless, what that seems to mean is that she wants to be "the intellectual companion of those who do practical theology in the more focused sense."[6] She does practical theology in a very broad manner, "helping students understand the complex terrain of their belief systems and faith commitments."[7] The practicality of systematic theology is twofold, then. Primarily it is teaching the protocols of the modern discipline: the major doctrinal loci, various perspectives on each doctrine, and the rules of working with doctrines through the conventional rubrics of the academic discipline with its particular thought-patterns that socialize students into current academic practices.

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5. Serene Jones, "Practical Theology in Two Modes," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 195.
6. Ibid., 197.
7. Ibid., 196.

Secondarily, Jones is interested in enabling the rules of doctrines to apply to the lives of her students: "Doctrines only take on life when they settle into the stuff of faith's ongoing, practical unfolding."[8] Therefore, she tries to offer "on-the-ground" versions of doctrines, as these will help ministerial students prepare for funerals, sermons, and counseling sessions in parish ministry. All this explains what Jones means by being an intellectual companion of her colleagues in practical theology. Understanding the doctrines delineated by seventeenth-century Protestant dogmatics should help parish clergy perform their pastoral duties with proper theological undergirding.

Cooperative undertakings are to be commended in theological schools. Students appreciate points of contact among their classes so that their education is not quite so choppy. None of this however, has anything to do with Augustine's point that the theological endeavor is a spiritual exercise for the sake of a wise and happy life in God.

Accounts of Wisdom

I am arguing that the theological endeavor, both as scholarship and as teaching, should be oriented toward wisdom—that is, the truth of God Christianly understood—and that the strategies of both scholarship and teaching should be aimed at that pedagogical end. Let us, then, next examine the wisdom to which theological education points.

Wisdom is perennially interesting. All agree that living wisely makes for a better life. Aristotle distinguished such excellence from cleverness, a natural disposition that humans share with animals. That is not wisdom, however. Cleverness moves toward wisdom when intelligence, not instinct, guides deliberation about action. Not only that, but to be excellent the disposition must be both toward and accompanied by "the correct prescription," which I take to mean a morally good purpose.[9] Wisdom correctly prescribes action in particular contexts. To be an excellent person is to have one's character both correctly oriented and correctly motivated. Such a person is wise.

John Kekes, a contemporary secular moral philosopher, thinks about wisdom in the Aristotelian mode. He recasts Aristotle's distinction between the cleverness that relies upon natural inclinations and wisdom that guides such inclinations intelligently as two forms of knowledge: descriptive and

8 Ibid, 201

9 Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, ed Sarah Broadie, trans Christopher Rowe (New York Oxford University Press, 2002), 188-9

interpretive. The former bases action on information gained from common human experience. The latter is a wise and discerning use of basic information and common assumptions about life to a good end. Interpreting information wisely is both broad and deep. It both recognizes various contexts in which virtuous action would call on different strengths and goes deeply into the matter by understanding human nature and oneself well for the sake of an enduringly meaningful life. Wisdom, for Kekes, is corrective. Because the wise can limit their striving to what is realistically possible, they can aim themselves toward a significant life and away from a trivial one by means of good judgment: "Wisdom is to arrange one's life so as to aim to satisfy those wants that accord with [one's] ideals, while paying due regard to human limitations and possibilities in general, and [one's] own limitations and possibilities in particular."[10] In short, wisdom is the ability to guide one's life away from banality and toward deep meaningfulness based on carefully chosen priorities.

What Aristotle called human excellence, current psychological research calls "optimality." Influenced by Kekes, Paul B. Baltes and his associates have been spearheading the effort to develop a psychological theory of wisdom that can be identified across cultures. Here, wisdom is expertise at life under difficult circumstances. Although few people actually become wise, wisdom can be identified, measured, and perhaps even taught. "From a metaheuristic perspective," they write, "a wise person has available an elaborate, effective, flexible, and orchestrated system of subheuristics in the domain of the fundamental pragmatics of life and uses this system as a repertoire to reach positive and avoid negative outcomes."[11] By "heuristic," the authors mean an organized strategy for seeking and using information in a certain set of situations. Such orchestration enables judgment on how and to what extent available information should be taken into account when making decisions as well as, of course, recognizing when insufficient information is available for rendering an informed judgment. A metaheuristic orchestrates multiple strategies (subheuristics) into a master strategy for using the various substrategies needed when selecting among problems to deal with "in the fundamental pragmatics of life."[12] As a psychological theory, wisdom is a well-developed and

10 John Kekes, "Wisdom," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1983) 285

11 Paul B Baltes, Judith Glueck, and Ute Kunzmann, "Wisdom Its Structure and Function in Regulating Successful Life Span Development," in *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, ed C R Snyder and Shane J Lopez (New York Oxford University Press, 2002), 339

12 Ibid , 338

expertly deployed set of strategies for coping with life—indeed, for living an effective life.

From a different angle, biblical wisdom literature, concentrated in Proverbs, contrasts wisdom with folly (both personified as alluring women). Following Lady Wisdom's ways enables flourishing of self, family, clan, and community. Succumbing to Lady Folly leads to disaster on all fronts. Proverbs has no doubt that wisdom can be cultivated if it is taught to the young by their respected elders and leaders who not only articulate appropriate adages but model wisdom both personally and pedagogically through literary constructions.

Baltes and colleagues understand the social dimension of the concept of wisdom they are studying and the importance of social interaction for the formation of values for the common good. Yet they are somewhat on the defensive against skeptics who see wisdom as self-seeking and need to assert that wisdom "is also used for the well-being of others," but they do not seem to think that this is deeper than giving good advice.[13] Proverbs's point of departure is, of course, much different. Wisdom and knowledge begin with reverence for the Lord (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33). Community welfare is the purpose of an excellent life. Here wisdom is not a set of coping skills by means of which one wends one's way through the changes and chances of life in order to master them or advances oneself by means of them. Rather, wisdom is a singular pattern of virtuous living that enables the family and the village to flourish. The character strengths that Proverbs commends include intelligence, dedication to one's appointed tasks, devotion to family, self-discipline (especially with regard to sex and speech), openness to correction, and the art of discretion.

Proverbs provides advice for community welfare. It does not discourage by pointing to how difficult these life-patterns are to sustain, nor does it assume that one is striving to become something that most people cannot or at least do not achieve. Proverbial wisdom is simply life lived from reverence to God, and the assumption is that all members of the community are doing the same. It is assumed that all can live this way, rather than being surprised that anyone can achieve it at all, as the modern psychological research seems to suggest. For Proverbs, reverent living before the awesomeness of God means being a good citizen. Being an excellent parent, spouse, child, worker, landowner, or king exemplifies fine citizenship. Wisdom is not primarily effective life-management skills but effective community participation. Living wisely does

13. Ibid., 341.

not require attending to one's own life and then another's. Being an excellent person is to focus on the well-being of the community. The notion of individual advancement was not on their monitor. Had the biblical sages gone further into the mechanisms by which wisdom functions, they might have said that identifying the needs of the social context one finds oneself in and responsibly discerning the best course of action to meet the needs of all those within the reach of that setting stimulate careful judgment and decision making. Starting to think about wisdom from the claim of God on one's life as a member of the community of God eliminates the need wisdom researchers have to justify their endeavor as not self-centered.

Wisdom according to Augustine

With both atheological and theological concepts of wisdom in view, we return to Augustine. For him as for most of the ancient world, wisdom is participation in eternal truth. He struggled to distinguish *scientia* from *sapientia* at the end of book 12 of *De Trinitate* using the accepted distinctions between action that is about temporal things and contemplation that is about eternal things.[14] The second half of the binary opposition is always superior to the first. A central text here is Job 28:28: "Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." While the parallelism of the Hebrew text probably intends the two phrases to read as synonyms, Augustine reads them as opposites. Job, like Proverbs, takes awesome reverence for the Lord to be wisdom, and Augustine agrees. His independent move is to read "understanding" (*b'nh*; *intellegentia* in the Vulgate) as *scientia*. Based on this reading, revering the Lord is contemplation, while abstaining from evil belongs to the temporal realm of action, although it does not define it.

He sustains the distinction by reflecting on 1 John 3:2: "What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." He continues:

> As I see it, a word about these and suchlike things is a word of wisdom. To abstain from evil things, however, which Job called knowledge, is without doubt a matter of temporal things, because it is in terms of time that we are in the midst of evils, which we should abstain from in order to arrive at those eternal good things. Thus anything that we do sagaciously, courageously, moderately, and justly belongs to this knowledge

14. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 334-7.

> or discipline with which our activity sets about avoiding evil and seeking good; and so does whatever historical knowledge we gather for the sake of examples to be avoided or imitated and for the sake of the necessary information about anything at all that has been provided for our use.[15]

This passage seems to suggest that the four virtues listed belong to the temporal side of the binary. However, he immediately goes on to say that a word from Scripture about things to be avoided is a word of knowledge, while the word of wisdom is about things that "always had the same being and always will have it." Knowledge of the temporal sort cannot be allowed to impede the way to wisdom by distracting the seeker from the higher things. These are not localized in space because they are not bodies but ideas. However, they are available to the mind, as they are localized in events yet "without themselves being localized." That is, they are expressed in the actions of embodied intelligences but not circumscribed thereby. They appear in "movements passing through time that stand unmeasurable in time; these too [are] also intelligible, of course, not sensible." That is, these ideas or forms in the mind of God appear in but are not contained by local actions or objects. To find wisdom, one must extract the eternal ideas from the movements and places as they pass through them. One must snatch the eternal form when it becomes visible in an action or event and store it in memory so that it can be recognized the next time it passes by in another localization. As the scent of it stays in memory, "by recollection [the mind] will be able somehow to chew this in the cud and transfer what it has learnt into its stock of learning."[16]

Augustine was not more specific than this about the content of wisdom. However, it is reasonable to assume that if the way to wisdom is abstracting eternal goods from temporal events, living wisely in the temporal life gives voice to these goods in one's actions. Given that eternal knowledge must be plucked from instances in which good things become visible, it is not inappropriate to suggest that sagacity, courage, moderation, and justice as pure ideas that are the good are what can be abstracted from events that express them. These values and virtues are appropriate and function to the same good end across time and culture. They may lodge in the mind of God, yet the wise make them visible momentarily in their actions. The work of abstracting the goods from passing events, storing them in memory, and taking them out to

15. Ibid., 334.
16. Ibid., 335.

use them is the mental activity of contemplation. We might call it discerning judgment.

Another important verse that corroborates his distinction is 1 Cor 12:8: "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit." From this, Augustine concludes that wisdom is "the intellectual cognizance of eternal things" and knowledge is "the rational cognizance of temporal things."[17]

The above is a labored bit of reading. To put his argument more plainly, it seems that wisdom, in and of itself, is a comely set of ideas that lodge in the divine mind and that become visible in excellent human actions of the wise. In practice, acting according to them is the fine way of doing things to good purpose so that these eternal goods that reside in the divine mind may shine forth in the world. To live wisely is to be obedient to one's calling.

While this reading of the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia* seems to be reasonable, Augustine's explanation of *scientia* remains unclear. He concludes that *scientia* is "rational cognizance of temporal things" needed for the management of daily life (close to Baltes's view of wisdom as life-management skills). It is what we usually mean by knowledge and science. We benefit from it and we need it. Augustine's interpretation of the Job verse, however, contrasts *sapientia* with turning from evil. Presumably, strong life-management skills do advance the quality of one's life, and wisdom in Kekes's and Baltes's sense does enable one to turn from or avoid evil. Still, Augustine fails to explain here the subtlety of *scientia* that both makes life go well and is a first step toward wisdom by turning from evil. He has a strong and positive place for the active life, although it remains inferior to cultivating wisdom. Book 13 of *De Trinitate* elaborates it as the daily life of the faithful believer, although Augustine did not resolve this unclarity. If this reading of Augustine's doctrine of wisdom is feasible, we can locate it both in relation to the other theories considered and then to theological education.

Augustine's separation of *scientia* from *sapientia* resembles Aristotle's separation of cleverness from wisdom and Kekes's separation of descriptive from interpretive knowledge. In both cases the higher form requires what the ancients call contemplation and what Kekes explores as self-knowledge—broad consideration of the variety of settings in which various options for acting virtuously arise, and deep consideration of human nature and the human condition.

17. Ibid., 336.

Although Augustine does not name good judgment specifically, turning from evil and attaching oneself to the eternal things of God clearly requires good judgment and strong character. Kekes and Augustine also agree that the wise commit themselves to a set of ideals that are prioritized for consistent patterns of decision. Perhaps both would agree that wisdom is a corrective also. For Kekes, death is the common understanding that casts life in serious terms, while for Augustine God does that.

While Kekes and Augustine share common views on wisdom, because it separates one from a shallow, trivial life, Augustine shares less with the research psychologists who define wisdom as good coping mechanisms for an optimal life. Perhaps Augustine would consign what they are studying to *scientia*. That would be fine and good with him, but he would not call it *sapientia.*

Augustine invites us into the mind of God, where pure beauty, truth, and goodness dwell. His is a soteriology of ascent. The soul can be lifted up into the truth that is God, taste divine wisdom in the body of the incarnate Christ, and transcend the mere cleverness of worldly wisdom that enables one simply to get ahead. The wisdom of God is wise enough not to be content with good life skills, as valuable as they are. It reaches beyond the ability to be successful at life to the goodness and righteousness that adorn the soul simply for the sake of enjoying their beauty. Perhaps this is the point at which Christian wisdom parts company with secular psychological theories of wisdom. Christian wisdom longs to become divinely beautiful, just, discerning, and good simply for the sake of enjoying being so, to be in a place where striving to become morally beautiful ceases and one simply is.

Teaching for the Sake of Wisdom

Augustine would place all theological studies in his *scientia-sapientia* framework. He would contend that the purpose of theological study is *sapientia*, with his *De Trinitate* as the perfect example of how theological scholarship and education should proceed. Its first half is *scientia.* It is for the sake of the *sapientia* of the second half within which there is a recurrence of the *scientia-sapientia* pattern.

While the pattern was comfortable for him, it may not be for us—as Serene Jones admits when she writes that she lacks the habits of mind to take her students from what we now see is *scientia* to *sapientia.* Augustine did not address the question of how to move from one to the other that is so awkward for us, although it was all obvious to him. He readily saw what we would call the subtext or the deep grammar that brought the text alive.

If theological education is to be oriented toward the wisdom of God, teachers of theological studies must ask themselves: Can Christian wisdom be identified?[18] If so, how does it differ from other visions of wisdom? Can it be cultivated? If so, is it a private or communal affair? Is wisdom a spirit of life that can be caught from others, or it is something that grows in those able to learn from experience? Can it be taught through adages and pithy maxims as Proverbs holds, or does it come from contemplation, from individual reflection on common human experience, as Kekes seems to think?

If theology is to wisdom, to practice and teach theology is to join the conversation of those who have sought the wisdom of God over millennia, knowing that we are privileged to stand among a great crowd of witnesses to this noble endeavor. If we can learn what they have to teach—that is, if they can hand on what they have gleaned as well as warn us of the cul-de-sacs into which they wandered, their labor in the vineyard will not have been in vain. Our task is not to stand on their shoulders that we may see farther; rather, it is to sit at their feet and pray that we may be filled as they were.

These are questions that those who populate various positions within theological education may wish to consider. If enabling students to pursue the wisdom of God is a chief pedagogical goal, it may well take various forms depending on where one sits in a theological school. As a theology teacher, I will address the question through texts that I love. Biblical studies, history, homiletics, pastoral care and counseling, liturgics, and Christian education and formation may extract the wisdom of God from different texts and subject matter using different styles. Although they will work through different texts and time periods, they will share a common task and goal with one another and with the deans, the chaplain, the school psychologist, and all others who work with students. Some will ask after the wisdom of God through texts, others through the play of doctrines, others from Christianity's mistakes, some by seeking wisdom that the past has to teach us, others by helping students meet what is beyond their comfort zone, still others by helping students come to terms with their failures, limitations, and liabilities. They all are engaged in the same enterprise.

Quite before clarity about whether and if so how wisdom may be taught or caught, visualized or imitated, teachers return to their classrooms with too much to impart in too little time. Adding wisdom to the list of instructional

18 David Ford, *Christian Wisdom Desiring God and Learning in Love*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, 16 (Cambridge, New York Cambridge University Press, 2007)

objectives may be heard as simply another burden to be shouldered unless it proves to be the foundation for presenting information, scouring texts, and reframing history altogether.

Approaching teaching and scholarship as spiritual disciplines begins for the theological educator when she realizes that students are more interested in nurturing their life in God than in the teacher's dexterity at mastering the material, insight as to its perspicacity, and talent for reframing it for a fresh generation of students. These may be scintillating, but they distract the student from her goal. Students want to become wise in God—that is, they want to know, love, and enjoy God better. The teacher's task is to step aside and enable the texts, history, ideas, practices, and failings of the Christian tradition to help the student. On the sapiential model of theology, the teacher is a midwife whose task is not to work out problems of textual criticism, doctrinal nicety, or disciplinary method for the students and leave them to figure out what to do with the results. Those endeavors may engage scholars who are either so advanced spiritually that they can afford to entertain such academic pursuits or who are not seeking their own spiritual nourishment. The teacher's and the spiritually engaged scholar's task is to help the student or the reader grasp the spiritual point of the exercise.

In the classroom, simply inviting students to reflect together on the moral and spiritual implications of the information that they read will suffice. They can help one another. The teacher does not have to have this all worked out; perhaps that is preferable. One task of theological education is to enable students to take responsibility for their own spiritual life. Not only that, but ministerial students must learn to help others tend to their spiritual lives, and learning to do that through their coursework is key to developing that sensibility.

With Serene Jones, I work with doctrines and the texts that give voice to their various forms. With her also, I want the doctrines and texts to work for my students. To do this I ask what the doctrine or the text is hoping to do with, to, or for the one encountering the concept or reading the text. Where in the student's soul does the concept or the author's articulation of the doctrine land, and what might be expected to happen when it does? How will this concept or theme bring wisdom—often via dissonance—to the student who is paying attention? The basic question is what do the doctrines do? Both negative and positive responses are to be encouraged. Wisdom may be forthcoming more from what disturbs than from what encourages.

On a nonsapiential view of theological education, the ideas and texts do what Jones expects them to do: inform students about modern protocols for

talking about doctrines. She "give[s] [students] the glasses they need to see what is there already and a well-honed calculus for calibrating the weight of what they already know to be true."[19] She is following the standard "faith seeking understanding" model of theology popularized by Anselm of Canterbury. Augustine coined the phrase but did not offer it as a definition of the task of professional theology as Anselm seems to. Augustine's own work suggests that knowledge seeking wisdom is what he believed theology is about.

Here, of course, the teacher is on delicate ground. While the students come wanting to grow into God, the sagacious teacher knows that each student is different and that depending on preparation, temperament, interest, social location, and theological orientation, the same material will affect students differently. There is no controlling such things, but—at least on Augustine's terms—the teacher is obligated to see the project through. Simply dumping information into the student and then leaving her to figure out what it means on her own is pedagogically irresponsible in theology that is oriented to the well-being of learners in their life with God. The teacher must gently lead on, casting a pebble into a pond of the student's soul and watching its ripples, trusting that the Holy Spirit will educate the students.

An opposite danger for the teacher arises at this point. Let us assume that the teacher can identify at least a rendition of the wisdom that the material means to impart, having pondered it longer than the students have. For example, the doctrine of the incarnation teaches that God cherishes human life in all its ambiguity and works through it to bring it to the height of excellence. Alternatively, the doctrine of the incarnation teaches that God, like every wise parent, struggles between mercy and justice to determine which strategy will most help confused children. Or the doctrine of the incarnation teaches that only God can placate God's wrath and that nothing we can do can make up for the wrong we have done to God. The danger is that the teacher may anticipate the outcome of her teaching and try to control it. The challenge is first to help students realize that what they want is the wisdom the subject matter offers and then to help them tease out what that wisdom is and the shape it takes in this particular subject matter. The skill of teaching is to empower students to extract the wisdom they need from the material they study, just as Augustine taught that the task of the believer is to pluck the wisdom of God from its localization in actions and events.

19. Jones, "Practical Theology in Two Modes," 200.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that being a theological teacher is a heavy responsibility. The teacher is responsible for conveying the wisdom of the Christian tradition, including the false steps that took it in harmful pathways. Some teachers will be inclined to promote triumphalist readings of the texts and Christian history that they control. Others will be eager to point out Christianity's weaker moments in order to equip students to avoid repeating past mistakes. Both seek to bring students and those scholars who read their academic contributions to reflect deeply on the impact that Christianity's texts, ideas, history, and practices will have on individuals and communities.

A sapiential orientation to theological education transgresses disciplinary and subdisciplinary boundaries. Seeking the wisdom of God for the welfare of students and those who read theological scholarship is a common interest whereby colleagues divided into disciplinary guilds can unite in a common project that requires each area of expertise in the pursuit of the spiritual well-being of students and colleagues alike. In Christian theological institutions, the goal is to support others in their life in Christ. Support sometimes takes the form of encouragement but at other times will call for judgment to be offered in Christian love. A sapiential orientation to theological studies enables colleagues in different divisions of the nineteenth-century curriculum to think of themselves as a symphony orchestra where each instrument contributes to the harmonious sound that the composer calls forth.