

Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*

I.i.1. “Great art thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is thy power, and infinite is thy wisdom.”⁶ And man desires to praise thee, for he is a part of thy creation; he bears his mortality about with him and carries the evidence of his sin and the proof that thou dost resist the proud. Still he desires to praise thee, this man who is only a small part of thy creation. Thou hast prompted him, that he should delight to praise thee, for thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee.

III.iv.7. In the ordinary course of study I came upon a certain book of Cicero’s, whose language almost all admire, though not his heart. This particular book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy and was called *Hortensius*. Now it was this book which quite definitely changed my whole attitude and turned my prayers toward thee, O Lord, and gave me new hope and new desires. Suddenly every vain hope became worthless to me, and with an incredible warmth of heart I yearned for an immortality of wisdom and began now to arise that I might return to thee. . . . Only this checked my ardor: that the name of Christ was not in it.

III.v.9. I resolved, therefore, to direct my mind to the Holy Scriptures, that I might see what they were. . . . When I then turned toward the Scriptures, they appeared to me to be quite unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Tully. For my inflated pride was repelled by their style, nor could the sharpness of my wit penetrate their inner meaning.

III.vi.10. Thus I fell among men [the Manicheans], delirious in their pride, carnal and voluble, whose mouths were the snares of the devil--a trap made out of a mixture of the syllables of thy name and the names of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Paraclete.

IV.vii.12. [after his best friend suddenly dies] But when my soul left off weeping, a heavy burden of misery weighed me down. It should have been raised up to thee, O Lord, for thee to lighten and to lift. This I knew, but I was neither willing nor able to do; especially since, in my thoughts of thee, thou wast not thyself but only an empty phantasm. Thus my error was my god. If I tried to cast off my burden on this phantasm, that it might find rest there, it sank through the vacuum and came rushing down again upon me.

V.x.19 And when I desired to meditate on my God, I did not know what to think of but a huge extended body--for what did not have bodily extension did not seem to me to exist--and this was the greatest and almost the sole cause of my unavoidable errors.

VI.iv.6. And I listened with delight to Ambrose, in his sermons to the people, often recommending this text most diligently as a rule: “The letter kills, but the spirit gives life,” while at the same time he drew aside the mystic veil and opened to view the spiritual meaning of what seemed to teach perverse doctrine if it were taken according to the letter.

VII.ix.13. And first of all, . . . thou didst procure for me, through one inflated with the most monstrous pride, certain books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin.

VII.x.16. And being admonished by these books to return into myself, I entered into my inward soul, guided by thee. This I could do because thou wast my helper. And I entered, and with the

eye of my soul--such as it was--saw above the same eye of my soul and above my mind the Immutable Light. It was not the common light, which all flesh can see; nor was it simply a greater one of the same sort, as if the light of day were to grow brighter and brighter, and flood all space. It was not like that light, but different, yea, very different from all earthly light whatever. Nor was it above my mind in the same way as oil is above water, or heaven above earth, but it was higher, because it made me, and I was below it, because I was made by it. He who knows the Truth knows that Light, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it, O Eternal Truth and True Love and Beloved Eternity! Thou art my God, to whom I sigh both night and day. When I first knew thee, thou didst lift me up, that I might see that there was something to be seen, though I was not yet fit to see it. And thou didst beat back the weakness of my sight, shining forth upon me thy dazzling beams of light, and I trembled with love and fear. I realized that I was far away from thee in the land of unlikeness, as if I heard thy voice from on high: "I am the food of strong men; grow and you shall feed on me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh into yourself, but you shall be changed into my likeness."

VII.xvii.23. And I marveled that I now loved thee, and no phantasm in thy stead, and yet I was not stable enough to enjoy my God steadily. Instead I was transported to thee by thy beauty, and then presently torn away from thee by my own weight, sinking with grief into these lower things. This weight was carnal habit. But thy memory dwelt with me, and I never doubted in the least that there was One for me to cleave to; but I was not yet ready to cleave to thee firmly. . . . And thus with the flash of a trembling glance, it arrived at *that which is*. And I saw thy invisibility [*invisibilia tua*] understood by means of the things that are made. But I was not able to sustain my gaze. My weakness was dashed back, and I lapsed again into my accustomed ways, carrying along with me nothing but a loving memory of my vision, and an appetite for what I had, as it were, smelled the odor of, but was not yet able to eat.

VII.xxi. 27. With great eagerness, then, I fastened upon the venerable writings of thy Spirit and principally upon the apostle Paul. . . . So I began, and I found that whatever truth I had read [in the Platonists] was here combined with the exaltation of thy grace.

X.xliii. 69. How hast thou loved us, O good Father, who didst not spare thy only Son, but didst deliver him up for us wicked ones! How hast thou loved us, for whom he who did not count it robbery to be equal with thee "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"! He alone was "free among the dead." He alone had power to lay down his life and power to take it up again, and for us he became to thee both Victor and Victim; and Victor because he was the Victim. . . . Rightly, then, is my hope fixed strongly on him, that thou wilt "heal all my diseases" through him, who sitteth at thy right hand and maketh intercession for us. Otherwise I should utterly despair. For my infirmities are many and great; indeed, they are very many and very great. But thy medicine is still greater. Otherwise, we might think that thy word was removed from union with man, and despair of ourselves, if it had not been that he was "made flesh and dwelt among us."

70. Behold, O Lord, I cast all my care on thee, that I may live and "behold wondrous things out of thy law." Thou knowest my incompetence and my infirmities; teach me and heal me. Thy only Son--he "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"--hath redeemed me with his blood. . . . For, being poor, I desire to be satisfied from him, together with those who eat and are satisfied: "and they shall praise the Lord that seek Him."