

St. Augustine on Truth and Interiority

RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo será considerar cómo Agustín llega a unirse con la verdad y con la belleza (ésta es el esplendor de la verdad, su luz), y así se une con Dios mediante la razón y también mediante la fe, ejerciendo la capacidad mística de la mente. El conocimiento de Dios según Agustín es inseparable del auto-conocimiento, ya que él no alcanza conocerse realmente si no se conoce en Dios. Para que este conocimiento se haga realidad, la mente y la voluntad, junto con sus amores, tendrán que estar bien dispuestas y ordenadas. La mente tendrá además que estar renovada por la fe y la gracia para así ver y amar todo lo que puede ser visto y amado. De este modo Agustín podrá ver la totalidad y su último fundamento, y se conocerá en relación con Dios y muy particularmente en relación con el Dios que es su causa ejemplar.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Verdad, belleza inteligible, belleza sensible, ojos corpóreos, ojo de la mente, conocimiento de Dios, auto-conocimiento, intelecto, razón, mente, alma, virtud, fe, gracia

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this essay will be to consider how Augustine attains to truth and beauty (which can be considered as the splendor of truth, its light) and ultimately to God by reason and also by faith, that is, by exercising the mystical capacity of his mind. Knowledge of God for Augustine is inseparable from knowledge of himself, as he cannot really know himself unless he knows the self in God. For this knowledge to be achieved, however, the mind and the will, together with its loves, must be properly disposed and ordered. The mind will also need to be renovated through faith and grace in order to see and love all that can be seen and loved. In this way Augustine will be able to see the whole and its ultimate foundation, and will understand himself in relation to God and more specifically in relation to the God who is also his exemplar.

KEY WORDS: Truth, intelligible beauty, sensible beauty, eyes of the body, eyes of the mind, knowledge of God, self-knowledge, intellect, reason, mind, soul, virtue, faith, grace

INTRODUCTION: THE MYSTICAL CAPACITY OF THE MIND AND THE INWARD TURN

St. Augustine has been called the prince of mystics because he unites in himself the elements of mystical experience, namely, “the most penetrating vision into things divine and a love of God that was a consuming passion”¹. These elements can equally be applied to St. John the Evangelist who is described as an eagle soaring above human weakness and gazing on the divinity of Christ, on “the light of unchanging truth with the most lofty and firm eyes of the heart”². John sees the Word “in the bosom of the Father by the eye of the mind”³. I begin this essay by comparing the mystical experience of Augustine with that of John –although their lives are very different, the first converted from a dissolute life and the second known for his friendship with Christ from his very youth– because in his *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* Augustine describes the Evangelist as a mountain or as an elevated soul, for in order to reach the presence of the Word by whom all things were made, he had to ascend beyond the mountain-tops of the earth, that is, he had to ascend beyond all created things⁴. What Augustine says of John can be attributed to himself, for to ascend to the Truth and to the Beauty of God Augustine like John had to transcend the visible, sensible, and temporal order.

While *The Confessions* of Augustine have been widely read, we wonder if modern-day man has any interest in mystics or in mystical experience. Contemporary thought has been characterized by a loss of metaphysics and a loss of truth, by the denial of the power of reason to penetrate the essential things in human life, questions regarding the human person’s origin and end, how he should live and act. If

1 BUTLER, C., *Western Mysticism*, (New York, 1924), p. 24, cited in RUSSELL, R. P., OSA, Introduction to *The Soliloquies of St. Augustine*, trans. and notes by Thomas F. Gilligan, OSA (New York: Cosmopolitan Science & Art Service Co., Inc., 1943).

2 THOMAS AQUINAS, Prologue to the *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, trans. James A. Weisheipl, OP (Albany, N.Y.: Magi Books, Inc.).

3 *Ibid.*

4 See ST. AUGUSTINE, Bishop of Hippo, *Homilies on the Gospel According to St. John and His First Epistle*, vol. I, trans. H. Browne (Oxford and London: John Henry Parker; F. & J. Rivington, 1848), pp. 4-5.

man cannot use his reason to ask and answer essential questions, then reason is not being elevated nor enlarged; it is rather “a self-limiting reason” or “an amputated reason”⁵. And yet, Augustine’s intellectual and spiritual endeavor was to bring men and women back to the hope of beholding and grasping the truth⁶. According to him philosophy has a twofold task: to know the soul, that is, to know oneself, and to know God, to know one’s origin⁷. For this purpose Augustine turns inward. And it is precisely this inward turn, this turn toward interiority, which seems lacking to contemporary man and thus important for contemporary culture to recover. The turn toward interiority requires that “the mystical capacity of the human mind” be strengthened once again⁸. St. Paul, whose writings Augustine knew only too well, begs God that the inner man may be strengthened⁹. In contemporary culture we find however “a hypertrophy of the outer man”, to the detriment of his inner strength¹⁰. How then is interiority to be strengthened? We are not without a possible answer. A contemporary theologian puts the answer in this way, “The capacity to renounce oneself, a greater inner openness, the discipline to withdraw ourselves from noise and from all that presses on our attention, should once more be for all of us goals that we recognize as being among our priorities”¹¹. In view of this insightful answer, it may perhaps be said that in the midst of so much distraction which can occur in our lives through technology and a plethora of material things we need to recover a culture of silence and contemplation, no easy task for human beings given our weakness

5 JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 158.

6 AUGUSTINE, *De Vera Religione* 10, 20 in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. J. H. S. Burleigh, in Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

7 Cf. *The Soliloquies of St. Augustine*, Book II, chap. I. Augustine’s faith seeking understanding leads him to pray thus, “O God, ever the same; may I know myself, may I know Thee. That is my prayer.”

8 RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 159.

9 Ephesians 3:16.

10 RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 159.

11 *Ibid.*, It should be noticed that the mystical capacity of the human mind which is to be strengthened requires an internal working on the self which is possible through virtue. This will be seen later in this article.

and our present-day tendency toward dispersion; but with reliance and dependence on God and his grace, this task is possible, as Augustine's conversion and work show us.

What is implicit in or makes possible the notion of an elevated reason, a reason open, as in the case of Augustine, to the truth that faith affords it,¹² and which seeks to discover and see the whole, not just the parts, remaining absorbed in the particular, is the expansiveness of the spiritual substance or of the human soul, whose intellect has been called a potency unto the infinite, which is in a sense "all in all", being able to understand all there is¹³. In addition, the truths made known by faith can aid the philosopher seeking the truth; as a philosopher of the twentieth century says, "If faith makes accessible truths unattainable by any other means, philosophy cannot forego them without renouncing its universal claim to truth"¹⁴. Augustine, like other visionary souls before and after him, was able to rise up out of the world of making and doing, to patiently climb up the steep mountain of the journey of

12 For Augustine, as is true of medieval thinkers, faith seeks understanding and understanding also seeks faith because faith enhances our rational powers.

13 Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, chap. 112. The human mind, according to Thomas, is ordered to the totality of all that is. As he says in this text, "Spirit endowed beings possess a higher affinity to the whole of reality than other beings. Every spiritual substance namely, in a certain sense, is all in all, insofar as it is able, through its cognitive power, to comprehend all there is. Any other substance, in contrast, enjoys but an incomplete participation in the realm of being." In *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, resp., Thomas says something similar about the human soul and its end: "It has been said that the soul is in a certain sense all in all; for its nature is directed toward universal knowledge. In this manner is it possible for the perfection of the entire world to be present in one single being. Consequently, the highest perfection attainable for the soul would be reached when the soul comprehends the entire order of the universe and its principles, according to the philosophers. They therefore see precisely in this the ultimate end of man, which –as we believe– will be realized in the beatific vision; for as Gregory says, 'what would those not see who see him who sees all?'" These texts are cited in Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 84-85. As Thomas sees it, "beings endowed with cognitive ability somehow resemble God himself in whom all things preexist, as Dionysius says" (*De Div. Nom.*, 5, 1, also quoted in *ST I*, q. 80, a. 1, resp.).

14 MacIntyre, A., *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue, 1913-1922* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), p. 180.

life and grow inwardly through constant purification so as to become a seer, a contemplative, of the whole, touched by the light of God ¹⁵.

The purpose of this essay will then be to consider how Augustine attains to truth and beauty (which can be considered as the splendor of truth, its light) and ultimately to God by reason and also by faith, that is, by exercising the mystical capacity of his mind. Knowledge of God for Augustine is inseparable from knowledge of himself, as he cannot really know himself unless he knows the self in God. For this knowledge to be achieved, however, the mind and the will, together with its loves, must be properly disposed and ordered. The mind will also need to be renovated through faith and grace in order to see and love all that can be seen and loved. In this way Augustine will be able to see the whole and its ultimate foundation, and will understand himself in relation to God and more specifically in relation to the God who is also his exemplar.

I. SIGNS OF GOD IN THE UNIVERSE AND IMPEDIMENTS TO REASON'S ATTAINMENT OF TRUTH:

The Soul's Proper Disposition to See the Light of Truth

It is interesting to note how much of medieval thought makes reference to the presence of God in the universe. Certainly, this is the case in both Augustine's early and later works. As a philosopher within the Platonic and neo-Platonic tradition, Augustine sees the order of things in the universe as signs or expressions of God's thought and reality. The created world is thus a meaningful order, because it participates in

15 Cf. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, pp. 160-161. In these pages Ratzinger recounts the story of St. Benedict's long and arduous journey which led him to see the whole; as Gregory the Great puts it, "[T]he whole world was held before his eyes, as if brought together in a single ray of sunshine.... If he... saw the whole world as one before him, then it was not that heaven and earth became narrower but the visionary's soul became so wide", quoted in Ratzinger, p. 160. As Ratzinger explains, "[St. Benedict] can see the whole because he is looking at it from on high, and he is able to gain this vantage point because he has grown interiorly great", p. 161.

God's ideas¹⁶; cosmic order is revelatory of God's reason¹⁷. This order is given to be seen and loved by the human person, to be respected by him such that he act in conformity with his place or rank in the universe. As Augustine explains, with the eyes of the mind raised and with his field of vision broadened, the human person surveys all things as a whole and will find that all things are arranged, classed, and assigned to their place¹⁸. The order of the forms in the universe reflects the beauty and light of God, of the divine mind, of the Form of forms. And thus the world and everything in it is beautiful because God's reason and his light permeate the cosmos¹⁹. The forms of material things which make the pattern of this visible world so beautiful reveal themselves to our senses and are given to us to be known. As Augustine puts it, "It is as though, in compensation for their own incapacity to know, they wanted to become known by us"²⁰. The world with its multiplicity of beings is thus given for man, to satisfy his natural desire to know²¹, which is not simply a desire to know particular things, particular truths, but to reach the ultimate causes and reasons of all things, the ultimate truth, the ultimate unity and source of the diversity gratuitously given to us in the universe²².

16 If we consider God's creative activity, the things made by him, then we can speak of a multiplicity of ideas for these things, but if we consider God's nature and his being, there is simplicity alone, and therefore only one Idea which is so rich and full that creatures express it in a great variety of ways.

17 See TAYLOR, Ch., *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 125.

18 *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil*, A Translation of *De Ordine*, by Robert P. Russell, OSA (New York: Cosmopolitan Science & Art Service Co., Inc., 1942), p. 93.

19 See *De Vera Religione*, p. 267.

20 *De Civitate Dei*, Book XI, chap. 27, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, S. J. *et al.* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1958).

21 On this natural desire to know, see ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* Book I, 980a21-983a3, trans. William D. Ross, in *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. VIII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908; 2nd ed. 1928), and ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Book I, chap. 1, trans. John P. Rowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961; rev. ed. 1995, Notre Dame, Indiana: Dumb Ox Books).

22 That natural desire to know can be immoderate and thus convert itself into the curiosity that Augustine warns us against for it disperses our attention and is an impediment to the attainment of truth. See *De Vera Religione*, pp. 224, 277.

And yet, the splendid forms, those beautiful things that surround us, can so seduce our sensible eyes with their beauty that we can begin to idolize them, to take such pleasure in them, that they will thus no longer serve as signs of their maker, of the divine artist, the one who is Beauty itself, splendid light²³. Those who cannot transcend the beauty of material things so as to ascend to their maker are seduced by corporeal light which, as Augustine says, “seasons for its blind lovers this world’s life with an alluring and perilous sweetness”²⁴. Our bodily eyes are thus blinded and we love signs which are mere instruments, rather than the God they should be pointing us toward; we thus become incapable of seeing with the eyes of the mind that intelligible light which is perceived inwardly and in not seeing that light we too are diminished²⁵. With our eyes so seduced and blinded, we fall away from the path that leads to God and to the truth of our very selves²⁶; we forget God and also forget our very life²⁷.

We can therefore understand how the attainment of knowledge of God from his presence in the universe may be difficult although not impossible²⁸. Augustine knows from personal experience that human

23 *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Book X, chap. 34, trans. John K. Ryan (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1960).

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*, in speaking of all those things made by artisans which distract men away from the primordial artist and beauty who is God and also make men direct their gaze outward rather than inward, thus forsaking God and their very selves, Augustine says, “Beyond count are the things made by various arts and crafts..., far exceeding all necessary and temperate use and devout purpose! Men have added all these to the allurements of the eyes, outwardly pursuing the things they make, but inwardly forsaking him by whom they themselves have been made, and destroying what they themselves have been made to be...”.

26 *Ibid.*, Augustine says, “I resist these seductions of the eyes, lest my feet, wherewith I walk upon your path, be ensnared, and I raise up my unseen eyes to you so that you may ‘pluck my feet out of the snare.’” Augustine is well aware that he is in need of God’s grace to resist being tempted and enticed by the splendid things of the world.

27 See AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate*, Book XIV, chap. 13, trans. Arthur West Haddan, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887; rev. and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1301.htm>).

28 See *De Ordine*, p. 131.

reason, however great a power it may be, can meet with impediments on its way toward the truth, the truth regarding God and the truth regarding oneself. For this reason, Augustine says, "Reason is a mental operation capable of distinguishing and connecting the things that are learned. But only a rare class of men is capable of using it as a guide to the knowledge of God or of the soul; ...and this is due to nothing else than the fact that for anyone who has advanced toward objects of sense, it is difficult to return to himself" ²⁹. From what Augustine says here it is clear that few men achieve with their reason knowledge of God and of self, of their soul, and yet human reason is known to be *capax entis, capax Dei*. Our attraction toward good and beautiful things that please our senses and disperse the attention of our reason can thus lead us into error, for man's mind then yields to those things, to their sensible images, and our reason thus scattered cannot effect the unifying operation of the mind ³⁰. In the pursuit of things which are in themselves useful and upright, Augustine tells us that reason is often superseded by sentiment and unruly dispositions: "[U]n wise men generally follow their own feelings and habits rather than the very marrow of truth –which indeed only a very exceptional mind beholds" ³¹.

While beautiful things of the sensible order may seduce our corporeal vision and disorder our passions, the beautiful should not be reduced simply to what gives pleasure to our senses, for there is in addition a spiritual beauty which has an affinity with reason and which procures for the person, who is able to see it with the internal eye of the mind, a joy unlike any sensible pleasure; nothing, then, which we perceive with our bodily eyes can be compared with what the mind discerns ³². Reason itself is pleased by nothing but beauty in the universe, but this is a higher sort of beauty that resides in the design of things,

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153. Augustine refers to the unifying function of reason which is impeded by yielding to sensible images which disperse our attention; if we do not give way to such dispersion then we can become learned: "If a man does not yield to these images, and if he reduces to a simple, true and certain unity all the things that are scattered far and wide throughout so many branches of study, then he is most deserving of the attribute *learned*." Emphasis found in text.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 149.

in their dimensions, in their number; it is worthwhile noting here that Aristotle likened numbers to forms, indicating with this that the diversity of forms, of things, in the universe is made up of degrees, some of a lower degree and others of a higher degree and thus more perfect; there is in this manner an order of the diversity of things given in degrees³³. Rather than recall the shadows and traces of the dimensions, of the numbers, of those things perceived by the senses, reason, by means of reflection and contemplation, will then behold in the numerical proportions of things, in their dimensions, that which is most true³⁴. Once reason is thus able to discern number and the truth, it ventures forward to prove the immortality of the soul, all the while seeking things divine, as truths not only to be believed, but as Augustine insists, “as matters to be contemplated, understood, and retained”³⁵. It is therefore not by faith alone but by “trustworthy reason” that we attain to a vision of truth and real beauty³⁶.

Man’s excellence over brute animals consists precisely in his rational nature, in the understanding of what he does³⁷. Augustine therefore notes that if man by means of his reason discerns the nature of numerical proportions in the universe and is able by means of this knowledge to write poetry with rhythm and to play the harp with the orderly arrangement of rhythmic sounds³⁸, it would be unfitting for the soul to be dominated by lust or other “shameful vices” and thus find itself “out of tune” with its very self³⁹. There is then an inner order, rhythm, or number that needs to be preserved within the soul itself, within reason,

33 See ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, Book VIII, referenced in St. Thomas, *The Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book III, chap. 97 (London: Burns, Oates, & Washbourne, Ltd., 1928).

34 *De Ordine*, p. 151.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

37 *De Ordine*, p. 165: “But why is man superior to brute animals, and why is he to be ranked above them? Because he understands what he does. Nothing else ranks me above the brute animal except the fact that I am a rational animal.”

38 See *De Ordine*, pp. 147-149. In these pages Augustine identifies rhythm with number and thus describes the poets as “begotten of reason”, and speaks of music as an offspring of poetry, which partakes of both sense and intellect.

39 *De Ordine*, pp. 165-167.

precisely because of its very nature which tends toward the true, the good, and the beautiful, because of that affinity already mentioned of reason with the beautiful. This affinity however needs to be cultivated, for while we are in our fallen condition and *in statu viatoris* there are many things that can deviate reason from its true object: being slaves to our passions or being inordinately desirous of mutable goods leads us into error and distances us from the truth⁴⁰. Augustine refers then to the tuning or adjusting that must take place in the human soul; as he puts it, "But when the soul has properly adjusted and disposed itself, and has rendered itself harmonious and beautiful, then will it venture to see God, the very source of all truth and the very Father of Truth. O great God, What kind of eyes shall those be! How pure! How beautiful! ...And what is that which they can see! What is it? ...A vision of beauty –the beauty of whose imitation all other things are beautiful, and by comparison with which all other things are unsightly–"⁴¹. The vision of this beauty will only be given to those who live well, pray well, and study well, according to Augustine⁴².

In order thus to see the truth and its beauty, the soul must be made fit for this vision by living a virtuous life and seeking and loving the sole good of the intellect which is truth, together with purity of heart or singleness of purpose, which is to will and love this one true good as the very reason for human living⁴³. This is why Augustine insists that the soul will lead itself gradually to virtuous habits and the per-

40 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

42 *Ibid.*

43 See *De Ordine*, p. 169. This notion of a single telos for the human life is also found in the work of the contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre who has called himself an Augustinian Christian (*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 10). For "singleness of purpose" see MACINTYRE, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981; 2nd ed. 1984), p. 203. See also my article "Technologies of the Self: Truth, Asceticism, and Autonomy", where Michel Foucault recognizes that Augustine's access to truth is impossible without purity of soul, but in modernist fashion Foucault proposes that we can be immoral and still know the truth (in *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 6, no. 1-2, 1994), pp. 20-29.

fect life not only by faith but by “trustworthy reason”⁴⁴, reason which subordinates itself to God but which also guides and rules over the human person’s lower powers, ordering them and therefore respecting the order of human nature, which recognizes the superiority of reason and of the rational soul. It is no wonder, then, that in yearning for the truth, in seeking God’s face, that is, knowledge of his nature and being, Augustine should say that order is what will lead us to God, such that we need to govern ourselves, to order our loves, and thus create order within ourselves so that we make ourselves “clean and beautiful”⁴⁵ –a beauty which will also renew the world.

It is interesting to note how Augustine will return in his writings to order and virtue, to the moral dispositions which will enable us to know the truth, to see God. The truth for which the human person yearns must be sought “not in space, but by a disposition of the mind, so that the inward man may agree with the indwelling truth in a pleasure that is not low and carnal but supremely spiritual”⁴⁶. The mind that is well disposed by means of the virtues will experience the highest sort of pleasure, the joy of the mind which rests in truth and finds its

44 *De Ordine*, p. 165. We should say here that faith itself is an act of the intellect which is moved by the will and ultimately by God’s grace. The act of faith is related to the good and the end, i.e., to the object of the will, and to the true, which is the object of the intellect, the true being the good of the intellect. Since faith, for the Medievals, seeks understanding, it must involve the intellect; the act of believing requires that the will move the intellect to assent. It may also be said that in the case of Augustine, as in other thinkers both past and present, understanding is seeking faith, and thus the better disposed one’s understanding is, the more one makes oneself a fitting recipient for grace, although the bestowal of grace is a free gift on God’s part.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 45. Augustine writes, “...for what indeed do you think that we pray to be converted to God and to see His face, if not from a certain uncleanness of the body and of its stains, and likewise from the darkness in which error has involved us? And what else is all this than to be, by virtue and temperance, lifted away from the over-growth of vices, and uplifted towards Himself? And what else is the face of God than the truth for which we yearn, and for which as the object of our love, we make ourselves clean and beautiful?” It is interesting to note here that Thomas Aquinas in his writings considers order to be the chief beauty in things. See my *Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), pp. 71-93.

46 *De Vera Religione*, p. 262.

proper place there ⁴⁷. According to Augustine, then, if the soul can make an end of its vices, it will free itself from the obstacles which inhibit it from recalling that primal light of truth, that primal beauty which it abandoned ⁴⁸. As Augustine sees it, the truth which comes from God, that eternal truth which is Christ, can only dwell in the mind that is prepared to receive him ⁴⁹. Each human person will therefore see the truth according to his ability, which will depend on “the moral quality of the will” ⁵⁰. We will listen to the eternal wisdom of God –that wisdom which in Augustine’s faith-filled knowledge and experience of the Trinitarian God is Christ, our real Teacher– who dwells in the inner man, in the mind or rational soul, according to the person’s good or evil will ⁵¹. For Augustine, then, Truth does not deceive us; it does not deceive the eye of the mind, just as the common light of the day does not deceive the eyes of the body ⁵². The light of the truth within us is therefore received according to the mode of the recipient which each one of us is.

The light of God is thus not merely found outside of us, in the luminous forms hierarchically arranged and ordered in the universe, but is also found within us as an inner light ⁵³. For the mind to perceive this inner light, the human soul cannot be absorbed with the sensible, which diverts its attention and desire, and so reason’s gaze, its power of seeing, should be turned inward ⁵⁴. For this very reason, it is not surprising to hear Augustine praise the beauty and light of God, as if in an ode, when he cries out in admiration of so wondrous a beauty and laments his former absorption with creatures which are merely participants of divine beauty and light: “Too late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you! Behold, you

47 *The Confessions*, Book X, chap. 23.33.

48 *Ibid.*

49 *De Magistro*, in Library of Christian Classics, p. 65. See n. 6 for bibliographical reference.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

52 *Ibid.*

53 TAYLOR, *Sources of the Self*, p. 129.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

were within me, while I was outside: it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you. They kept me far from you, those fair things which, if they were not in you, would not exist at all. You have called to me, and have cried out, and have shattered my deafness. You have blazed forth with light, and have shone upon me, and you have put my blindness to flight!"⁵⁵ The deformed creature that Augustine once was, his mind and the internal eye of the mind, were in need of spiritualization so as to see the real light of truth. The passage just cited, although not in its entirety, indicates how all the senses of Augustine have been spiritualized⁵⁶ by his acceptance of God's call and of divine grace which enabled him at last to see, no longer blinded by concupiscence of the eyes. The light that is seen and loved gathers the person together, unifies him, because he finds his true self in God; no longer is the person dispersed and separated from God and from others. For Augustine to see this light and to be unified, he needed to order his desires and his loves, and for him this meant in particular a turning toward the light of God by living continently, which he could only do by means of the light of grace, a wondrous divine gift⁵⁷. As Augustine says, "By continence we are gathered together and brought back to the One, from whom we have dissipated our being into many things"⁵⁸. It can perhaps be said that the virtues, and continence which is the case in point here, together with divine grace, have the power to gather us together –gather what is dispersed in us and unify it– because the mind is enabled to act, collecting and ordering our powers and thus bringing us back to our true selves and to

55 *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Book X, chap. 27.

56 *Ibid.*, not only has Augustine's sight been spiritualized but also his other senses, as seems to be the case when he says, "You have sent forth fragrance, and I have drawn in my breath, and I pant after you. I have tasted you, and I hunger and thirst after you. You have touched me, and I have burned for your peace."

57 In dialogue with God Augustine says, "All my hope is found solely in your exceeding great mercy. Give what you command, and command what you will. 'And as I knew,' says a certain man, 'that no one could be continent except God gave it, and this also was a point of wisdom to know whose gift it was'" (Wisdom 8:21). See in *The Confessions*, Book X, chap. 29.

58 *The Confessions*, Book X, chap. 29. Augustine's mention of the One shows undoubtedly the Plotinian influence but is also Christian.

God⁵⁹. It is according to Augustine proper to the mind to collect and bring things together, as if “out of a sort of scattered state”⁶⁰.

This notion of mind as gathering, bringing together, and unifying has great philosophical and also theological importance for our purposes here. Man’s intellect is in a certain sense all things, as we noted earlier, and in his expansive cognitive ability man resembles God himself in whom all things preexist. Man’s capacity to know is perfected when he possesses the things known by him, and in this way the incapacity to know on the part of other creatures in the universe, those incapable of reasoning, is compensated for, as Augustine tells us, when they are known by us. No other being but man enjoys this expansive participation in the realm of things, and thus his yearning is to know what is perfect and ultimate⁶¹. But the forms we know cannot be found in us with their determinate matter and so must be separated from matter in order to be found in our intellect⁶². The soul, then, which receives these immaterial forms must also be immaterial; these forms which originate in and from the light of the Word enlighten our minds and are thus brought back to their creator and origin, the Form of forms, when we know them. We can also add here, as might Augustine, that when we use things for the purpose for which they were designed and created, for the end for which their maker formed them or determined their form, then those things are being returned to God, the only one to be fully enjoyed and loved, for he is the font of all beauty in which things merely participate. In knowing, then, the purpose of the forms and acting accordingly, our minds are then rejoining the light of the Word.

59 This function of mind of gathering together and bringing back to God is exercised in the virtue of continence which is given by God’s grace.

60 *Ibid.*, Book X, chap. 11.

61 See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST II*, q. 32, a. 2, resp. and *De Veritate* 2, 2, resp., quoted in Pieper, *Living the Truth*, p. 84.

62 See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, resp. It may be added here that the immortality of the human soul which Augustine argues for in his writings follows from the immaterial and spiritual nature of the soul, of the intellect, which can only receive immaterial forms. The soul in which the Truth abides endures forever just as learning which is truth abides forever, whereas the body ceases to be. See *Soliloquies*, Book II, chap. XIII.

The intellectual creature that is man thus gathers together the multiplicity and diversity of things and therefore effects their unity and their return to God. In this way man's mind not only unifies itself but also unites all things to the maker of all creation, who is the One from whom all multiplicity proceeds. And the reason we can do this is that our soul, our intellect, as mentioned above, is in a sense all things, and that we are thus capable of the highest truth and of the highest good ⁶³.

While individual intellectual creatures may be said to be each a part of the universe and thus limited in perfection, they are more perfect because in exercising their activity of knowing and thus becoming in a way all things they resume in themselves the perfection of the whole ⁶⁴. We can say this in another way: intellectual creatures are capable of intensifying and collecting the perfection of the universe, knowing and leading all things back to God, because they are capable of the highest good, that is, they are capable of knowing and loving God, who is the highest good –which good is represented by the universe and is its extrinsic good and constitutes moreover the final end of intellectual creatures ⁶⁵. All creatures emanating from God can thus return to him due to the activity of intellectual creatures that can know and intend this end; intellectual creatures can thus gather the multiplicity of things into one and bring about their unity and return them to God ⁶⁶. What we have said here about intellectual creatures serves to corroborate once

63 See BLANCHETTE, O., *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas: A Teleological Cosmology* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), pp. 296-300.

64 By knowing the whole, they become in a sense the whole, which is what is meant in our opinion when Aquinas says that the soul, the intellect, is in a sense all things and that thus man's desire is for what is ultimate and perfect. And it is for this reason that intellectual creatures resemble God in whom all preexists, since in creating through his Word God has an idea for all things that are made by him and his essence is the perfection from which all perfections flow. See n. 13 above.

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 297-299. It seems to me that what Blanchette is saying of Aquinas can also be applied to Augustine as we have tried to show, in considering what is proper to Augustine's notion of mind which is to collect and bring things together, as if "out of a sort of scattered state." See n. 60 above.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 298. In saying that creatures emanate from God, we are not in any way referring to Neo-Platonic emanationism. We are however referring to the Platonic *exitus-reditus* theme: creatures that originate from God and that are destined to return to him.

again what Augustine claims is proper to the mind, namely, that it collects and brings things together, unifying them, and bringing all things, including itself, back to God, who is the one true good.

II. THE RENEWAL OF THE MIND BY FAITH AND GRACE

The Turning Toward the Light of Truth and the Perfection of Man's Inner Sight

For Augustine the nature of the human soul is great, but because it is not the highest nature it can be corrupted. It is nevertheless capable of being a partaker of the highest nature, as is indicated in the *De Trinitate*⁶⁷. Therefore, in recognizing the great capacity of the human mind and its excellence over all other creatures, as well as the obstacles which impede the actualization or perfection of the mind because its attention is scattered and diverted in an inordinate way to the sensible, Augustine also realizes the indispensable salutary effects which the virtues, faith, and grace have on the mind for the mind to reach its full actualization and to participate in the highest nature. According to Augustine, faith gives the mind the power to see; the eyes of the mind are enlightened by faith⁶⁸. In enabling the mind to see, faith also helps us to order our loves and thus to cultivate virtues and raise them to the supernatural plane. In speaking of the salutary grace offered to us through Christ, Augustine says, "What grace is meant to do is to help good people, not to escape their sufferings, but to bear them with a stout heart, with a fortitude that finds its strength in faith"⁶⁹. For Augustine supernatural grace is a reality that can only be given by the Christian God, the One greater than which there is no other, in order to heal the miseries of human sin⁷⁰. These so-called miseries of

67 *De Trinitate*, Book XIV, chap. 4. See also Book XIV, chap. 12.15.

68 *De Civitate Dei*, Book XXII, chap. 29.

69 *Ibid.*, Book XXII, chap. 22.

70 *Ibid.*, I will quote here only part of what Augustine says after his reference to fortitude which is strengthened by faith; what he says here evokes the idea of Justin Martyr that Christianity is the true philosophy: "To gain such fortitude we need, as even the wisdom of the world assures us, that true philosophy which, as

sin consist all too often in inordinate loves for which we need to apply virtue, seeking the mid-point of reason, what is reasonable, but because of the deviant tendencies which sin effects in us we also need the aid of faith and grace. In order to be truly happy, Augustine tells us that we need faith to cleanse our heart ⁷¹. Faith enables the heart and the mind to love what ought to be loved and thus to have that purity of heart needed to reach happiness.

Without the workings of faith and grace in the soul we would not be able to live a happy life for we need to be rescued from “the power of the devil” ⁷². We are rescued from this power, not simply by some other power, but by righteousness ⁷³. Salvation from sin and present and future happiness are therefore made possible for us through the Incarnate Word and through our ever penetrating knowledge into his own life such that this knowledge will gradually permeate our own life and thus effect our union with him. As Augustine says, “He, then, who is day by day renewed by making progress in the knowledge of God, and in righteousness and true holiness, transfers his love from things temporal to things eternal, from things visible to things intelligible, from things carnal to things spiritual; and diligently perseveres in bridling and lessening his desire for the former, and in binding himself by love to the latter. And he does this in proportion as he is helped by God. For it is the sentence of God Himself, without me you can do nothing.” ⁷⁴ Then, without God’s help, without his grace, the mind would not undergo the renewal that it needs to reach the fullness of happiness. Without dependence on God, the mind would have no strength; it would have no light to see within itself and no light to judge things and actions ⁷⁵.

Cicero says, is given by the gods to very few and is a gift greater than any which the gods have given men, or even have the power to give. Here, surely, in this insistence on a true as opposed to any kind of philosophy, we have an admission by our main opponent, the pagan world, of the reality of supernatural grace...”.

71 *De Trinitate*, Book XIII, chap. 20.25.

72 *De Trinitate*, Book XIII, chap. 13.

73 *Ibid.*

74 *De Trinitate*, Book XIV, chap. 17.23.

75 *De Trinitate*, Book XIV, chap. 14.18.

Ultimately, the restoration of the mind is God's work, although our own freedom helps in this work, for as Augustine thought, our objective redemption was wrought by the Incarnate Word, by his passion, death, and resurrection, but our own subjective redemption requires the free response to God's grace or gift. For this reason, in speaking of the mind as image of God, Augustine explains that when the mind is restored by the work of the incarnate Son of God or of the incarnate Word, then the image of God which is the mind in virtue of its intellectual nature can remember, know, and love God; this capacity is awakened, as it were, by grace and increases over time so as to reach its full actualization in union with God. Consequently, for Augustine, it is not possible to remember, know, and love the self as image of God unless we remember, know, and love the exemplar from whom the image has derived its existence and likeness ⁷⁶. While the faculties of man's mind, that is, memory, understanding, and will, or as they are called by Augustine, the trinity of the mind, require self-reference in order for this trinity to function properly such that the mind remembers, understands, and loves itself, this return to itself or self-reference does not constitute the true end of the mind, for as Augustine explains, the trinity of mental processes are to be directed not at the mind itself, but most especially and properly at the mind's maker ⁷⁷. At that moment, then, the mind attains to wisdom and to the happiness it seeks; to this effect, Augustine says that when the mind remembers, understands, and loves God "after whose image it is made... then it will be wise, not by its own light, but by participation of the supreme Light; and wherein it is eternal, therein shall reign in blessedness" ⁷⁸.

The mind of man, that rational and intellectual nature which is his mind, is then made after the image of its maker, and Augustine thus tells us that God is not far from us for "in him we live, move, and have our being" ⁷⁹. We are not therefore without God in whom we are, but if we do not remember, understand, and love him, we are not really with

⁷⁶ *De Trinitate*, Book XIV, chap. 12.15-16.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Book XIV, chap. 12.15.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Book XIV, chap. 12.16.

God, according to Augustine ⁸⁰, for in not remembering God, in being forgetful of him, we have in fact forgotten our very life ⁸¹. In failing to remember, understand, and love God, we fall from God, from his light, and we also fall from our very selves ⁸². We need therefore to be reminded and so to turn to the Lord, which turning enables us to come to life again by remembering our proper life which we had forgotten ⁸³. When the mind loves itself by not doing that which is adverse to itself, then it loves itself properly and loves God whom it remembers and understands. Augustine then says that the human mind which is made in God's image is an image that not only exists, but that this image is also renewed ⁸⁴; it has ceased to be an old man, and has become the new man because it has been transformed by the grace of the new Adam, the Incarnate Word. The mind has thus been restored and made happy ⁸⁵. Of course, the new man that is the mind is not confirmed in grace and can therefore still succumb to temptation and give in to worldly treasures such that the mind be subverted, but the light of God is always turned toward men even when they have turned away from it. By this Augustine seems to allude to the first moral principles within the mind that are not effaced from it. As he explains, the man who does not work righteousness and yet sees how he ought to act is turned away from "the book of that Light which is called Truth", and which in fact still touches him, for the splendor of the truth is everywhere present ⁸⁶.

The inner man is thus to be renewed day by day, growing in knowledge of God and in true holiness ⁸⁷. Once the likeness of God is perfected in the image that is man's mind, then man's sight of God will be perfected, for he will no longer see God as in a mirror by the help of faith, but rather face to face ⁸⁸. Augustine quotes the Apostle John

80 *Ibid.*

81 *Ibid.*, Book XIV, chap. 13.

82 *Ibid.*, Book XIV, chap. 14.18.

83 *Ibid.*, Book XIV, chap. 13.17.

84 *Ibid.*, Book XIV, chap. 14.18.

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Ibid.*, Book XIV, chap. 15.21.

87 *Ibid.*, Book XIV, chap. 17.23.

88 *Ibid.*

to further insist on what awaits the man whose inner sight, whose eyes of the mind, have been perfected: “We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is”⁸⁹. To end, let us say that the image that is the mind of man must have been beautified, as it were, conforming itself to the Light of Truth which was present and touched it, and which it yearned to know forever, for eternal life is to know and love that splendid Truth⁹⁰.

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89 1 John 3:2, cited in *De Trinitate*, Book XIV, chap. 18.24.

90 *De Trinitate*, Book XIV, chap. 18.25.