

Confessions - Book VII - Chapter XX

by St. Augustine

Transcript

26. By having thus read the books of the Platonists, and having been taught by them to search for the incorporeal Truth, I saw how thy invisible things are understood through the things that are made. And, even when I was thrown back, I still sensed what it was that the dullness of my soul would not allow me to contemplate. I was assured that thou wast, and wast infinite, though not diffused in finite space or infinity; that thou truly art, who art ever the same, varying neither in part nor motion; and that all things are from thee, as is proved by this sure cause alone: that they exist.

Of all this I was convinced, yet I was too weak to enjoy thee. I chattered away as if I were an expert; but if I had not sought thy Way in Christ our Saviour, my knowledge would have turned out to be not instruction but destruction.[222] For now full of what was in fact my punishment, I had begun to desire to seem wise. I did not mourn my ignorance, but rather was puffed up with knowledge. For where was that love which builds upon the foundation of humility, which is Jesus Christ?[223] Or, when would these books teach me this? I now believe that it was thy pleasure that I should fall upon these books before I studied thy Scriptures, that it might be impressed on my memory how I was affected by them; and then afterward, when I was subdued by thy Scriptures and when my wounds were touched by thy healing fingers, I might discern and distinguish what a difference there is between presumption and confession--between those who saw where they were to go even if they did not see the way, and the Way which leads, not only to the observing, but also the inhabiting of the blessed country. For had I first been molded in thy Holy Scriptures, and if thou hadst grown sweet to me through my familiar use of them, and if then I had afterward fallen on those volumes, they might have pushed me off the solid ground of godliness--or if I had stood firm in that wholesome disposition which I had there acquired, I might have thought that wisdom could be attained by the study of those [Platonist] books alone.

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