

Confessions - Book X - Chapter VI

by St. Augustine

Transcript

8. It is not with a doubtful consciousness, but one fully certain that I love thee, O Lord. Thou hast smitten my heart with thy Word, and I have loved thee. And see also the heaven, and earth, and all that is in them--on every side they tell me to love thee, and they do not cease to tell this to all men, \so that they are without excuse.\"[330] Wherefore, still more deeply wilt thou have mercy on whom thou wilt have mercy, and compassion on whom thou wilt have compassion.[331] For otherwise, both heaven and earth would tell abroad thy praises to deaf ears.

But what is it that I love in loving thee? Not physical beauty, nor the splendor of time, nor the radiance of the light--so pleasant to our eyes--nor the sweet melodies of the various kinds of songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers and ointments and spices; not manna and honey, not the limbs embraced in physical love--it is not these I love when I love my God. Yet it is true that I love a certain kind of light and sound and fragrance and food and embrace in loving my God, who is the light and sound and fragrance and food and embracement of my inner man--where that light shines into my soul which no place can contain, where time does not snatch away the lovely sound, where no breeze disperses the sweet fragrance, where no eating diminishes the food there provided, and where there is an embrace that no satiety comes to sunder. This is what I love when I love my God.

9. And what is this God? I asked the earth, and it answered, \I am not he\"; and everything in the earth made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps and the creeping things, and they replied, \We are not your God; seek above us.\" I asked the fleeting winds, and the whole air with its inhabitants answered, \Anaximenes[332] was deceived; I am not God.\" I asked the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars; and they answered, \Neither are we the God whom you seek.\" And I replied to all these things which stand around the door of my flesh: \You have told me about my God, that you are not he. Tell me something about him.\" And with a loud voice they all cried out, \He made us.\" My question had come from my observation of them, and their reply came from their beauty of order. And I turned my thoughts into myself and said, \Who are you?\" And I answered, \A man.\" For see, there is in me both a body and a soul; the one without, the other within. In which of these should I have sought my God, whom I had already sought with my body from earth to heaven, as far as I was able to send those messengers--the beams of my eyes? But the inner part is the better part; for to it, as both ruler and judge, all these messengers of the senses report the answers of heaven and earth and all the things therein, who said, \We are not God, but he made us.\" My inner man knew these things through the ministry of the outer man, and I, the inner man, knew all this--I, the soul, through the senses of my body.[333] I asked the whole frame of earth about my God, and it answered, \I am not he, but he made me.\"

10. Is not this beauty of form visible to all whose senses are unimpaired? Why, then, does it not say the same things to all? Animals, both small and great, see it but they are unable to interrogate its meaning, because their senses are not endowed with the reason that would enable them to judge the evidence which the senses report. But man can interrogate it, so that "the invisible things of him . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." [334] But men love these created things too much; they are brought into subjection to them--and, as subjects, are not able to judge. None of these created things reply to their questioners unless they can make rational judgments. The creatures will not alter their voice--that is, their beauty of form--if one man simply sees what another both sees and questions, so that the world appears one way to this man and another to that. It appears the same way to both; but it is mute to this one and it speaks to that one. Indeed, it actually speaks to all, but only they understand it who compare the voice received from without with the truth within. For the truth says to me, "Neither heaven nor earth nor anybody is your God." Their very nature tells this to the one who beholds [335] them. "They are a mass, less in part than the whole." Now, O my soul, you are my better part, and to you I speak; since you animate the whole mass of your body, giving it life, whereas no body furnishes life to a body. But your God is the life of your life.

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