

Confessions - Book X - Chapter Xxxiv

by St. Augustine

Transcript

51. There remain the delights of these eyes of my flesh, about which I must make my confession in the hearing of the ears of thy temple, brotherly and pious ears. Thus I will finish the list of the temptations of carnal appetite which still assail me--groaning and desiring as I am to be clothed upon with my house from heaven.[372]

The eyes delight in fair and varied forms, and bright and pleasing colors. Let these not take possession of my soul! Rather let God possess it, he who didst make all these things very good indeed. He is still my good, and not these. The pleasures of sight affect me all the time I am awake. There is no rest from them given me, as there is from the voices of melody, which I can occasionally find in silence. For daylight, that queen of the colors, floods all that we look upon everywhere I go during the day. It flits about me in manifold forms and soothes me even when I am busy about other things, not noticing it. And it presents itself so forcibly that if it is suddenly withdrawn it is looked for with longing, and if it is long absent the mind is saddened.

52. O Light, which Tobit saw even with his eyes closed in blindness, when he taught his son the way of life--and went before him himself in the steps of love and never went astray[373]; or that Light which Isaac saw when his fleshly "eyes were dim, so that he could not see"[374] because of old age, and it was permitted him unknowingly to bless his sons, but in the blessing of them to know them; or that Light which Jacob saw, when he too, blind in old age yet with an enlightened heart, threw light on the nation of men yet to come--presignified in the persons of his own sons--and laid his hands mystically crossed upon his grandchildren by Joseph (not as their father, who saw them from without, but as though he were within them), and distinguished them aright[375]: this is the true Light; it is one, and all are one who see and love it.

But that corporeal light, of which I was speaking, seasons the life of the world for her blind lovers with a tempting and fatal sweetness. Those who know how to praise thee for it, "O God, Creator of Us All," take it up in thy hymn,[376] and are not taken over by it in their sleep. Such a man I desire to be. I resist the seductions of my eyes, lest my feet be entangled as I go forward in thy way; and I raise my invisible eyes to thee, that thou wouldst be pleased to "pluck my feet out of the net."[377] Thou dost continually pluck them out, for they are easily ensnared. Thou ceasest not to pluck them out, but I constantly remain fast in the snares set all around me. However, thou who "keepest Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."[378]

53. What numberless things there are: products of the various arts and manufactures in our clothes, shoes, vessels, and all such things; besides such things as pictures and statuary--and all these far beyond

the necessary and moderate use of them or their significance for the life of piety--which men have added for the delight of the eye, copying the outward forms of the things they make; but inwardly forsaking Him by whom they were made and destroying what they themselves have been made to be!

And I, O my God and my Joy, I also raise a hymn to thee for all these things, and offer a sacrifice of praise to my Sanctifier, because those beautiful forms which pass through the medium of the human soul into the artist\

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