

Deep Is Calling on Deep.
The Mystagogy of Augustine's *Confessions* and His *Homilies on the Gospel of John*

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I have always been attracted to Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, for its representation of the human spirit as an inward and upward bound journey towards God. His *Homilies on John's Gospel* widen the way of that journey by showing how it ascends along the same axis as the Incarnation of the Word's descent into human existence. Augustine's dynamic anthropology moves from human potential toward divine fulfillment. I focus primarily on Augustine's spirituality, which I prefer to identify as mystagogy, an invitation into the dynamic inwardness that characterizes every human being, inherently loved, created and encountered by God.

I have not been able to resolve the theological and anthropological enigmas conjured by some of Augustine's works. I needed to include and welcome them in order to elicit an effective and convincing idea of the depth and breadth of Augustine's mystagogy. In the elucidation and appreciation of Augustine's ardent Christological anthropology, the dissonance of these vexing questions blend into a multi-tonal theological adventure along the way (*uia*) toward a resolution Augustine identified as wisdom (*sapientia*). Wisdom does not obliterate troubling theological discourse; it transforms it into a loving longing for God, too deep to be expressed in the words of discourse. I show just how unquiet our heart can be until it comes to rest in Augustine's God.

Augustine assimilated at least three ideas that produce theological and anthropological conundrums that challenge an appreciation of Augustine's mystagogy and its validity for Christians today. First, many stumble over Augustine's conviction of humanity's radical depravity inherited from an original human couple who have generated a universal post-lapsarian human nature characterized by intrinsic alienation from God. Second, Augustine believed that all humanity, having inherited the guilt of Adam and Eve's original sin has been justly abandoned by God, and that only a privileged few have been predestined for salvation. Third, an appreciation for Augustine is also deflated by his reception of the idea that the salvation of the predestined was earned by the human sacrifice of God's Son offered to his Father in appeasement of his indomitable justice. Many of Augustine's critics question his approach to these separate issues.

But Augustine engaged his theology in two very different registers. The first was within the context of his stinging rhetoric against those he considered enemies of orthodox doctrine, like the Pelagians for insisting that salvation is a matter of will and works rather than of grace. This register represents an anthropology that is rather more notional than real, more polemical than pastoral. Augustine engaged a different theological register within the pastoral Christological

soteriology by which he addressed his friends and the congregation he was preaching to. It flowed from the idea of universal salvation being of a piece with the idea of God's creating all human beings from God's loving them into being from all eternity. These two distinctive registers need not occupy an either/or binary set. They can be partners within a single discourse.

I attempt to understand Saint Augustine's "spirituality" as mystagogy within my examination of his Christological anthropology, which is grounded in his concept of God's creation of the individual human soul. I pursue some of the implications of Augustine's idea of the "interiority" of the soul. Actually, "inwardness" is a better word to represent his dynamic concept of the soul. His fundamental appreciation of the Lucan parable of the wayward son inspired his *Confessions*. He saw himself as that spendthrift son who had been far away from God, in the "land of unlikeness," while all the while Christ had been more within him than he was to himself: *tu eras interior intimo me et superior superno meo* (3.11) – *more within my most within self and higher than my highest self*. Most commentators have not delved into the pivotal importance of this one line for understanding Augustine's anthropology. I rely on it as the foundation of my work.

Plato's notion of the "hierarchy of being" that spans from absolute non-being to Being-Itself furnished Augustine with a description of the heart's dynamism, that I imagine as moving along two simultaneous axes: one between "inward" and "outward," and the other perpendicular to it: between "upward" and "downward." Accordingly, Augustine's spirituality represents the innate dynamism of every human soul moving in either direction along a convergent diagonal axis between the two poles, "inward/upward" and "outward/downward." The soul's movement toward either pole corresponds either to conversion or to aversion. The movement toward conversion is the way, *uia*, from restlessness toward rest in the Father-Land, *patria*, from rational kataphatic discourse, *scientia*, toward immediate apophatic intuition, *sapientia*.

The "hierarchy of being" also demonstrates how salvation and the Incarnation are movements in opposite directions meeting each other along the same diagonal axis. Just as the road taken by the spendthrift son is along the same axis as the road on which the prodigal father sets out to meet up with his beloved son, the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity is the externalization and descent of God into becoming human in historical time and geographical space to meet up with humanity in ascending and entering into God. The individual's salvation is effected by the baptismal assimilation within the ascent and return of the one Whole Christ, *totus Christus*, back into the Godhead of the Father.

This thesis is shored up by the accumulation of many other elements of Saint Augustine's thought that I tried to marshal as closely connected to his spirituality. These elements provide the

sub-text of my thesis.

A **first element**. Augustine's concept of the created soul identifies it as innately endowed with the presence of the one, eternal, uncreated *Verbum*, which intrinsically defines its actuality and possible activity and provides the dynamism that attracts it toward its own intrinsic fruition. This would imply that redemption is the realization of creation and not the consequence of a selective predestination.

A **second element**. The Word's presence to the soul is indirectly evident by one's self-awareness that Augustine identifies as memory, which is both representational and creative. Fact and fiction are thereby products of the same memory. Remembered sense experience (*sensibilia*) is external to memory itself, while its *intelligibilia* are intrinsic to itself as the criteria of judgment, giving value to all its *sensibilia*, in terms of the good, the true and the beautiful. Both the meaning of the world beyond oneself and the meaning of one's own existence emanate from these transcendental *intelligibilia*. The *Verbum Dei*, the soul's life-principle, reveals itself indirectly through these *intelligibilia*. This too gives us an idea of what Augustine could have had in mind with his confession of Christ's presence to him, *Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*.

A **third element**. I used T.S. Eliot's metaphor of the still-point, which is dimension-less, without movement or extension, to characterize both memory and *sapientia*. Memory is like the still-point: its objects are either the past, no longer but remembered in the present, or the future, not yet but projected from the present. *Sapientia* is also like the present of the memory: it swallows all the efforts of discursive thinking. Without movement, wisdom is timeless. As still-point it is a given, neither willed nor achieved from by discursive thought. The predicaments of discursive thought give way to awestruck silence within the immediate intuition of *sapientia*.

A **fourth element**. Augustine was mystified over language, the process by which one can communicate and transfer one's "interiority" into another's, not by replicating it (*res*) but by representing it by signs (*signa*) that convey meaning, not intrinsically but by convention. Words (*uerba*) must be combined with other words to construct metaphors, which are basically analogies from one's experience and thinking to another's. There is an inwardness that each one has that cannot actually be conveyed to another, except through the allusion of language. Ultimately, one's inwardness can resonate with another's only by means of the Word's, the Interior Master's, innate presence to each individual engaged in discourse.

And so it follows that the innate presence of the *Logos* within everyone's soul, that constitutes human personhood, ultimately defies the idea of an innately inherited radical alienation from God and its corollary notion of selective predestination. Once again, the creation

of the individual human person, willed into existence by God, seems to be the assurance of God's irreversible will for the salvation of all.

Acknowledging the elements of this sub-text frees me to develop Augustine's spirituality in a rationally consistent creation theology that would be all that we can know of the transcendent God who remains hidden in "the cloud of unknowing." Accordingly, the difference between Augustine's *kataphasis*, engaged in his theological discourse, and his *apophasis*, the consequence of his experience of the Christ's relationship to him, corresponds to his assimilation of Plato's distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia*. The vexing questions of discourse, never actually resolved by *kataphasis*, are to *scientia*, what silent *apophasis* and stillness, resting within the mystery of God, are to *sapientia*.

This leads to the title, "Deep Is Calling on Deep" which surfaces from Psalm 42 (41 LXX). The depth of one's soul calls out to the other, infinitely deeper, Depth, unfathomable knowing and profundity beyond all understanding. One's soul cries out to know God's infinite depth. Moreover, the ambiguity of "deep is calling on deep" implies a mutuality: one deep calls on the Deep, and the Deep calls on any single deep, like that cataract that swallows up one's own deep. This Abyss, utterly experienced within the soul's *sapientia*, remains altogether unknown within the rational discourse of *scientia*. As *superior summo meo*, God evades any idea of God we may have, however theologically accurate it may be. The real God, then, pervades "the Cloud of Unknowing". Because the soul is dynamic spirit, our deep ever calls on the only Deep, who eternally calls on our deep, as that Wind from God that sweeps over the face of the formless void since "the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth."

My thesis proceeds mainly by featuring Augustine's Christological anthropology as worked out through the principal of analogy: the outer dimensions of human existence correspond to the inner, the lower to the higher. In terms of the mutual relationship between God and the individual, that analogy also plays itself out: the down/outward toward sin is to the in/upward response to divine grace; the individual's descent in sin corresponds to the Word's divine condescension; and the human ascent toward deification corresponds to Christ's Resurrection/Ascension.

My **Introduction** shows how Saint Augustine's being the author of more than one defining work has caused him to be misunderstood and often blamed for an anthropology and theology that continue to haunt Western Christianity.

Chapter One (Prolegomena to Reading *Confessions* and Beyond) deals with some of the issues needing at least to be acknowledged in order to arrive at an understanding of the soul as the locus of one's self and of God's presence. It also introduces other issues, which may have

eventually revealed a theological rift between Western and Eastern Christianity.

Chapter Two (Turning toward Wisdom) focuses on Augustine's conversion as advancing from a devotional attachment to Christ, passing through Manicheanism, struggling to understand the problem of evil, being disillusioned until meeting up with Christian Platonists from whom he discovered the non-materiality of God and of his own soul, and culminating in his embrace of orthodox Christology. From there he was able to develop his anthropology, characterized by the gravitational pull of Christ and a life-long introversion toward becoming more himself, ultimately within Wisdom itself.

Chapter Three (The Heart of Confessions) is grounded in Augustine's often quoted but seldom explicated *Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo* in *Confessions* 3.11. Returning to one's self, entering into one's memory and ascending beyond it, inwardness and transcendence simultaneously, are the extended metaphors Augustine used to describe the relationship between God and the human spirit.

Chapter Four (Memory, Still-Point of the Soul) uses T.S. Eliot's metaphor of the still-point to develop what memory is for Augustine and how the heart's attractions are the fundamental activity of the soul. Memory, partnered with mind as its dynamism, is the seat of consciousness that becomes awareness of self, of the world, and of God. Memory is the seat of both the *sensibilia*, experience internalized, and of the innate *intelligibilia*. It is where the world is perceived, contained and judged and where reality becomes real. As this chapter provides the foundation for understanding the difference between exteriority and interiority, it sheds light on the difference between gradual understanding effected through discourse (*kataphasis*) and knowing immediately (*apophasis*), between *scientia* and *sapientia*.

Chapter Five (From One Still-Point to Another) begins with Augustine's motivation for "confessing" his interior experience of the one who is Truth by representing it in the exterior verbal expression of preaching. It also deals with the dialogical relationship between the auditors' faith and the preacher's trustworthiness, both required to establish the truth of what is being communicated. It then serves as transition from Augustine's idea of an individual's still-point to his idea of a universal still-point in Christ, moving toward the idea of Christ as *totus Christus* in whom humanity's space-time distention coalesces into the one Global Still-Point.

Chapter Six (Preaching to the Whole Christ) begins with a consideration of the Liturgy as the context for Augustine's interpretation of the Scriptures as fundamentally Christological. Read outside the liturgy, they are only about Christ. When preached as discourse, they become alive as the Word of God, Christ addressing the congregation as the extension of his Incarnation

within the local community: *totus Christus*.

Chapter Seven (The Word Descended to Ascend as the One, Whole Christ) situates Augustine's Christology within his appreciation of John's Gospel. Time and space merging within memory serve as an analog for understanding the hypostatic union of divine nature and human nature into the historical event of Jesus Christ. Augustine represented salvation as the Logos of God having descended and externalized himself from God to become the humanized Logos, coalescing with human beings through Baptism, to ascend and enter with them back into God, as the convergence of Creator and creature, *totus Christus*. The Incarnation establishes the way of salvation, which is an exchange along the way (*uia*) where God draws into Godself the human nature of men and women who have set themselves toward the *Patria*.

Chapter Eight (The Spring of Life, Light of the World) examines the homilies Augustine preached about two encounters Jesus had, which represent individual instances of inward ascent, divinely occasioned by Jesus, Word of God become human invitation. Augustine used *apud te est fons uitae* and *in lumine tuo uidebimus lumen* of Psalm 35 to elucidate the discourse at Jacob's Well between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman and the successive scenes of the Man born blind being brought to sight. Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan Woman engaged metaphors of word and hearing associated with *fons uitae*; his second, connected with the healing of the Man born blind enlists those of seeing associated with *lumen*. Again the Incarnate Word is the principle of coalescence between two separate sets of metaphors. Combined, they move from kataphatic *scientia* to immediate apophatic *sapientia*.

Chapter Nine (The Cloud of Unknowing) shows how the two perceptual structures of hearing and seeing provide the basis for noting the conceptual difference between time and space, sequence and simultaneity, learning through discourse and knowing by vision, and *scientia* distinguished from *sapientia*.

Augustine's anthropological Christology is further enhanced by the ratio he found in Plato's *Timaeus*: "As temporal becoming is to eternal being, so is faith to truth." Augustine described the Word-become-human as the mediator accommodating the temporality of faith grounded in human history to the eternity of divine truth. His use of the ratio melded human endeavor with eternal stillness. All discourse attempting to understand comes to rest in the Cloud of Unknowing, the experience of the One Thing wordlessly.

The "Afterword" attempts to pull Augustine out of theological quagmires occasioned by his engagement in an inherited theological tradition and in Pelagian controversies, by invoking his distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia*. The rational dilemma that roils among the discourses of *scientia* might dissolve within the silencing still-point of *sapientia*.

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