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St. Augustine's Journey to Faith

Augustine's *Confessions* detail the Catholic philosopher's reflection on his faith journey, a journey that would encompass much of his youth and early adulthood. Despite being raised by a devout mother, Augustine struggled to balance faith and purpose in his life. He practiced several different philosophies and religions throughout his life. Through his writings, Augustine elaborates on several of the Four Claims of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. His introspection on his own relationship with the divine relates to the first claim that states the Catholic belief in the relationship between mankind and a Triune God. In addition, his contemplations of life, morality, and divine influence relate to the third claim, which states the Catholic belief that faith and reason are compatible. Augustine's spiritual journey is defined by his search for reconciliation between his own flaws and what he felt was his divine purpose.

Augustine begins *Confessions* with a brief elaboration on how humans can search for God, if we can't even be certain on what God is. Augustine sees this mysteriousness reflected in his own search for purpose and divine connection. He feels a calling to a divine purpose directed by a divine being whose very nature he cannot begin to understand. He begins with a prayer of thanks and longing. On one hand, Augustine is grateful to have developed faith in Catholicism; on the other, he is haunted by his previous lifestyle and beliefs. He describes his mindset as he converted:

But as usually happens, the man who has tried a bad doctor is afraid to trust even a good one: so it was with the health of my soul, which could not be healed save believing, and refused to be healed that way for fear of believing falsehood.

Thus I was resisting Your hands, for You first prepared us the medicine of faith

(Text page 165)

Augustine clearly feels deeply regretful of his pre-Catholic actions. His early books reflect at length on what he feels are false truths and happiness. As he says in the above excerpt, he feels as though he was essentially diseased by his lack of faith. Despite that, Augustine does feel that God was guiding him through these phases with a deliberate intent of revelation. His deliberation on God's cleverly disguised message of truth reflect the depth of the relationship the Catholic Church believes exists between man and a Triune God.

Augustine writes about the mystery of omnipresent God that is also present within himself. The divine has a unique dichotomy of being, in that God exists as an eternal Truth and as a core part of Augustine's humanity. Augustine explains:

For You, O highest and nearest, most hidden and present, have not parts greater and smaller; You are wholly everywhere, yet nowhere limited within space, nor are You of any bodily form. And yet You have made man in Your own image, and man in space from head to foot. (Text, page 164)

This brief passage summarizes a great mystery of the Roman Catholic Church that continues to be contemplated, examined, and worshiped even today. God, supposedly a divine being of eternal truth, is named as mankind's creator who modeled his creation after his own perfection. Yet his creation-humanity- remains deeply and fundamentally flawed. The Trinity- a unique feature of the Roman Catholic Church- attempts to explain this multiplicity of being with the Trinity. God's singular relationship with humanity is explained through multiple identities that interact with it in different ways, creating the critical relationship expressed in the first claim.

The Bible becomes an integral part of Augustine's connection with Catholicism as he grows more devout. Reflecting on how he once read the Holy Book as falsehood, he rejoices in being able to see clearly the meaning in its pages. He applauds the language of the Bible for being simple and approachable as well as insightful and full of meaning. With its simplicity,

Augustine says, the Scriptures can draw all to the Roman Catholic Church, yet the meaning is still fully conveyed to those ready to see it. He felt that the common language of the Bible assisted his faith journey when he was struggling; it allowed him to stay on the path when he was wavering. The Scripture continues to hold an integral role within the Roman Catholic Church and is considered to be inspired by the Holy Spirit- another expression of the Holy Trinity and the first claim.

A central theme in Augustine's writings is that of happiness. Born to a wealthy family with decent prospects for his time, Augustine spent much of his youth and early adulthood pursuing wealth, marriage, and prestige. Though he began a successful career that spanned both academia and government service, Augustine felt deeply unfilled as he moved through the ranks. He reflects on the stresses and worries that dominate his daily life, only to prove unsatisfied with their fruits. He writes:

It does indeed make a difference what one is happy about: I know it, and I know that the happiness of a sure hope is incomparably beyond all such vanity. And there was indeed a difference between him and me- for he was the much happier man: not only because he was soaked in his merriment while I was eaten up with cares, but also because he by wishing luck to all comers had at least got wine, while I by lying was aiming to get only empty praise. (Text, page 167)

In the end, Augustine's journey to conversion was partially a selfish one; he desired happiness beyond what his current trajectory could offer. His attempts to drown his misery in multiple other religions, excessive drinking, and other shallow pleasures only satisfied him for so long. Yet, as he states in Book Two, perhaps this is an innate drive for mankind to find the attributes of God in everyday life. Augustine sought love through multiple relationships, sought truth in Manicheism, and glory in earthly success. Though misguided, he writes, the drive to connect with these sensations were attempts to connect with his own innate feeling of the divine. The Roman Catholic Church proclaims

that mankind has a connection with the Triune God that derives from our very origins; it is only natural, as Augustine demonstrates, to search for that connection throughout our lives, even if we go astray in that search.