

APOSTOLIC LETTER
AUGUSTINUM HIPPOENSEM



OF POPE
JOHN PAUL II

TO THE BISHOPS, PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS
FAMILIES AND FAITHFUL OF THE WHOLE
CHURCH, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
16TH CENTENARY OF THE CONVERSION
OF ST. AUGUSTINE, BISHOP AND DOCTOR.

August 28, 1986.

Venerable brothers and beloved Sons and Daughters :

Greetings and the Apostolic Blessing !

Augustine of Hippo, who, scarcely one year after his death, was called "one of the best teachers" of the Church by my distant predecessor, St. Celestine I,¹ has been present ever since in the life of the Church and in the mind and culture of the whole western world. In a similar fashion, other Roman Pontiffs have proposed the example of his way of life and the writings that embody his teachings as an object of contemplation and imitation, and very many Councils have often drawn copiously from his writings. Pope Leo XIII praised his philosophical teachings in the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* ;² later, Pius XI made a brief synthesis of his virtues and teachings in the Encyclical *Ad salutem humani generis*, declaring that, of those who have flourished from the beginnings of the human race down to our own days, none – or, at most, very few – could rank with Augustine, for the very great acuteness of his genius, for the richness and sublimity of his teachings, and finally for his holiness of life and defense of Catholic truth.³ Paul VI later affirmed : "Indeed, over and above

¹ Celestine I, *Apostolici verba* (May 431) : PL 50, 530 A.

² Cf. Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris* (August 4, 1879) : *Acta Leonis III*, I, Rome 1881, p. 270.

³ Cf. Pius XI, *Ad salutem humani generis* (April 22, 1930) : *AAS* 22 (1930), p. 233.

the shining example he gives of the qualities common to all the Fathers, it may be said that all the thought-currents of the past meet in his works and form the source which provides the whole doctrinal tradition of succeeding ages."⁴

I too have added my voice to those of my predecessors, when I expressed my strong desire "that his philosophical, theological and spiritual doctrine be studied and spread, so that he may continue...his teaching in the Church, a humble but at the same time enlightened teaching which speaks above all of Christ and love."⁵ On another occasion, I urged in particular the spiritual sons of this great saint "to keep the fascination of St. Augustine alive and attractive even in modern society." This is an excellent ideal that must fire us with enthusiasm, because "the exact and heartfelt knowledge of his life awakens the thirst for God, the attraction of Christ, the love for wisdom and truth, the need for grace, prayer, virtue, fraternal charity, and the yearning for eternal happiness."⁶

⁴ Paul VI, Discourse to the Religious of the Augustinian Order (May 4, 1970) : AAS 62 (1970), p. 426 ; cf. L. 'Osservatore Romano, English edition, May 21, 1970.

⁵ John Paul II, Discourse to the Professors and students of the "Augustinianum" (May 8, 1982) : AAS 74 (1982), p. 800 ; cf. L'Osservatore Romano, English edition, June 14, 1982.

⁶ John Paul II, Discourse to the General Chapter of the Augustinian Order on August 25, 1983 : Insegnamenti VI-2 (1983), p. 305 ; cf. L. 'Osservatore Romano, English edition, September 3, 1983.

I am very happy, accordingly, that the propitious circumstance of the sixteenth centenary of his conversion and baptism offers me the opportunity to evoke his brilliant figure once again. This commemoration will be at the same time a thanksgiving to God for the gift that He has made to the Church, and through her to the whole human race, with this wonderful conversion. It will also be a very fitting occasion to recall to all that this convert, when he had become a bishop, was a marvelous example to pastors in his intrepid defense of the true faith, or, as he would say, of the "virginity" of the faith.⁷ He was likewise the genius who constructed a philosophy that can truly be called Christian because of its harmony with the faith, and a tireless promoter of spiritual and religious perfection.

I.

We know the progress of his conversion from his own works written in the solitude of Cassiciacum before his baptism,⁸ and above all from the famous Confessions, a work that is simultaneously autobiography, philosophy, theology, mysticism and poetry, a work in which

⁷ Cf. St. Augustine, Sermon, 93, 4 ; 213, 7 : PL 38, 1063. (Henceforth, all references not expressly naming the author are to be understood as "St. Augustine").

⁸ Cf. De beata vita 4 : PL 32,961, Contra Acad. 2, 2, 4-6, PL 32, 921-922, Solil. 1, 1, 1-6, PL 32, 869-872.

those who thirst for truth and know their own limitations have always discovered their own selves. Toward the end of his life, he wrote : "Which of my works succeeded more often in being known and loved than the books of my Confessions?"⁹ History has never contradicted this judgment, but has amply confirmed it. Even today, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine are widely read, since the richness of their interior insight and religious emotion have a profound effect on the minds of men and women, stimulating them and disturbing them. This is true not only of believers ; even one without faith, but in search at least of a certainty that will allow him to understand himself, his deep aspirations and his torments, reads this work with advantage. The conversion of St. Augustine, an event totally dominated by the need to find the truth, has much to teach the men and women of today, who are so often mistaken about the greatest question of all life.

It is well known that this conversion took a wholly individual path, because it was not a case of arriving for the first time at the Catholic faith, but of rediscovering it. He had lost it, convinced that in so doing, he was abandoning only the Church, not Christ.

⁹ De dono perseu. 20, 53 : PL 45, 1026.

He had been brought up in a Christian manner by his mother,¹⁰ the pious and holy Monica.¹¹ In virtue of this education, Augustine always remained not only a believer in God, in providence and in the future life,¹² but also a believer in Christ, whose name he "had drunk in," as he says, "with my mother's milk."¹³ After he had returned to the faith of the Catholic Church, he said that he had returned "to the faith which was instilled in me as a child and which had entered into my very marrow."¹⁴ If one wishes to understand his interior evolution, and what is perhaps the most profound aspect of his personality and his thought, one must take this fact as one's starting-point.

He awoke at the age of nineteen to the love of wisdom, when he read the *Hortensius* of Cicero – "That book altered my way of thinking...and I desired wisdom's immortality with an incredible ardor in my heart."¹⁵ He loved the truth deeply, and sought it always with all the strength of his soul : "O Truth, Truth, how deep even then was the yearning for you in the inmost depths of my mind !"¹⁶

¹⁰ Confess. 1, 11, 17 : PL 32, 699.

¹¹ Cf. Confess. 9, 8, 17-9, 13, 17 : PL 32, 771-780.

¹² Cf. Confess. 6 5,8 : PL 32,723.

¹³ Confess. 3, 4, 8 : PL 32, 686 ; *ibid.* 5, 14, 25 : PL 32, 718.

¹⁴ *Contra Acad.* 2,2,5 : PL 32,921.

¹⁵ Confess. 3,4,7 : PL 32,685.

¹⁶ Confess. 3, 6, 10 : PL 32, 687.

Despite this love for truth, Augustine fell into serious errors. Scholars who look for the reasons for this indicate three directions : first, a mistaken, account of the relationship between reason and faith, so that he would have to choose between them ; second, in the supposed contrast between Christ and the Church, with the consequent conviction that it was necessary to abandon the Church in order to belong more fully to Christ ; and third, the desire to free himself from the consciousness of sin, not by means of the remission of sin through the working of grace, but by means of the denial of the involvement of human responsibility in the sin itself.

The first error consisted, therefore, in a certain spirit of rationalism which led Augustine to believe that "one should believe those who teach, rather than those who issue commands."¹⁷ With this spirit, he read the Sacred Scriptures and felt himself repelled by the mysteries that they contain, mysteries that need to be accepted with humble faith. When he spoke later to his people about this period of his life, he said : "I who speak to you was once deceived, when I first came to the divine Scriptures as a youth, preferring to discuss intellectual points rather than to seek piety.... In my wretchedness, I

¹⁷ De beata vita 4 : PL 32, 961.

thought that I could fly, and left the nest ; and before I could fly, I fell."¹⁸

It was at this time that Augustine met the Manichaeans, heard them and followed them. The chief reason for this was that "they said that, having set aside the terrible authority, they would lead to God by pure and simple reason those willing to listen to them, freed from all errors"¹⁹ Augustine then presented himself as "one wishing to grasp and imbibe the open and authentic truth"²⁰ with the force of reason alone.

After long years of study, especially of philosophical study,²¹ he realized that he had been deceived, but the effect of the Manichaean propaganda was to keep him convinced that the truth was not to be found in the Catholic Church.²² He fell into a profound depression and indeed despaired of ever coming to know the truth : "the Academicians kept my rudder for long in the middle of the streams, resisting all winds."²³

It was the same love for truth which he always had within him, that rescued him from this interior crisis. He realized that it was impossible

¹⁸ Serm. 51, 5, 6 : PL 38, 336.

¹⁹ De utilitate cred. 1, 2 : PL 42, 66.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cf. Confess. 5, 3, 3 : PL 32,707.

²² Cf. Confess. 5, 10, 19 ; 5, 13, 23 ; 5, 14, 24 : PL 32, 715, 717, 718.

²³ De beata vita 4 : PL 32, 961 ; Cf. Confess. 5, 9, 19 ; 5, 14, 25 ; 6, 1, 1 : PL 32, 715, 718, 719.

that the path to truth should be closed to the human mind ; if it is not found, it is because men neglect and despise the means that will lead to the discovery of truth.²⁴ Strengthened by this conviction, he replies to himself : "Rather, let us seek more diligently, and not despair."²⁵ He therefore continued to search, and reached the harbor under the guidance of the divine grace which his mother implored for him in her supplications and abundant tears.²⁶

He understood that reason and faith are two forces that are to cooperate to bring the human person to know the truth,²⁷ and that each of these has its own primacy : faith comes first in the sequence of time, reason has the absolute primacy : "the authority is first in the order of time, but in reality the primacy belongs to the reason."²⁸ He understood that if faith is to be sure, it needs a divine authority, and that this is none other than the authority of Christ, the supreme teacher – Augustine had never doubted this²⁹-and that the authority of Christ is found in

²⁴ Cf. *De utilitate credendi* 8, 20 : PL 42, 78-79.

²⁵ *Confess.* 6, 11, 18 : PL 32, 719.

²⁶ Cf. *Confess.* 3, 12, 21 : PL 32, 694.

²⁷ Cf. *Contra Acad.* 3, 20, 43 : PL 32, 957 ; *Confess.* 6, 5, 7 : PL 32, 722-723.

²⁸ *De ordine* 2, 9, 26 : PL 32, 1007.

²⁹ Cf. *Confess.* 7, 19, 25 : PL 32, 746.

the Sacred Scriptures³⁰ that are guaranteed by the authority of the Catholic Church.³¹

With the help of the Platonist philosophers, he freed himself from the materialistic concept of being that he had taken in from Manichaeism : "Admonished by them to return to myself, I entered within myself, under Your guidance.... I entered, and I saw as with the eye of my soul...the inalterable light above my mind."³² It was this inalterable light that opened to him the immense horizons of the spirit of God.

He understood that the first question to be asked about the serious question of evil, which was his great torment,³³ was not its origin, but what it was ;³⁴ and he saw that evil is not a substance, but the lack of good : "All that exists is good. The evil about the origin of which I asked questions is not a substance."³⁵ He concluded that God is the creator of everything, and that no substance exists that was not created by Him.³⁶

Taught by his own experience of life,³⁷ he made the decisive discovery that sin has its origin in the will of the human person, a will that is free

³⁰ Cf. Confess. 6, 5, 7 ; 6, 11, 19 ; 7, 7, 11 : PL 32, 723, 729, 739.

³¹ Cf. Confess. 7, 7, 11 : PL 32, 739.

³² Confess. 7, 10, 16 : PL 32, 742.

³³ Cf. Confess. 7, 1, 1 ; 7, 7, 11 : PL 32, 733, 739.

³⁴ Cf. Confess. 7, 5, 7 : PL 32, 736.

³⁵ Confess. 7, 13, 19 : PL 32, 743.

³⁶ Cf. Confess. 7, 12, 18 : PL 32, 743.

³⁷ Cf. Confess. 7, 3, 5 : PL 32, 735.

and weak : "It was I who willed and refused ; it was I, I."³⁸

Although he could assert at this time that he had reached the point of arrival, this was not yet the case, because he was caught in the tentacles of a new error, the presumption that he could attain the beatifying possession of the truth by natural powers alone. An unhappy personal experience changed his opinion on this point.³⁹ He understood then that it is one thing to know the goal, another to reach it.⁴⁰ In order to find the necessary powers and the path itself, he took up "most eagerly," as he says, "the venerable Scripture of Your Spirit, and above all the apostle Paul."⁴¹ He found Christ the teacher in the letters of Paul, as he had always venerated Him, but also Christ the Redeemer, the incarnate Word, the only mediator between God and men. He saw then in all its splendor "the face of philosophy"⁴²- the philosophy of Paul that has as its center Christ, "the power and wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1 :24), and has other centers in faith, humility and grace ; the "philosophy" that is at once wisdom

³⁸ Confess. 8, 10, 22 : PL 32, 759 ; Cf. Ibid. 8, 5, 10-11 : PL 32, 753-754.

³⁹ Cf. Confess. 7, 17, 23 : PL 32, 744-745.

⁴⁰ Cf. Confess. 7, 21, 26 : PL 32, 749.

⁴¹ Confess. 7, 21, 27 : PL 32, 747.

⁴² Contra Acad. 2, 2, 6 : PL 32, 922.

and grace, so that it becomes possible not only to know one's homeland, but also to reach it.⁴³

Having rediscovered Christ the Redeemer and embraced Him, Augustine had returned to the harbor of the Catholic faith, to the faith in which he had been brought up by his mother : "For I had heard while still a boy about the eternal life promised to us by the God who in His humility came down to our pride."⁴⁴ The love for the truth, nourished by divine grace, overcame all errors.

But the path was not yet at its end. A former plan was reborn in Augustine's mind : to consecrate himself totally to wisdom once he had found it, abandoning every earthly hope in order to possess wisdom.⁴⁵ Now he could no longer make excuses : the truth so long desired was now certain.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, he hesitated, seeking reasons to put off the decision to do this.⁴⁷ The bonds that tied him to the earthly hopes were strong : honors, money, marriage,⁴⁸ especially the last, in view of the way of life that that had become customary for him.⁴⁹

⁴³ Cf. Confess. 7, 21, 27 : PL 32, 748.

⁴⁴ Confess. 1, 11, 17 : PL 32, 669.

⁴⁵ Cf. Confess. 6, 11, 18 ; 8, 7, 17 : PL 32, 729, 757.

⁴⁶ Cf. Confess. 8, 5, 11, 12 : PL 32, 754.

⁴⁷ Cf. Confess. 6, 12, 21 : PL 32, 730.

⁴⁸ Cf. Confess. 6, 6, 9 : PL 32, 723.

⁴⁹ Cf. Confess. 6, 15, 25 : PL 32, 732.

Augustine knew well that he was not forbidden to marry ;⁵⁰ but he did not want to be a Catholic Christian in any other way except by renouncing the excellent ideal of the family in order to dedicate himself with "all" his soul to the love and possession of wisdom. In taking this decision which corresponded to his deepest aspirations but was in contrast to his most deeply-rooted habits, Augustine was prompted by the example of Anthony and of the monks who were beginning to spread in the West also and whom he came to know by chance.⁵¹ He accused himself with great shame, "You could not do what these men and women do."⁵² A deep and painful struggle ensued, which was brought to its close by divine grace once again.⁵³

Augustine related to his mother his serene and strong decision : "Then we went to my mother and related the matter to her : she rejoiced. We related how it had come about : she exulted in triumph and she blessed You, who are able to do more than we ask or think (Eph 3 :20), because she saw that You had given her so much more, as regarded me, than she had been accustomed to ask with her unhappy and tearful groanings. For You converted me to yourself, so

⁵⁰ Cf. Confess. 8, 1, 2 : PL 32, 749.

⁵¹ Cf. Confess. 8, 6, 13-15 : PL 32, 755-756.

⁵² Confess. 8, 11, 27 : PL 32, 761.

⁵³ Cf. Confess. 8, 7, 16-12, 29 : PL 32, 756-762.

that I might seek neither wife nor any hope of this world."⁵⁴

From this moment, Augustine began a new life. He finished the academic year-the harvest holidays were near⁵⁵-and withdrew to the solitude of Cassiciacum ;⁵⁶ at the end of the vacation, he gave up teaching,⁵⁷ and returned to Milan at the beginning of 387. He enrolled among the catechumens and was baptized on the night of Holy Saturday-April 23-24 – by Ambrose, the bishop from whose preaching he had learned so much. "We were baptized, and the care of the past life fled from us. I could not have enough in those days of the wonderful sweetness of contemplating the sublimity of Your plan of salvation for the human race." He adds, bearing witness to the profound emotion of his mind, "How much I wept at the hymns and canticles, keenly moved by the sweet voices of Your Church !"⁵⁸

After baptism, Augustine's one desire was to find a suitable place to live with his friends according to his "holy resolution" to serve the Lord.⁵⁹ He found it in Africa, at Tagaste, his

⁵⁴ Confess. 8, 12, 30 : PL 32, 762.

⁵⁵ Confess. 9, 2, 24 ; PL 32, 763.

⁵⁶ Cf. Confess. 9, 4, 7-12 : PL 32, 766-769.

⁵⁷ Cf. Confess. 9, 5, 13 : PL 32, 769.

⁵⁸ Confess. 9, 6, 14 : PL 32, 769.

⁵⁹ Cf. Confess. 9, 6, 14 : PL 32, 769.

native town, where he went after the death of his mother at Ostia Tiberina⁶⁰ and after spending a few months at Rome to study the monastic movement.⁶¹ When he arrived at Tagaste, "having now cast off from himself the cares of the world ; he lived for God with those who accompanied him, in fasting, prayers, and good works, meditating on the law of the Lord by day and by night." The passionate lover of the truth wanted to dedicate his life to asceticism, to contemplation, and to the intellectual apostolate. His first biographer indeed goes on to say : "In his discourse and his books, he taught about what God had revealed to his intellect as he pondered and prayed."⁶² He wrote very many books at Tagaste, as he had done at Rome and Milan and at Cassiciacum.

After three years he went to Hippo, intending to look for a site to found a monastery, and to meet a friend whom he hoped to win for the monastic life. He found instead, in spite of himself, the priesthood.⁶³ But he did not give up his ideal : he asked and obtained permission to found a monastery, the *monastery of the laymen*, in which he lived, and from which many priests and

⁶⁰ Cf. Confess. 9, 12, 28s : PL 32, 775s.

⁶¹ Cf. De mor. Eccl. cath. 1, 33, 70 : PL 32, 1340.

⁶² POSSIDIO, Vita S. Augustini 3, 1 : PL 32, 36.

⁶³ Cf. Serm. 355, 2 : PL 39, 1569.

many bishops came for all of Africa.⁶⁴ When he became bishop, five years later, he transformed the bishop's house into a monastery, the *monastery of the clerics*. Not even as priest and bishop did he abandon the ideal conceived at the moment of his conversion. He wrote also a rule *for the servants of God*, which has had so much influence in the history of western religious life, and continues to play its part today.⁶⁵

II.

I have dealt at some length with the essential points of the conversion of Augustine, because they offer so much useful teachings, not only for believers, but for all men and women of good will : they teach how easy it is to go astray on the path of life, and how difficult it is to rediscover the way of truth. But this wonderful conversion also helps us to understand better his life afterwards as monk, priest and bishop who always remained the great man who had been struck by the lightning-flash of grace : "You had shot at our heart with the arrow of Your love, and we bore Your words transfixed in our breast."⁶⁶ Above all, the conversion helps us to penetrate more easily into his thought, which was so universal and profound that it rendered

⁶⁴ Cf. POSSIDIO, *Vita S. Augustini* 11, 2 : PL 32, 42.

⁶⁵ Cf. L. VERHEIJEN, *La règle de Saint Augustin*, Paris 1967, I-II.

⁶⁶ *Confess.* 9, 2, 3 : PL 32, 764 ; cf. *ibid.* 10, 6, 8 : PL 32, 782.

incomparable and imperishable service to Christian thought, so that we have good reason to call him the common father of Christian Europe.

The hidden force of his tireless search was assuredly the same force that had guided him on the path of his conversion : love for the truth. He himself indeed says : What does the soul desire more strongly than the truth ?"⁶⁷ In a work of lofty theological and mystical speculation, written more out of personal need than for external requirements, he recalls this love and writes : "We are caught up by the love of seeking out the truth."⁶⁸ This time, the object of the search is the august mystery of the Trinity and the mystery of Christ, the Father's revelation, "knowledge and wisdom" of the human person : thus was born the great work *On the Trinity*.

Two coordinates guided the research, which was unceasingly nourished by love : the deepening of the Catholic faith and its defense against those who denied it, such as the Manichaeans and the pagans, or who interpreted it erroneously, such as the Donatists, the Pelagians and the Arians. It is difficult to venture forth upon the sea of Augustine's thought, and even more difficult to summarize it-this indeed is almost impossible. I may however be permitted

⁶⁷ Tractatus in Io 26, 5 : PL 35, 1609.

⁶⁸ De Trin. 1, 5, 8 : PL 42, 825.

to recall some illuminating insights of this mighty thinker, for the edification of all.

1. Reason and faith

First of all, there is the problem that occupied him most in his youth and to which he returned with all the force of genius and the passion of his spirit: the problem of the relationship between reason and faith. This is a perennial problem, no less acute today than yesterday, and the direction taken by human thought depends on its solution. It is a difficult problem, however, because one must pass safely between two extremes, between the fideism that despises reason and the rationalism that excludes faith. Augustine's intellectual and pastoral endeavor aimed to show, beyond any shadow of doubt, that "since we are impelled by a twin pull of gravity to learn,"⁶⁹ both forces, reason and faith, must work together.

He always listened to what faith had to say, but he exalted reason no less, giving each its own primacy in time of importance.⁷⁰ He told all, "Believe that you may understand," but he repeated also, "Understand that you may believe."⁷¹ He wrote a work, perennially relevant,

⁶⁹ *Contra Acad.* 3, 20, 43 : PL 32, 957.

⁷⁰ Cf. *De ordine* 2, 9, 26 : PL 32, 1007.

⁷¹ Cf. *Serm.* 43, 9 : PL 38, 258.

on the usefulness of faith,⁷² and explained that faith is the medicine designed to heal the eye of the spirit,⁷³ the unconquerable fortress for the defense of all, especially of the weak, against error,⁷⁴ the nest in which we receive the wings for the lofty flights of the spirit,⁷⁵ the short path that permits one to know, quickly, surely and without errors, the truths which lead the human person to wisdom.⁷⁶ He also emphasizes that faith is never without reason, because it is reason that shows "in what one should believe."⁷⁷ "For faith has its own eyes, by means of which it sees in a certain manner that what it does not yet see is true."⁷⁸ Therefore "no one believes anything, unless he has first thought that it is to be believed," because "to believe is itself nothing other than to think with assent...if faith is not' thought through, it is no faith."⁷⁹

The outcome of the discourse on the eyes of faith is the discourse on credibility, of which Augustine often speaks, adducing the reasons for credibility as if to confirm the consciousness with

⁷² Cf. *De utilitate credendi* : PL 42, 65-92.

⁷³ Cf. *Confess.* 6, 4, 6 : PL 32, 722 : *De serm, Domini in monte* 2, 3, 14 : PL 34, 1275.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ep.* 118, 5, 32 : PL 33, 447.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Serm.* 51, 5, 6 : PL 387, 337.

⁷⁶ Cf. *De quantitate animae* 7, 12 : PL 32, 1041-1042.

⁷⁷ *De uera relig.* 24, 45 : PL 34, 1041-1042.

⁷⁸ *Ep.* 120, 2, 8 : PL 33, 456.

⁷⁹ *De praed. sanctorum* 2, 5 : PL 44, 962-963.

which he himself had returned to the Catholic faith. It is good to listen to one of these texts : "There are many things that most properly keep me in the bosom of the Catholic Church ; to say nothing of the most genuine wisdom...let me therefore omit mention of this wisdom" (for this argument, which for Augustine was extremely strong, was not accepted by his opponents). "The consensus of peoples and races keeps me in the Church, as does the authority based on miracles, nourished by hope, increased by charity, strengthened by its ancient character ; likewise the succession of the priests, from the very see of the apostle Peter, to whom the Lord entrusted the care of His sheep after the resurrection, down to the episcopate of today ; finally, the very name of the Catholic Church keeps me in her, because it is not without reason that this Church alone has obtained such a name amid so many heresies."⁸⁰

In the great work on the *City of God*, which is at once apologetic and dogmatic, the problem of reason and faith becomes that of faith and culture. Augustine, who did so much to establish and promote Christian culture, solves this problem by developing three main arguments : the faithful exposition of Christian doctrine ; the careful salvaging of pagan culture, to the extent that it had elements capable of being salvaged (in the area of philosophy, this was no small

⁸⁰ Contra ep. Man. 4, 5 : PL 42, 175.

amount) ; and the insistent demonstration of the presence in Christian teaching of whatever was true and perennially valid in pagan culture, with the advantage of finding it perfected and exalted there.⁸¹ It was not for nothing that the *City of God* was widely read in the middle ages ; and it greatly deserves to be read today as well, as an example and stimulus to deepen the encounter of Christianity with the cultures of the peoples. An important text of Augustine may be usefully quoted here : "The heavenly city...draws citizens from all peoples...taking no account of what is different in customs laws and institutions ;...she neither suppresses nor destroys anything of these, but rather preserves and fosters it. The diversities that may exist in the diverse nations work together for the single goal of earthly peace, unless they obstruct the practice of the religion that teaches the worship of the one, true and most high God."⁸²

2. *God and man*

The other great word-pair which Augustine continuously studied is God and man. As I have said above, when he freed himself from the materialism which prevented him from having an exact concept of God- and hence the true concept of man- he made this word-pair the

⁸¹ Cf. eg. *De civ. Dei* 2, 29, 1-2 : PL 41, 77-78.

⁸² *De civ. Dei* 19, 17 : PL 41, 645.

center of the great themes of his study,⁸³ and always studied the two together : man thinking of God, God thinking of man, who is His image.

In the *Confessions*, he asks himself these two questions : "What are You for me... What am I myself for You ?"⁸⁴ He brings all the resources of His thought and all the unwearying labor of his apostolate to bear on the search for an answer to these questions. He is fully convinced of the ineffability of God, so that he cries out : "Why wonder that you do not understand ? For if you understand, it is not God."⁸⁵ It follows that "it is no...small beginning of the knowledge of God, if before we are able to know what He is, we already begin to know what He is not."⁸⁶ It is necessary therefore to strive "that we should thus know God, if we are able and as far as we are able, the one who is good without quality, great without quantity, the creator not bound by necessity," and thus going through all the categories of reality that Aristotle has described.⁸⁷

Although God is transcendent and ineffable, Augustine is nevertheless able, starting from the self-awareness of the human person who knows that he exists and knows and loves, and

⁸³ Cf. Solil. 1, 2, 7 : PL 32, 872.

⁸⁴ Confess. 1, 5, 5 : PL 32, 663.

⁸⁵ Serm. 117, 5 : PL 38, 673.

⁸⁶ Ep. 120.3.15 : PL 33, 459.

⁸⁷ De Trin. 5, 1, 2 : PL 42. 912 ; cf. Confess. 4, 16, 28 : PL 32 ; 704.

encouraged by Sacred Scripture, which reveals God as the supreme Being (Ex 3 :14), highest Wisdom (Wis, *passim*) and first Love (1 Jn 4 :8), is able to illustrate this threefold notion of God : the Being from whom every being proceeds through creation from nothing, the Truth which enlightens the human mind so that it can know the truth with certainty, the Love that is the source and the goal of all true love. For God, as he so often repeats, is "the cause of what exists, the reason of thought and the ordering of living,"⁸⁸ or, to use an equally famous formula, "the cause of the universe that has been created, and the light of the truth that is to be perceived, and the fountain from which happiness is to be drunk."⁸⁹

But it was above all in studying the presence of God in the human person that Augustine used his genius. This presence is both profound and mysterious. He finds God as "the eternal internal,"⁹⁰ most secret and most present⁹¹ – man seeks Him because he is absent, but knows Him and finds Him because He is present. God is present as "the creative substance of the world,"⁹² as the truth that gives light,⁹³ as the love that

⁸⁸ De civ. Dei 8, 4 : PL 41, 228.

⁸⁹ De civ. Dei 8, 10, 2 : PL 41, 235.

⁹⁰ Confess. 9, 4, 10 : PL 32, 768.

⁹¹ Cf. Confess. 1, 4, 4 : PL 32, 662.

⁹² Ep 187, 4, 14 : PL 33, 837.

⁹³ Cf. De magistro 11, 38-14, 46 : PL 32, 1215-1220.

attracts,⁹⁴ more intimate than what is most intimate in man, and higher than what is highest in him. Referring to the period before his conversion, Augustine says to God : "Where were You then for me, and how far away ? And I was a wanderer far away from You.... But You were more internal than what was intimate in me, and higher than what was highest in me" ;⁹⁵ "You were with me, and I was not with You."⁹⁶ Indeed, he insists :

"You were in front of me ; but I had gone away from myself and did not find myself, much less find You."⁹⁷ Whoever does not find himself does not find God, because God is in the depths of each one of us.

The human person, accordingly, cannot understand himself except in relationship to God. Augustine found ever new expressions of this great truth, as he studied the relationship of man to God and stated this in the most varied and effective way. He sees the human person as a tension directed toward God ; his words, "You have made us for yourself and our heart has no rest until it rests in You,"⁹⁸ are very well known. He sees the human person as a capacity of

⁹⁴ Cf. Confess. 13, 9, 10 PL 32, 848-849.

⁹⁵ Confess. 3, 6, 11 : PL 32, 687-688.

⁹⁶ Confess. 10, 27, 38 : PL 32, 795.

⁹⁷ Confess. 5, 2, 2 : PL 32, 707.

⁹⁸ Confess 1, 1, 1 : PL 32, 661.

existence elevated to the immediate vision of God, the finite who reaches the Infinite. He writes in the *De Trinitate* that man "is the image of the one whom he is capable of enjoying, and whose partner he can become."⁹⁹ This faculty "is in the soul of man, which is rational or intellectual...immortally located in his immortality," and therefore the sign of his greatness : "he is a great nature, because he is capable of enjoying the highest nature and of becoming its partner."¹⁰⁰ He sees the human person also as a being in need of God, because he is in need of the happiness that he can find only in God. Human nature "has been created in such an excellent state that even although it is itself mutable, it reaches happiness by cleaving to the unchangeable good, that is, to God. Nor can it satisfy its need unless it is totally happy ; and only God suffices to satisfy it."¹⁰¹

It is because of this basic relationship between man and God that Augustine continually exhorts men to the life of the spirit. "Go back into yourself ; the truth dwells in the inner man ; and if you discover that your nature is mutable, transcend yourself also,"¹⁰² in order to find God, the source of the light that illuminates the mind.

⁹⁹ De Trin. 14, 8, 11 : PL 12, 1044.

¹⁰⁰ De Trin. 14, 4, 6 : PL 42, 1040.

¹⁰¹ De civ. Dei 12, 1, 3 : PL 41, 349.

¹⁰² De uera relig. 39, 72 : PL 34, 154.

Together with the truth there is in the inner man the mysterious capacity to love, which is like a weight (in Augustine's celebrated metaphor)¹⁰³ that draws him out of himself, toward the others and especially toward the Other, i.e. God. The force of attraction exercised by love makes him social by his very nature,¹⁰⁴ so that, as Augustine writes "there is nothing so social by nature...as the human race."¹⁰⁵

Man's interiority, where the inexhaustible riches of truth and love are stored, is "a great abyss,"¹⁰⁶ which St. Augustine never ceases to investigate with unfailing wonder. Here we must add that, for one who reflects on himself and on history, the human person appears as a great problem- as Augustine says, a "great question."¹⁰⁷ Too many enigmas surround him : the enigma of death, of the profound division that he suffers in himself, of the incurable imbalance between what he is and what he desires. These enigmas can be synthesized in the fundamental enigma of the greatness of the human person and his incomparable wretchedness. The Second Vatican Council spoke at length of these enigmas when it wished to cast light on the "mystery of the human

¹⁰³ Cf. Confess 13, 9, 10 : PL 32, 848-849.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. De bono coniugali 1, 1 : PL 40, 373.

¹⁰⁵ De civ. Dei 12, 27 : PL 41, 376.

¹⁰⁶ Confess. 4, 14, 22 : PL 32, 702.

¹⁰⁷ Confess. 4. 4. 9 : PL 32, 697.

person."¹⁰⁸ Augustine tackled these problems with passion and employed all the genius of his interest, not only to discover the reality, which is often very sad-if it is true that no one is more social by nature than the human person, it is no less true, adds the author of the *City of God*, taught by history, that "no one is more prone to discord by vice than the human race"¹⁰⁹-but also and above all to seek and propose their solution. He finds only one solution, which had already appeared on the eve of his conversion : Christ, the Redeemer of man. I too have felt it necessary in my first Encyclical, called precisely *Redemptor Hominis*, to draw the attention of the Church's children and all of men and women of good will to this solution ; I was happy to take up with my own voice the voice of all the Christian tradition.

As Augustine's thought penetrates these problems, it becomes more theological, while remaining fundamentally philosophical ; and the word-pair Christ and Church, which he had at first denied and later recognized in his younger years, began to illuminate the more general word-pair of God and man.

3. *Christ and the Church*

One may rightly say that the summit of the theological thinking of the Bishop of Hippo is

¹⁰⁸ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*. n. 10, cf. nn. 12-18.

¹⁰⁹ *De civ. Dei* 12, 27 : PL 41, 376.

Christ and the Church ; indeed, one could add that this is the summit of his philosophy too, in that he rebukes the philosophers for having done philosophy "without the man Christ."¹¹⁰ The Church is inseparable from Christ. From the time of his conversion onwards, he recognized and accepted with joy and gratitude the law of providence which has established in Christ and in the Church "the entire summit of authority and the light of reason in that one saving name and in His one Church, recreating and reforming the human race."¹¹¹

Without doubt, he spoke profusely and sublimely of the Trinitarian mystery in his work on the Trinity and in his discourses, tracing the path that was to be taken by later theology. He insisted both on the equality and on the distinction of the divine Persons, illustrating these through his teaching on their relations : God "is what He has, with the exceptions that are predicated of each Person in respect of the other."¹¹² He developed the theology of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and from the Son, but "principally" from the Father, because "the Father is the principle of all the divinity, or, to put it better, of the Godhead,"¹¹³

¹¹⁰ De Trin. 13, 19, 24 : PL 42, 1034.

¹¹¹ Ep. 118, 5, 33 : PL 33, 448.

¹¹² De civ. Dei 11, 10, 1 : PL 41, 325.

¹¹³ De Trin 4, 20, 29 : PL 42, 908.

and He has granted to the Son the spiration of the Holy Spirit,¹¹⁴ who proceeds as Love and therefore is not begotten.¹¹⁵ To reply better to the "garrulous rationalists,"¹¹⁶ he proposed the "psychological" explanation of the Trinity, seeking its image in the memory, in the intellect and in the love of the human person, and studying thus the most august mystery of faith together with the highest nature of creation, the human spirit.

Yet when he speaks of the Trinity, he never removes his gaze from Christ, who reveals the Father, nor from the work of salvation. Having come to understand the reason for the mystery of the incarnate Word, shortly before his conversion,¹¹⁷ he did not cease to investigate this more deeply, summarizing his thought in formulae that are so full and effective that they are like an anticipation of the teaching of Chalcedon. In an importance passage of one of his last works, he writes : "the believer... believes that in him there is the true human nature, that is our nature, although it is taken up in a unique way into the one Son of God when God the Word receives it, such that the One who received it and

¹¹⁴ Cf. De Trin. 15, 17, 29 : PL 42, 1081.

¹¹⁵ Cf. De Trin. 15, 27, 50 : PL 42, 1097 ; *ibid.* 1, 5, 8 : PL 42, 824-825 ; 9, 12, 18 : PL 42, 970-971.

¹¹⁶ De Trin. 1, 2, 4 : PL 42, 822.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Confess. 7, 19, 25 : PL 32, 746.

what He received formed one Person in the Trinity. The assumption of man did not make a quarternity, but the Trinity remained: this assumption wrought in an ineffable manner the truth of one person in God and man. Therefore we do not say that Christ is only God...nor only man...nor man in such a way that He would lack something that certainly belongs to human nature... but we say that Christ is true God, born of God the Father...and the same is true man, born of a human mother... nor does His humanity, in which He is less than the Father, take away anything from His divinity, in which He is equal to the Father...The one Christ is both of these."¹¹⁸ He puts it somewhat more briefly: "The same one who is man, is God; and the same one who is God, is man-not by the confusion of the nature but in the unity of the person,"¹¹⁹ "one...person in both natures."¹²⁰

With this solid vision of unity of the person in Christ, who is called "wholly God and wholly man,"¹²¹ Augustine covers an immense ground in theology and history. If his eagle's eye gazes on Christ the Word. of the Father, he insists no less on Christ the man; indeed, he asserts vigorously that without Christ the man there is neither

¹¹⁸ De dono persev. 24, 67 : PL 45, 1033-1034.

¹¹⁹ Serm. 186, 1, 1 : 38, 999.

¹²⁰ Serm. 294.9 : PL 38, 1340.

¹²¹ Serm. 293, 7 : PL 38, 1332.

mediation, nor justification, nor resurrection, nor membership of the Church. whose head is Christ.¹²² He returns often to this theme and develops it broadly, both to explain the faith which he had obtained again at the age of twenty-two and because of the needs of the Pelagian controversy.

Christ, the man-God,¹²³ is the sole mediator between the righteous and immortal God and mortal and sinful human beings, because He is at once mortal and righteous.¹²⁴ It follows that He is the universal way, "which has never been lacking for the human race, no one has been set free no one is set free, no one will be set free."¹²⁵

The mediation of Christ is accomplished in the work of redemption, which consists not only in the example of righteousness, but above all in the sacrifice of reconciliation, which was supremely true,¹²⁶ supremely free,¹²⁷ and completely perfect.¹²⁸ The essential characteristic of the redemption by Christ is its universality, which shows the universality of sin. This is how Augustine repeats and interprets the words of St. Paul, "If one has died for all, then all have died"

¹²² Cf. Tractatus in Io 66, 2 : PL 35, 1810-1811.

¹²³ Cf. Sermon. 47, 12-20 : PL 38, 308-312.

¹²⁴ Cf. Confess. 10, 42, 68 : PL 32, 808.

¹²⁵ De civ. Dei 10, 32, 2 : PL 41, 315.

¹²⁶ De Trin 4 :13, 17 ; PL 42, 899.

¹²⁷ De Trin. 4, 13, 16 : PL 42, 898.

¹²⁸ De Trin 4, 14, 19 : 42, 901.

(2 Cor 5 : 14), i.e., dead because of sin : "The Christian faith, accordingly, exists precisely because of these two men" ;¹²⁹ "One and one : one for death, one for life."¹³⁰ Therefore "every man is Adam ; likewise, for those who have believed, every man is Christ."¹³¹

In Augustine's view, to deny this doctrine is the same as "emptying the cross of Christ" (1 Cor 1 : 17). To prevent this, he wrote and spoke much about the universality of sin, including the doctrine of original sin, "which the Catholic faith has believed from ancient times."¹³² He teaches that "Jesus Christ came in the flesh for no other reason... than to give life and salvation to all, to free, redeem, and enlighten those who beforehand were in the death of sins, in sickness, slavery, captivity, and darkness... It follows that those who are not in need of life, salvation, liberation and redemption cannot have anything to do with this dispensation of salvation by Christ."¹³³

Because Christ, the only mediator and redeemer of men, is head of the Church, Christ and the Church are one single mystical person, the total Christ. He writes with force : "We have

¹²⁹ De gratia Christi et de pecc. orig. 2, 24, 28 : PL 44, 398.

¹³⁰ Serm. 151, 5 : PL 38, 817.

¹³¹ Enarr. in ps. 70, d. 2, 1 : PL 36, 891.

¹³² De nupt et concup. 2, 12, 25 : PL 44, 450-451.

¹³³ De pecc. mer. et rem. 1, 26, 39 : PL 44, 131.

become Christ. Just as He is the head, we are the members ; the whole man is He and ourselves."¹³⁴ This doctrine of the total Christ is one of the teachings that mattered most to the Bishop of Hippo, and one of the most fruitful themes of his ecclesiology.

Another fundamental theme is that of the Holy Spirit as the soul of the mystical body : "what the soul is to the body of a man, the Holy Spirit is for the body of Christ, which is the Church."¹³⁵ The Holy Spirit is also the principle of community, by which the faithful are united to one another and to the Trinity itself. "By means of what is common to the Father and the Son, They willed that we should have communion both among ourselves and with Them. They willed to gather us together, through that gift, into that one thing which both have in common ; that is, by means of God the Holy Spirit and the gift of God."¹³⁶ He therefore says in the same text : "the fellowship of unity of the Church of God, outside of which there is no remission of sins, is properly the work of the Holy Spirit, of course with the cooperation of the Father and the Son, because the Holy Spirit himself is in a

¹³⁴ Tractatus in Io 21, 8 : PL 35, 1568.

¹³⁵ Serm. 267, 4 : PL 38, 1231.

¹³⁶ Serm. 71, 12, 18 : PL 38, 454.

certain manner the fellowship of the Father and the Son."¹³⁷

Contemplating the Church as body of Christ, given life by the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ, Augustine gave varied development to a concept which was also emphasized in a special way by the recent Council : that of the Church as communion.¹³⁸ He speaks in three different but converging ways : first, the communion of the sacraments, or the institutional reality founded by Christ on the foundation of the apostles.¹³⁹ He discusses this at length in the Donatist controversy, defending the unity, universality, apostolicity and sanctity of the Church,¹⁴⁰ and showing that she has as her center the See of Peter, "in which the primacy of the apostolic see has always been in force."¹⁴¹ Second, he speaks of the communion of the saints, or the spiritual reality that unites all the righteous from Abel until the end of the ages.¹⁴² Third, he speaks of the communion of the blessed, or the eschatological reality that gathers in all those who have attained salvation, that is, the Church "without spot and wrinkle" (Eph 5 : 27).¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Sermon. 71, 20, 33 : PL 38, 463-464.

¹³⁸ Cf. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 13-14 : 21. etc.

¹³⁹ Cf. *De civ. Dei* 1, 35 ; 18, 50 : PL 41, 46 ; 612.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. eg. *De unitate Ecclesiae* : PL 43, 391-446.

¹⁴¹ Ep. 43, 7 : PL 33, 163.

¹⁴² Cf. *De civ. Dei* 18, 51 : PL 41, 613.

¹⁴³ Cf. *Retract.* 2, 18 : PL 32, 637.

Another theme dear to Augustine's ecclesiology was that of the Church as mother and teacher, a theme on which he wrote profound and moving pages, because it had a close connection to his experience as convert and to his teaching as theologian. While he was on the path back to faith, he met the Church, no longer opposed to Christ as he had been made to believe,¹⁴⁴ but rather as the manifestation of Christ, "most true mother of Christians"¹⁴⁵ and authority for the revealed truth.¹⁴⁶

The Church is the mother who gives birth to the Christians :¹⁴⁷ "Two parents have given us the birth that leads to death, two parents have given us the birth that leads to life. The parents who gave us birth for death are Adam and Eve : the parents who gave us birth for life are Christ and the Church."¹⁴⁸ The Church is a mother who suffers on account of those who have departed from righteousness, especially those who destroy her unity ;¹⁴⁹ she is the dove who moans and calls all to return or draw near to her wings ;¹⁵⁰ she is the manifestation of God's universal fatherhood, by means of the charity which "is mild for some,

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Confess. 6, 11, 18 : PL 32 728-729.

¹⁴⁵ De mor. Eccl. cath. 1, 30, 62 : PL 32, 1336.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Confess. 7, 7, 11 : PL 32, 739.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Ep. 48, 2 : PL 33, 188.

¹⁴⁸ Serm. 22, 10 : PL 38, 154.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. e.g. Psalmus contra partem Donati, epilogus : PL 43, 31-32.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Tractatus in Io 6, 15 : PL 35, 1432.

severe for others ; an enemy to none, but mother for all."¹⁵¹

She is a mother, but also, like Mary, a virgin : mother by the ardor of charity, virgin by the integrity of the faith that she guards, defends and teaches.¹⁵² This virginal motherhood is linked to her task of teacher, a task which the Church carries out in obedience to Christ. For this reason, Augustine looks to the Church as guarantor of the Scriptures,¹⁵³ and attests that he will remain secure in her whatever difficulties arise for him,¹⁵⁴ urgently exhorting others to do the same : "Thus, as I have often said and impress upon you with vehemence, whatever we are, you are secure if you have God as your Father and His Church as your mother."¹⁵⁵ From this firm conviction then is born his passionate exhortation that one should love God and the Church -God as Father and the Church as Mother.¹⁵⁶ Perhaps no one else has spoken of the Church with such great affection and passion as Augustine. I have pointed out a few of his statements, in the hope that these are sufficient to show the depth and the beauty of a teaching that

¹⁵¹ De catech. rud. 15, 23 : PL 40, 328.

¹⁵² Cf. Serm. 188, 4 : PL 38, 1004.

¹⁵³ Cf. Confess. 7, 7, 11 : PL 32, 759.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. De bapt. 3, 2, 2 : PL 43, 139-140.

¹⁵⁵ Contra litt. Petil. 3, 9, 10 : PL 43, 353.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Enarr. in ps. 88, d. 2, 14 : PL 37, 1140.

will never be studied sufficiently, especially from the point of view of the love that animates the Church as the effect of the Holy Spirit's presence within her. He writes, "We have the Holy Spirit if we love the Church : we love the Church if we remain in her unity and charity."¹⁵⁷

4. *Freedom and grace*

Even to indicate briefly the various aspects of St. Augustine's theology would be an infinite task. Another important, indeed fundamental aspect, linked also to his conversion, is that of freedom and grace. As I have already mentioned, it was on the eve of his conversion that he grasped the responsibility of the human person in his actions, and the necessity of the grace of the sole Mediator,¹⁵⁸ whose power he felt in the moment of the final decision, as the eighth Book of his Confessions eloquently testifies.¹⁵⁹ His personal reflections and the controversies he later experienced, particularly with the followers of the Manichaeans and the Pelagians, offered him the opportunity to study more deeply the individual facets of this problem and to propose a synthesis, although this was done with great modesty because of the highly mysterious nature of the problem.

¹⁵⁷ Tractatus in Io 32, 8 : PL 35, 1646.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Confess 8, 10, 22 ; 7, 18, 24 : PL 32, 759-745.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. e.g. Confess. 8, 9, 21 ; 8, 12, 29 : PL 32, 758-759 ; 762.

He always defended freedom as one of the bases of a Christian anthropology, against his former coreligionists,¹⁶⁰ against the determinism of the astrologers whose victim he himself had once been,¹⁶¹ and against every form of fatalism;¹⁶² he explained that liberty and foreknowledge are not incompatible,¹⁶³ nor liberty and the aid of divine grace. "The fact that free will is aided, does not destroy it; but because it is not taken away, it is aided."¹⁶⁴ And the Augustinian principle is well known: "He who made you without your participation, does not justify you without your participation. He has made you without your knowledge; He justifies you if you will it."¹⁶⁵

With a long series of biblical texts, he demonstrates to those who doubted this compatibility, or upheld the contrary view, that freedom and grace belong to divine revelation and that one must hold firmly to both of these truths.¹⁶⁶ Few are capable of grasping this compatibility in its profundity, for this is an

¹⁶⁰ Cf. *De libero arb.* 3, 1, 3 : PL 32, 1272 ; *De duabus animabus* 10, 14 : PL 42, 104-105.

¹⁶¹ Cf. *Confess.* 4, 3, 4 : PL 32, 694-695.

¹⁶² Cf. *De civ. Dei* 5, 8 : PL 41, 48.

¹⁶³ Cf. *De libero arb.* 3, 4, 10-11 : PL 32, 1276 ; *De civ. Dei* 5, 9, 1-4 : PL 148-152.

¹⁶⁴ *Ep* 157, 2, 10 : PL 33, 677.

¹⁶⁵ *Serm* 169, 11, 13 : PL 38, 923.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *De gratia et lib. arb.* 2, 2-11, 23 : PL 44, 882-895.

exceedingly difficult question¹⁶⁷ which can cause many people anxiety,¹⁶⁸ because while defending liberty one can give the impression of denying grace, and vice versa.¹⁶⁹ One must therefore believe in their compatibility just as one must believe in the compatibility of the two entirely necessary offices of Christ, who is at once savior and judge, for it is on these two offices that freedom and grace depend : "If then God's grace does not exist, how does He save the world? And if free will does not exist, how does He judge the world?"¹⁷⁰

On the other hand, Augustine insists on the necessity of grace, which is the same thing as the necessity of prayer. To those who said that God does not command what is impossible, and that therefore grace is not necessary, he replied that "God does not command what is impossible ; but when He commands, He exhorts you to do what you can and to ask for what you cannot do,"¹⁷¹ and God gives help so that the command becomes possible, since "He does not abandon us unless we abandon Him first."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Ep. 214, 6 : PL 33, 970.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. De pecc. mer. et rem. 2, 18, 28 : PL 44, 124-125.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. De gratia Christi et de pecc. orig. 47, 52 : PL 44, 383-384.

¹⁷⁰ Ep. 214. 2 : PL 33, 969.

¹⁷¹ De natura et gratia 43, 50 : PL 44, 271, Cf. Conc. Trid., D-S.

¹⁷² De natura et gratia 26, 29 : PL 44, 261.

The doctrine of the necessity of divine grace becomes the doctrine of the necessity of prayer, on which Augustine insists so much,¹⁷³ because, as he writes, "it is certain that God has prepared some gifts even for those who do not pray, such as the beginning of faith ; but other gifts only for those who pray, such as final perseverance."¹⁷⁴

Grace is therefore necessary to remove the obstacles that prevent the will from fleeing evil and accomplishing what is good. These obstacles are two in number, "ignorance and weakness,"¹⁷⁵ but especially the latter because "although it begins to be clear what is to be done and what goal is to be striven for...one does not act, one does not carry it out, one does not live well."¹⁷⁶ Augustine calls this helping grace "the inspiration of love so that we may carry out in holy love what we have recognized...must be done."¹⁷⁷

The two obstacles of ignorance and weakness must be overcome if we are to breathe the air of freedom. It will not be superfluous to recall that the defense of the necessity of grace is, for Augustine, the defense of Christian freedom. Starting from Christ's words, "If the Son sets you free, then you will be truly free" (Jn 8 :36), he

¹⁷³ Cf. Ep. 130 : PL 33, 494-507.

¹⁷⁴ De dono persev. 16, 39 : PL 45, 1017.

¹⁷⁵ De pecc. mer. et rem. 2 17, 26 : PL 44, 167.

¹⁷⁶ De spiritu et littera 3, 5 : PL 44, 203.

¹⁷⁷ Contra duas epp. Pel. 4, 5, 11 : PL 44, 617.

defends and proclaims this freedom which is inseparable from truth and love. Truth, love and freedom are the three great good things that fired the spirit of Augustine and exercised his genius ; he shed much light on the understanding of these.

To pause briefly in consideration of this last good, that of freedom, we must observe that he describes and celebrates Christian freedom in all its forms, from the freedom from error- for the liberty of error is "the worst death of the soul"¹⁷⁸- through the gift of faith which subjects the soul to the truth,¹⁷⁹ to the final and inalienable freedom, the greatest of all, which consists in the inability to die and in the inability to sin, i.e. in immortality and the fullness of righteousness.¹⁸⁰ All other freedoms which Augustine illustrates and proclaims find their place among these two, which mark the beginning and the end of salvation : the freedom from the dominion of the disordered passions, as the work of the grace that enlightens the intellect and gives the will so much strength that it becomes victorious in the combat with evil (as he himself experienced in his conversion when he was freed from the harsh slavery) ; ¹⁸¹the freedom from time that we devour

¹⁷⁸ Ep. 105, 2, 10 : PL 33, 400.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. De libero arb. 2, 13, 37 : PL 32, 1261.

¹⁸⁰ De corrept. et gratia 12, 33 : PL 44, 936.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Confess. 8, 5, 10 ; 8, 9, 21 : PL 32, 753 ; 758-759.

and that devours us,¹⁸² in that love permits us to live anchored to eternity.¹⁸³

He sets forth the unutterable riches of justification-the divine life of grace,¹⁸⁴ the indwelling of the Holy Spirit,¹⁸⁵ and "deification"¹⁸⁶ and makes an important distinction between the remission of sins which is total, full and perfect on the one hand, and on the other hand the interior renewal which is progressive and will be full and total only after the resurrection, when the human person as a whole shares in the divine immutability.¹⁸⁷

In the case of the grace that strengthens the will, he insists that it operates by means of love and therefore makes the will invincible against evil, without removing from the will the possibility of refusal. Commenting on the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John, "No one comes to me unless the Father draws him" (Jn 6 :44), he writes, "Do not think that you are drawn against your will : the spirit is drawn also by love."¹⁸⁸ But love, as he also observes, works "with liberal

¹⁸² Cf. Confess. 9, 4, 10 : PL 32, 768.

¹⁸³ Cf. De vera relig. 10, 19 : PL 34, 131.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Enarr, in ps. 70, d. 2, 3 : PL 36, 893.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Ep. 187 : PL 33, 832-848.

¹⁸⁶ Enarr, in ps. 49, 2 : PL 36, 565.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. De pecc. mer. et rem. 2, 7, 9 : PL 44, 156-157 ; Serm. 166, 4 : PL 38, 909.

¹⁸⁸ Tractatus in Io 26, 25 : PL 35, 1607-1609.

sweetness,"¹⁸⁹ so that "the one who observes the precept with love, observes it in freedom."¹⁹⁰ "The law of freedom is the law of love."¹⁹¹

Augustine teaches no less insistently freedom from time, a freedom that Christ, the eternal Word, has come to bring us by his entry into the world in the incarnation: "O Word that exists before time, through whom time was made," he exclaims, "born in time although You are eternal life, calling those who exist in time and making them eternal!"¹⁹² It is well known that St. Augustine studied deeply the mystery of time¹⁹³ and both felt and stated the need to transcend time in order to exist truly. "That you may be truly yourself, transcend time. But who shall transcend it by his own power? Let Christ lift him up, as He said to the Father: 'I wish that they too may be with me where I am.'"¹⁹⁴

Christian freedom, as I have briefly mentioned, is seen and meditated on in the Church, the city of God, which manifests the fruits of this freedom and, as far as is in her power, makes all people sharers in them, upheld by divine grace. For she is founded on the "social

¹⁸⁹ *Contra Iulianum* 3, 112 : PL 45, 1296.

¹⁹⁰ *De gratia Christi et de pecc. orig.* 1, 13, 14 : PL 44, 368.

¹⁹¹ *Ep.* 167, 6, 19 : PL 33, 740.

¹⁹² *Enarr. in ps.* 101, d. 2, 10 : PL 37, 1311-1312.

¹⁹³ *Cf. Confess. lib.* 11 : PL 32, 809-826.

¹⁹⁴ *Tractatus in Io* 38, 10 : PL 35, 1680.

love that embraces all people and wishes to unite them in one justice and peace, unlike the city of the wicked, which divides and sets people against one another because it is founded on "private" love.¹⁹⁵

It is good to mention here some of the definitions of peace which Augustine made according to the various contexts in which he was speaking. Starting from the idea that "the peace of mankind is ordered harmony," he defines other kinds of peace, such as "the peace of the home, the ordered harmony of those who live together, in giving orders and in obeying them," likewise the peace of the earthly city and "the peace of the heavenly city, the wholly ordered and harmonious fellowship in enjoying God and enjoying one another in God," then "the universal peace that is the tranquillity of good order," and finally the order itself that is "the disposition that gives its place to each of the various equal and unequal things."¹⁹⁶

"The pilgrimage of Your people sighs" for this peace "from its departure until its return,"¹⁹⁷ and for this peace it works.

¹⁹⁵ De Gen. ad litt. 11, 15, 20 : PL 34, 437.

¹⁹⁶ De civ. Dei 19, 13 : PL 41, 840.

¹⁹⁷ Confess. 9, 13, 37 : PL 32, 780.

5. *Charity and the ascent of the spirit*

This brief synthesis of Augustine's teaching would remain seriously incomplete, if we did not mention his spiritual teaching, which, united closely to his philosophical and theological teaching, is no less rich than these. We must return once more to conversion, with which we began. It was then that he decided to dedicate himself totally to the ideal of Christian perfection. He remained always faithful to this ideal ; even more than this, he committed himself with all his power to showing others the path of perfection, drawing both on his own experience and on the Bible, which is for all the first nourishment of piety.

He was a man of prayer ; one might indeed say, a man made of prayer – it suffices to recall the famous *Confessions* which he wrote in the form of a letter to God-and he repeated to all, with incredible persistence, the necessity of prayer : "God has willed that our struggle should be with prayers rather than with our own strength",¹⁹⁸ he describes the nature of prayer, which is so simple and yet so complex,¹⁹⁹ the interiority which permits him to identify prayer with desire : "Your desire is itself your prayer ; and if your desire is continuous, then your prayer too is

¹⁹⁸ *Contra Iulianum* 6, 15 : PL 45, 1535.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. *De Serm. Domini in Monte* 2, 5, 14 : PL 34, 1236.

continuous."²⁰⁰ He brings out its social usefulness also : "Let us pray for those who have not been called, that they may be called. For perhaps God has predestined them in such a way that they will be granted and receive the same grace in answer to our prayers";²⁰¹ and he speaks of its wholly necessary link to Christ "who prays for us, and prays in us, and is prayed to by us. He prays for us as our priest ; He prays in us, as our head ; He is prayed to by us, as our God. Let us therefore recognize our voices in him, and his voice in us."²⁰²

He climbed with steady diligence the steps of the interior ascents, and described their program for all, an ample and well-defined program that comprises the movement of the spirit toward contemplation – purification, constancy and serenity, orientation toward the light, dwelling in the light²⁰³ – the stages of charity – incipient, progressing, intense, perfect²⁰⁴ – the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are linked to the beatitudes,²⁰⁵ the

²⁰⁰ Enarr. in ps. 37, 14 : PL 36, 404.

²⁰¹ De dono persev. 22, 60 : PL 45, 1029.

²⁰² Enarr. in ps. 85, 1 : PL 37, 1081.

²⁰³ Cf. De quantitate animae 33, 73-76 : PL 32, 1075-1077.

²⁰⁴ Cf. De natura et gratia 70, 84 : PL 44, 290.

²⁰⁵ Cf. De Serm. Domini in monte 1, 1, 3-4 : PL 34, 1231-1232 ; De doct. Christ. 2, 7, 9-11 : PL 34, 39-40.

petitions of the Lord's Prayer,²⁰⁶ the examples given by Christ himself.²⁰⁷

If the Gospel beatitudes constitute the supernatural environment in which the Christian must live, the gifts of the Holy Spirit bring the supernatural touch of grace which makes this climate possible ; the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, or in general, prayer which can be narrowed down to these petitions, gives the necessary nourishment ; the example of Christ provides the model that is to be imitated ; and charity is the soul of all, the source of radiation outwards and the secret power of the spiritual life. It is no small merit of Augustine to have narrowed all of Christian doctrine and life down to the question of charity. "This is true love : that we cling to the truth and live righteously."²⁰⁸

We are led to this by Sacred Scripture, which in its entirety "tells the story of Christ and admonishes us to charity,"²⁰⁹ and also by theology, which finds its own goal in charity,²¹⁰ by philosophy,²¹¹ by pedagogy,²¹² and finally by the study of politics.²¹³

²⁰⁶ Cf. De Serm. Domini in monte 2, 11, 38 : PL 34, 1286.

²⁰⁷ Cf. De sancta virginitate 28, 28 : PL 40, 411.

²⁰⁸ De Trin. 8, 7, 10 : PL 42, 956.

²⁰⁹ De catech. rudibus 4, 8 : PL 40, 315.

²¹⁰ Cf. De Trin. 14, 10, 13 : PL 42, 1047.

²¹¹ Cf. Ep. 137, 5, 17 : PL 38, 524.

²¹² Cf. De catech. rudibus 12, 17 : PL 40, 323.

²¹³ Cf. Ep. 137, 5, 17 ; 138, 2, 15 : PL 38, 524 ; 531-532.

Augustine located the essence and the norm of Christian perfection in charity,²¹⁴ because it is the first gift of the Holy Spirit²¹⁵ and the reality which prevents one from being wicked.²¹⁶ It is the good with which one possesses all goods, and without which the other goods are of no avail. "Have charity, and you will have them all; because without charity, whatever you have will be of no benefit."²¹⁷

He indicated all the inexhaustible riches of charity; it makes easy whatever is difficult,²¹⁸ gives newness to what has become a habit;²¹⁹ it gives irresistible force to the movement toward the supreme Good, because charity is always imperfect here on earth;²²⁰ it frees from every interest that is not God;²²¹ it is inseparable from humility – "where there is humility, there is charity"²²² – and is the essence of every virtue, since virtue is nothing else but well-ordered love;²²³ it is the gift of God. This final point is crucial, because it separates and distinguishes the

²¹⁴ Cf. *De natura et gratia* 70, 84 : PL 44, 290.

²¹⁵ Cf. *Tractatus in Io* 87, 1 : PL 35, 1852.

²¹⁶ Cf. *Tractatus in Ep. Io* 7, 8 ; 10, 7 : PL 35, 1441 ; 1470-1471.

²¹⁷ *Tractatus in Io* 32,8 : PL 35, 1646.

²¹⁸ Cf. *De bono viduitatis* 21, 26 : PL 40, 447.

²¹⁹ Cf. *De catech. rudibus* 12, 17 : PL 40, 323.

²²⁰ Cf. *Serm.* 169, 18 : PL 38, 926 ; *De perf. iust. hom.* : PL 44, 291-318.

²²¹ Cf. *Enarr. in ps.* 53, 10 : PL 36, 666-667.

²²² *Tractatus in Ep. Io*, prol. : PL 35, 1977.

²²³ Cf. *De civ. Dei* 15, 22 : PL 41, 467.

naturalistic and the Christian concepts of life. "Whence comes the love of God and of neighbor that exists in men, if not from God himself? Because if it is not from God, but from men, the Pelagians have won: but if it is from God, then we have defeated the Pelagians."²²⁴

Charity gave birth in Augustine to the anxious desire to contemplate divine things, a desire that belongs to wisdom.²²⁵ He frequently experienced the highest forms of contemplation, not only in his famous experience at Ostia,²²⁶ but in other forms too. He says of himself, "I often do this," referring to his recourse to the meditation of Scripture so that his pressing cares may not oppress him: "This is my delight, and I take refuge in this pleasure as much as the things I must do permit me to relax.... Sometimes You lead me into an interior sentiment that is utterly unusual, to a sweetness I cannot describe: if this were to reach its perfection in me, I cannot say what that would be, but it would not be this life."²²⁷ When these experiences are united to the theological and psychological acuteness of Augustine, and to his uncommon talent as a writer, we understand how he was able to describe the mystical ascents with such precision,

²²⁴ De gratia et lib. arb. 18, 37: PL 44, 903-904.

²²⁵ Cf. De Trin. 12, 15, 25: PL 42, 1012.

²²⁶ Cf. Confess. 9, 10, 24: PL 32, 774.

²²⁷ Confess 10, 40, 65: PL 32, 807.

so that he has been called by many people the prince of mystics.

Despite his predominating love for contemplation, Augustine accepted the burden of the episcopate and taught others to do likewise, responding thus with humility to the call of our mother the Church.²²⁸ But he also taught through his example and his writings how to preserve the taste for prayer and contemplation among the tasks of pastoral activity. It is worth while to recall the synthesis that he offers us in the City of God, which has become classical. "The love of the truth seeks the holy repose of leisure, but the necessity of love takes on the just duty. If no one imposes this burden, one should spend one's time in perceiving and grasping the truth : but in this case, the delight in the truth must not be altogether abandoned, lest the sweetness be lost, and necessity become oppressive."²²⁹ The profound teaching set out here merits a long and careful reflection, which becomes more easy and fruitful if we look to Augustine himself, who gave a shining example of the way to reconcile both aspects of the Christian life, prayer and action, which are apparently contradictory.

III.

²²⁸ Cf. Ep. 48,1 : PL 33, 188.

²²⁹ De civ. Dei 19, 19 : PL 41, 647.

It is not irrelevant to recall the pastoral activity of this bishop, who is universally acknowledged as one of the greatest pastors of the Church. This activity also had its origin in his conversion, because the conversion gave birth to his resolve to serve God alone. "Now I love You alone.... I am ready to serve You alone."²³⁰ When he then realized that this service must also include pastoral activity, he did not hesitate to accept it; he accepted it with humility and trepidation, but out of obedience to God and to the Church.²³¹

This apostolate had three fields which spread out like concentric circles: the local church of Hippo, which was not large, but was troubled and needy; the African Church, which was sadly divided between Catholics and Donatists; and the universal Church, which was attacked by paganism and Manichaeism, and disturbed by heretical movements.

He saw himself as the servant of the Church in every way: "Christ's servant, and through him the servant of his servants."²³² He drew all the consequences of this, including the most taxing, such as risking his own life for the faithful:²³³ he asked the Lord for the strength to love them in

²³⁰ Solil. 1, 1, 5: PL 32, 872.

²³¹ Cf. Sermon 335, 2: PL 39, 1569.

²³² Ep. 217: PL 33, 978.

²³³ Cf. Ep. 91, 10: PL 33, 317-318.

such a way as to be ready to die for them "in reality or in disposition."²³⁴ He was convinced that one who was placed at the head of the people without this disposition was "a scarecrow standing in the vineyard"²³⁵ rather than a bishop. He did not want to be safe without his faithful,²³⁶ and he was ready for any sacrifice, if it would bring those in error back to the way of truth.²³⁷ At a time of extreme danger because of the invasion by the Vandals, he taught his priests to stay among their faithful even at the risk of their own lives.²³⁸ In other words, he wished that bishops and priests should serve the faithful as Christ served them. "Let us therefore see in what sense the bishop who is set over others is a servant : in the same way as the Lord himself."²³⁹ This was his constant program of action.

In his diocese, which he never left except in a case of necessity,²⁴⁰ he was assiduous in preaching – he preached on Saturday and Sunday, and frequently throughout the entire week²⁴¹ – in catechesis ;²⁴² in what he called "the bishop's

²³⁴ *Miscellanea Ag.*, I, 404.

²³⁵ *Miscellanea Ag.*, I, 568.

²³⁶ Cf. *Serm.* 17 :2 : PL 38, 125.

²³⁷ Cf. *Serm.* 46, 7, 14 : PL 38, 278.

²³⁸ Cf. *Ep.* 128, 3 : PL 33, 489.

²³⁹ *Miscellanea Ag.*, I, 565.

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Ep.* 122, 1 : PL 33, 470.

²⁴¹ Cf. *Miscellanea Ag.*, I, 353 ; *Tractatus in Io* 19, 22 : PL 35, 1543-1582.

²⁴² Cf. *De catech. rudibus* : PL 40 309s.

audience," which sometimes lasted for an entire day, so that he did not eat ;²⁴³ for the care of the poor ;²⁴⁴ in the formation of the clergy ;²⁴⁵ in directing the monks, many of whom were later called to the priesthood and the episcopate,²⁴⁶ and in the guidance of the monasteries of nuns.²⁴⁷ When he died, "he left the Church a very numerous clergy, and monasteries of men and women full of those consecrated to chastity under their superiors, and libraries."²⁴⁸

He worked with equal tirelessness for the Church in Africa, accepting the task of preaching whenever he was asked.²⁴⁹ He took part in the frequent regional councils, despite the difficulties of travel, and undertook with intelligence, assiduity and passion the work of terminating the Donatist schism which divided that Church into two parties. He strove hard to achieve this success, which was his great merit. He recorded the history of the doctrine of Donatism in innumerable writings, explaining the Catholic doctrine of the sacraments and of the Church ; he promoted an ecumenical conference between

²⁴³ Cf. POSSIDIO, *Vita S. Augustini* 19, 2-5 PL 32, 57.

²⁴⁴ Cf. POSSIDIO, *Ibid.*, 24, 14-25 : PL 32, 53-54 ; *Serm.* 25.8 : PL 38, 170 ; *Ep.* 122, 2 : PL 33, 471-472.

²⁴⁵ Cf. *Serm.* 335, 2 : PL 39, 1569-1570 ; *Ep.* 65 : PL 33, 234-235.

²⁴⁶ Cf. POSSIDIO, *Vita S. Augustini*, 11, 1 : PL 32, 42.

²⁴⁷ Cf. *Ep.* 211, 1-4 : PL 3, 958-965.

²⁴⁸ POSSIDIO, *Vita S. Augustini* 31, 8 : PL 32, 64.

²⁴⁹ Cf. *Retract.*, prolog. 2 : PL 32, 584.

Catholic and Donatist bishops, and he animated it by his presence. He proposed the removal of all obstacles to reunification, including that of the renunciation of the episcopate by the Donatist bishops,²⁵⁰ and obtained this. He published the conclusions of this conference,²⁵¹ and brought the process of pacification to full success.²⁵² When persecutors sought his death, he once escaped from the hands of the Donatist *circumcelliones* because their guide took the wrong way.²⁵³

He composed very many works and wrote many letters for the universal Church, entering into many controversies. The Manichaeans, the Pelagians, the Arians and the pagans were the object of his pastoral concern in the defense of the Catholic faith. He worked untiringly by day and by night.²⁵⁴ Even in the last years of his life, he would dictate one work by night and another, when he was free, by day.²⁵⁵ When he died at the age of seventy-six, he left three works unfinished: these three works are the most eloquent testimony to his sleepless diligence and to his unconquerable love for the Church.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Ep. 128, 3 : PL 33, 489 ; De gestis cum Emerito 7 : PL 43, 702-703.

²⁵¹ Cf. Post collationem contra Donatistas : PL 43, 651-690.

²⁵² Cf. POSSIDIO, Vita S. Augustini 9-14 : PL 32, 40-45.

²⁵³ Cf. POSSIDIO, Ibid. 12, 1-2 : PL 32, 43.

²⁵⁴ Cf. POSSIDIO, Ibid., 24 11 : "...in die laborans et in nocte lucubrans" : PL 32, 54.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Ep. 224, 2 : PL 33, 1001-1002.

IV.

Before concluding, let us ask this extraordinary man what he has to say to the modern man. I believe that he has indeed much to say, both by his example and by his teaching.

He teaches the person who searches for truth not to despair of finding it. He teaches this by his example – he himself rediscovered it after many years of laborious seeking – and by means of his literary activity, the program of which he had fixed in the first letter after his conversion. "It seems to me that one must bring men back...to the hope of finding the truth."²⁵⁶ He teaches therefore that one must seek the truth "with piety, chastity and diligence,"²⁵⁷ in order to overcome doubts about the possibility of returning into oneself, to the interior realm where truth dwells;²⁵⁸ and likewise to overcome the materialism which prevents the mind from grasping its indissoluble union with the realities that are understood by the intelligence,²⁵⁹ and the rationalism that refuses to collaborate with faith and prevents the mind from understanding the "mystery" of the human person.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Ep. 1, 1 : PL 33, 61.

²⁵⁷ De quantitate animae 14, 24 : PL 32, 1049 ; Cf. De vera relig. 10, 20 : PL 34, 131.

²⁵⁸ Cf. De vera relig. 39, 72 : PL 34, 154.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Retract. 1, 8, 2 : PL 32, 594 ; 1, 4, 4 : PL 32, 590.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Ep. 118, 5, 33 : PL 33, 448.

Augustine's legacy to the theologians, whose meritorious task is to study more deeply the contents of the faith, is the immense patrimony of his thought, which is as a whole valid even now ; above all, his legacy is the theological method to which he remained absolutely faithful. We know that this method implied full adherence to the authority of the faith, which is one of its origin – the authority of Christ²⁶¹ – and is revealed through Scripture, Tradition and the Church. His legacy includes the ardent desire to understand his own faith – "Be a great lover indeed of understanding,"²⁶² is his command to others, which he applies to himself also ;²⁶³ likewise the profound sense of the mystery – "for it is better," he exclaims, "to have a faithful ignorance than a presumptuous knowledge" ;²⁶⁴ and likewise the sure conviction that the Christian doctrine comes from God and thus has its own original source, which must not only be preserved in its integrity – this is the "virginity" of the faith, of which he spoke – but must also serve as a measure to judge the philosophies that conform to it or diverge from it.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Cf. *Contra Acad.* 3, 20, 43 : PL 32, 957.

²⁶² *Ep.* 120, 3. 13 : PL 33, 458.

²⁶³ Cf. *De Trin.* 1, 5, 8 : PL 42, 825.

²⁶⁴ *Serm.* 27, 4 : PL 38, 179.

²⁶⁵ Cf. *De doctrina Christ.* 2, 40, 60 : PL 34, 55 ; *De civ. Dei* 8, 9 : PL 41, 233.

It is well known how much Augustine loved Sacred Scripture, proclaiming its divine origin,²⁶⁶ its inerrancy,²⁶⁷ its depth and inexhaustible riches;²⁶⁸ and it is well known how much he studied Scripture. But the aim of his own study, and of his promotion of study by others, is the entirety of Scripture, so that the true thought, or as he says, the "heart"²⁶⁹ of Scripture may be indicated, harmonizing it where necessary with itself.²⁷⁰ He takes these two principles to be fundamental for the understanding of Scripture. For this reason he reads it in the Church, taking account of the Tradition, the nature²⁷¹ and obligatory force of which he forcefully underlines.²⁷² He made the celebrated statement: "I should not believe the Gospel unless I were moved to do so by the authority of the Catholic Church."²⁷³

In the controversies that arose concerning the interpretation of Sacred Scripture, his recommendation was that one should discuss "with holy humility, with Catholic peace, with

²⁶⁶ Cf. Enarr. in Ps 90, d. 2, 1 : PL 37, 1159-1160.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Ep. 28, 3, 3 : PL 33, 112 ; 82, 1, 3 : PL 33, 277.

²⁶⁸ Cf. Ep. 137, 1, 3 : PL 33, 516.

²⁶⁹ De doctrina Christ. 4, 5, 7 : PL 34, 91-92.

²⁷⁰ Cf. De perf. iustr. hom. 17, 38 : PL 44, 311-312.

²⁷¹ Cf. De baptismo 4, 24, 31 : PL 43, 174-175 m.

²⁷² Cf. Contra Iulianum 6, 6-11 : PL 45, 1510-1521.

²⁷³ Contra Ep. Man. 5, 6 : PL 42, 176 ; cf. C. Faustum 28, 2 : PL 42, 483-486.

Christian charity,"²⁷⁴ until the truth itself be grasped, which God "has set...upon the throne of unity."²⁷⁵ One will then be able to see that the controversy had not broken out in vain, because it "was the occasion for learning"²⁷⁶ and progress has been made in the understanding of the faith.

Another contribution of Augustine's teaching to the men and women of today which we may briefly mention is his proposal of the twofold object of study that should occupy the human mind: God and man "What do you wish to know?" he asks himself. And he replies: "God and the soul are what I wish to know." Nothing more? Nothing at all.²⁷⁷ Confronted with the sad spectacle of evil he reminds modern men and women that they must nevertheless have confidence in the final triumph of the good, i.e., of the City "where the victory is the truth; where dignity is holiness; where peace is happiness where life is eternity."²⁷⁸

Further, he teaches scientists to recognize the signs of God in the things that have been created²⁷⁹ and to discover the "seeds" which God

²⁷⁴ De baptismo 2, 3, 4 : PL 43, 129.

²⁷⁵ Ep 105, 16 : PL 3, 403.

²⁷⁶ De civ. Dei 16, 2, 1 : PL 41, 477.

²⁷⁷ Solil. 1, 2, 7 : PL 32, 872.

²⁷⁸ De civ. Dei 2, 29, 2 : PL 41, 78.

²⁷⁹ Cf. De diversis quaestionibus 83, q. 46, 2 : PL 40, 29-31.

has sown in the harmony of the universe²⁸⁰ He recommends above all to those who have control over the destinies of the peoples that they love peace,²⁸¹ and that they promote it, not through conflict, but with the methods of peace, because, as he wisely writes, "there is more glory in killing the wars themselves with a word than in killing men with the sword, and there is more glory in achieving or maintaining peace by means of peace than by means of war."²⁸²

Finally, I should like to address the young people whom Augustine greatly loved as a professor before his conversion²⁸³ and as a pastor afterwards.²⁸⁴ He recalls three great things to them : truth, love and freedom – three supreme goods which stand together. He also invites them to love beauty, for he himself was a great lover of beauty.²⁸⁵ It is not only the beauty of bodies, which could make one forget the beauty of the spirit,²⁸⁶ nor only the beauty of art,²⁸⁷ but the interior beauty of virtue²⁸⁸ and especially the

²⁸⁰ Cf. De Gen. ad litt. 5, 23, 44-45 ; 6, 6, 16-6, 12, 20 : PL 34, 337-338 ; 346-347.

²⁸¹ Cf. Ep. 189, 6 : PL 33, 856.

²⁸² Ep. 2298, 2 : PL 33 1020.

²⁸³ Cf. Confess. 6, 7, 11-12 : PL 32, 75 ; De ordine 1, 10, 30 : PL 32, 991.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Ep. 26, 118-243, 266 : PL 33, 103-107 ; 431-449 ; 1054-1059 ; 1089-1091.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Confess. 4, 13, 20 : PL 32, 701.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Confess. 10, 8, 15 : PL 32, 758-786.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Confess 10, 34, 53 : PL 32, 801.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Ep. 120, 4, 20 : PL 33, 462.

eternal beauty of God, from which is derived the beauty of bodies, of art and of virtue. Augustine calls God "the beauty of all beauties."²⁸⁹ "in whom and from whom and through whom exist as good and beautiful everything that is good and beautiful."²⁹⁰ When he looked back on the years before his conversion, he regretted bitterly that he had been late in loving this "beauty, ever ancient, ever new" ;²⁹¹ he admonished the young not to imitate him in this, but to love beauty itself always and above all else, and to preserve to the end the interior glory of their youth in beauty.²⁹²

V.

I have recalled the conversion of St. Augustine and have sketched briefly a panorama of the thought of an incomparable man whose children and disciples we all are in a certain fashion, both in the Church and in the western world itself. I express once again my fervent desire that his teaching should be studied and widely known, and his pastoral zeal be imitated, so that the authoritative teaching of such a great doctor and pastor may flourish ever more happily in the Church and in the world, for the progress of the faith and of culture.

²⁸⁹ Confess 3, 6, 10 : PL 32, 687.

²⁹⁰ Solil. 1, 1, 3 : PL 32, 870.

²⁹¹ Confess 10, 27, 38 : PL 32, 795.

²⁹² Cf. Ep. 120, 4, 20 : PL 33, 462.

The sixteenth centenary of the conversion of St. Augustine offers a highly favorable opportunity to increase the study of St. Augustine and to spread devotion to him. I exhort in particular the religious orders, male and female, which rejoice to bear his name, live under his patronage and follow his Rule in whatever way, to dedicate themselves to this task, so that this may be for them the occasion to follow St. Augustine's example of wisdom and holiness, and to spread this zealously to others.

I shall be present in spirit, with gratitude and best wishes, at the various initiatives that celebrate this centenary, invoking on each of them with all my heart the heavenly protection and the efficacious help of the Virgin Mary, whom the Bishop of Hippo proclaimed as Mother of the Church.²⁹³ As a pledge of grace I am happy to impart my Apostolic Blessing with this Letter.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's on August 28, on the feast day of St. Augustine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, in the year 1986, the eighth of my Pontificate.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

²⁹³ Cf. De sancta virginitate 6, 6 : PL 40, 339.