

Confessions - Book V - Chapter IV

by St. Augustine

Transcript

5. They do not know the way which is thy word, by which thou didst create all the things that are and also the men who measure them, and the senses by which they perceive what they measure, and the intelligence whereby they discern the patterns of measure. Thus they know not that thy wisdom is not a matter of measure.[126] But the Only Begotten hath been "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification"[127] and hath been numbered among us and paid tribute to Caesar.[128] And they do not know this "Way" by which they could descend from themselves to him in order to ascend through him to him. They did not know this "Way," and so they fancied themselves exalted to the stars and the shining heavens. And lo, they fell upon the earth, and "their foolish heart was darkened."[129] They saw many true things about the creature but they do not seek with true piety for the Truth, the Architect of Creation, and hence they do not find him. Or, if they do find him, and know that he is God, they do not glorify him as God; neither are they thankful but become vain in their imagination, and say that they themselves are wise, and attribute to themselves what is thine. At the same time, with the most perverse blindness, they wish to attribute to thee their own quality--so that they load their lies on thee who art the Truth, "changing the glory of the incorruptible God for an image of corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."[130] "They exchanged thy truth for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."[131]

6. Yet I remembered many a true saying of the philosophers about the creation, and I saw the confirmation of their calculations in the orderly sequence of seasons and in the visible evidence of the stars. And I compared this with the doctrines of Mani, who in his voluminous folly wrote many books on these subjects. But I could not discover there any account, of either the solstices or the equinoxes, or the eclipses of the sun and moon, or anything of the sort that I had learned in the books of secular philosophy. But still I was ordered to believe, even where the ideas did not correspond with--even when they contradicted--the rational theories established by mathematics and my own eyes, but were very different.

7. Yet, O Lord God of Truth, is any man pleasing to thee because he knows these things? No, for surely that man is unhappy who knows these things and does not know thee. And that man is happy who knows thee, even though he does not know these things. He who knows both thee and these things is not the more blessed for his learning, for thou only art his blessing, if knowing thee as God he glorifies thee and gives thanks and does not become vain in his thoughts.

For just as that man who knows how to possess a tree, and give thanks to thee for the use of it--although he may not know how many feet high it is or how wide it spreads--is better than the man who can measure

it and count all its branches, but neither owns it nor knows or loves its Creator: just so is a faithful man who possesses the world\

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