

Confessions - Book VI - Chapter V

by St. Augustine

Transcript

7. Still, from this time forward, I began to prefer the Catholic doctrine. I felt that it was with moderation and honesty that it commanded things to be believed that were not demonstrated--whether they could be demonstrated, but not to everyone, or whether they could not be demonstrated at all. This was far better than the method of the Manicheans, in which our credulity was mocked by an audacious promise of knowledge and then many fabulous and absurd things were forced upon believers because they were incapable of demonstration. After that, O Lord, little by little, with a gentle and most merciful hand, drawing and calming my heart, thou didst persuade me that, if I took into account the multitude of things I had never seen, nor been present when they were enacted--such as many of the events of secular history; and the numerous reports of places and cities which I had not seen; or such as my relations with many friends, or physicians, or with these men and those--that unless we should believe, we should do nothing at all in this life.[159] Finally, I was impressed with what an unalterable assurance I believed which two people were my parents, though this was impossible for me to know otherwise than by hearsay. By bringing all this into my consideration, thou didst persuade me that it was not the ones who believed thy books--which with so great authority thou hast established among nearly all nations--but those who did not believe them who were to be blamed. Moreover, those men were not to be listened to who would say to me, "How do you know that those Scriptures were imparted to mankind by the Spirit of the one and most true God?" For this was the point that was most of all to be believed, since no wranglings of blasphemous questions such as I had read in the books of the self-contradicting philosophers could once snatch from me the belief that thou dost exist--although what thou art I did not know--and that to thee belongs the governance of human affairs.

8. This much I believed, some times more strongly than other times. But I always believed both that thou art and that thou hast a care for us,[160] although I was ignorant both as to what should be thought about thy substance and as to which way led, or led back, to thee. Thus, since we are too weak by unaided reason to find out truth, and since, because of this, we need the authority of the Holy Writings, I had now begun to believe that thou wouldst not, under any circumstances, have given such eminent authority to those Scriptures throughout all lands if it had not been that through them thy will may be believed in and that thou mightest be sought. For, as to those passages in the Scripture which had heretofore appeared incongruous and offensive to me, now that I had heard several of them expounded reasonably, I could see that they were to be resolved by the mysteries of spiritual interpretation. The authority of Scripture seemed to me all the more revered and worthy of devout belief because, although it was visible for all to read, it reserved the full majesty of its secret wisdom within its spiritual profundity. While it stooped to all in the great plainness of its language and simplicity of style, it yet required the closest attention of the most

serious-minded--so that it might receive all into its common bosom, and direct some few through its narrow passages toward thee, yet many more than would have been the case had there not been in it such a lofty authority, which nevertheless allured multitudes to its bosom by its holy humility. I continued to reflect upon these things, and thou wast with me. I sighed, and thou didst hear me. I vacillated, and thou guidedst me. I roamed the broad way of the world, and thou didst not desert me.

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