

AN AUGUSTINE SYNTHESIS

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LONDON
SHEED & WARD
1936

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ness and reach out Thy right hand to me. Hold Thy light before me and recall me from my strayings, that with Thee as my guide I may return to myself and to Thee. Amen.

Solil. II, vi, 9.

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O God who art ever the same, let me know myself, let me know Thee.

Solil. II, i, 1.

29

In every place, O Truth, thou givest audience to such as consult thee, and at the same time dost thou answer all their demands, be they never so diverse. Thou givest them clear answers, but everyone doth not clearly understand thee. For all men consult thee about what they will, but they do not always hear what they will by way of answer. He is thy best servant who endeavoureth not to hear that from thee which he desireth, but rather desireth that which he heareth from thee.

Conf. X, xxvi, 37.

30

More happy are they that hear than they that speak. For he that learneth is humble, but he that teacheth laboureth that he be not proud, lest the inclination to please men to their hurt steal over him, lest he displease God that would please men. There is a great dread in teaching, my brethren, great is our trembling over these our words. Believe our heart which you cannot see. May He be merciful to us, may He be favourable to us, who knoweth with what great trembling we speak to you. But when we hear Him suggesting anything and teaching us within our hearts, we are without concern, and without concern we rejoice; for we are under the Master; His glory we seek, His teaching we praise; His truth delighteth us within, where no one maketh or heareth a sound.

In Ps. L, 13.

31

For see, brethren, what there is in a human soul. Of itself it hath no light, nor of itself powers; but all that is fair in a

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soul is virtue and wisdom; but it neither is wise for itself, nor strong for itself, nor is itself light to itself, nor is itself virtue to itself. There is a certain fountain and origin of virtue, there is a certain root of wisdom, there is a certain, so to speak, if this also is to be said, region of immutable truth; from which if the soul withdraws it is made dark and if it draws near it is made light.

In Ps. LVIII, *Serm.* i, 18.

32

For a lamp is a creature, not a creator; and it is lit by participation of an immutable light. This was John, of whom God the Word saith, 'He was a burning and a shining lamp' (John v, 35). But he is both light and lamp; nevertheless compared with the Word, of Whom it is said, 'the Word was God,' 'he was not the light,' but was sent 'to give testimony of the light.' For 'that was the true light,' which was not lit as a man, but 'which enlighteneth every man' (John i, 1-9). But unless a lantern also were a light, He would not say to His apostles, 'You are the light of the world' (Matt. v, 14), when they had heard that they might not think themselves to be that which He was, who said this. For in a certain passage He saith of Himself, 'I am the light of the world' (John viii, 12), and of themselves He saith to them, 'A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house. So let your light shine before men' (Matt. v, 14 *sqq.*); that they might know that they were, as it were, lanterns lit by that light which shineth immutably. For no creature, howsoever rational and intellectual, is lighted of itself, but is lighted by participation of eternal Truth.

In Ps. CXIX, *Serm.* xxiii, 1.

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God therefore, of Himself, because He is the light (John i, 4, 9), enlighteneth pious minds, that they may understand the divine truths which are declared or exhibited. . . . God hath created man's mind rational and intellectual, whereby he may take in His Light; . . . and He so enlighteneth it of Himself,

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that not only those things which are displayed by the truth, but even truth itself may be perceived by the mind's eye.
In Ps. CXVIII, Serm. xviii, 4.

34

Let religion bind us fast to the one omnipotent God; for no creature is interposed between our mind, by which we know Him, the Father, and the truth, that is, the interior light by which we understand Him. Wherefore, let us adore in Him and with Him that very Truth, which is in no part dissimilar to Him, and is the form of all things, which were created by Him alone, and which strive to attain to Him alone.

De vera relig. liii, 113.

35

As the mind to the body, so must also truth be preferred to the mind itself; so that the mind may desire it not only more than the body, but even more than its own self. Thus will the mind be more complete and chaste, when it shall enjoy the immutability of truth rather than its own mutability.

De mendacio vii, 10.

36

For the flesh is not life to itself, but the soul is the life of the flesh. The soul is not life to itself, but God is the life of the soul. . . . And if the soul live after God, then doth the flesh live rightly after the soul.

Serm. (de Script. Nov. Test.) CLVI, vi, 6.

37

Be thou subject to God, thy flesh to thee. What can be more just, more beautiful? Thou subject to Him that is greater, it that is less to thee. Obey thou Him that made thee, that that which was made for thee may obey thee. For we know not nor do we commend this order: 'My flesh to thee, and thou to God,' but rather, 'thou to God, and thy flesh to thee.' For if thou despisest 'thou to God,' thou wilt never bring about

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'thy flesh to thee.' Thou that obeyest not God shalt be tormented by a slave.

In Ps. CXLIII, 6.

38

The soul obeyeth God enthroned in it, and itself commandeth the members. For thy soul commandeth thy members that so the foot, the hand, the eye, the ear may move. It ordereth the members as its servants, but itself nevertheless serveth its God enthroned within. It cannot rule its inferior well unless it has not disdained to serve its superior.

In Ps. XLVI, 10.

39

In so far as concerns the nature of man, there is in him nothing better than the mind and reason. But he who would live blessedly ought not to live according to them; for then he would live according to man, whereas he ought to live according to God, so that he may attain to blessedness. And to accomplish this, our mind must not be content with itself, but must be subjected to God.

Retract. I, i, 2.

40

'But it is good for me to adhere to my God' (Ps. lxxii, 28); so that our bodies will live on us by adhering to us, but we draw life from God, because it is good for us to adhere to God.

In Ps. CXVIII, Serm. x, 2.

41

Remain not in thyself, transcend thyself also; put thyself in Him who made thee.

Serm. (de Script. Nov. Test.) CLIII, vii, 9.

42

That the soul in the contemplation of the supreme wisdom (which is certainly not the soul itself, since it is immutable), can behold itself also, though it is mutable, comes to pass by reason of that distinction whereby the soul is not that which God

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is, and is yet something, after God, capable of pleasing. But the soul is a better thing when it forgets itself for love of the immutable God, or by comparison with Him utterly despises itself.

De lib. arb. III, xxv, 76.

43

When first I knew Thee Thou didst raise me up, that I might see there was somewhat for me to see, though as yet I was not fit to see it.

Conf. VII, x, 16.

44

O for some most wise and eloquent man who by speech and argument might explain the power of the soul in the body, its power in itself, its power before God, to whom it is the most near when it is the most pure, and in whom it has its whole and its sovereign good! But now though others fail me in this matter, I nevertheless venture not to fail thee. But I have this reward, that while I expound in unlearned fashion what the power of the soul is, I safely put to the test what I myself am capable of. But first I would remove any too broad and boundless a hope you may have, so that you may not imagine that I am going to speak on every manner of soul; for I shall speak only of the human soul, for which alone we must take thought, if we take thought of ourselves. First then, as any one can easily see, the soul quickens by its presence this earthly and mortal body, it gathers it into one and holds it in one, it does not allow it to fall apart and decay; it causes food to be distributed equably among the members of the body, allotting to each what is proper to it; it preserves its harmony and measure, not only in beauty of form, but also in growth and reproduction. But these things may seem to be shared by men even with plants; for we say that the latter also live, and we see and acknowledge that each of them after its kind is taken care of and nourished, grows and begets. Let us therefore ascend a second step, and see what are the powers of the soul in the senses, wherein a more evident and more manifest life is to be perceived. . . .

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Consider the power of the soul in the senses, and in that motion which more clearly displays the living creature, wherein we can have nothing in common with things that are rooted to the ground. The soul directs its attention to the sense of touch and feels and distinguishes things hot and cold, rough and smooth, hard and soft, light and heavy. Then, by taste, smell, hearing, and sight it determines innumerable differences in flavours, odours, sounds, and shapes. And among all these things it appropriates to itself and seeks out those which are in accord with its own body, and rejects and shuns those which are contrary to it. At certain intervals of time it removes itself from these senses, and, refreshing their motions by a kind of rest period, revolves in itself the medley of images of things which it has received through the senses; and this all is sleep and dreams. Often as it joyously ranges, it delights in the ease of motion, and without effort orders the concord of the members. In the union of the sexes it plays its part, and by companionship and love makes of two natures one. It conspires not only to the begetting of offspring, but also to the cherishing, protection, and nurture thereof. It attaches itself by long habit to the things among which it guides the body and by which it sustains the body, and as though they were its members it can hardly be parted from them; and this power of habit, which even by a separation from the things themselves, and by lapse of time, is not severed, is called memory. But again, no one denies that the soul, i.e. the vital principle can do all these things even in beasts.

Rise therefore to the third step, which is already peculiar to man, and consider the memory of the innumerable things not made familiar by custom, but committed to the mind and retained by observation and signs: the many works of artists, the tilling of the fields, the building up of cities, the manifold wonders of building and other undertakings, the invention of the many symbols in letters and words, in gesture, in all manner of sounds, in pictures and statues; the many tongues of men, so many things set in hand, newly begun or restored; the vast number of books and all manner of memorials to keep a record of things done, the much thought given to posterity, the many grades of offices, powers, honours, and dignities, whether in families, or in the state at home or on military service, or in

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sacred or profane displays; the power of reasoning and thought, the stream of eloquence, the various kinds of verse, the thousand simulations for the sake of play or jest, the skill of players and singers, the subtlety of mensuration, the art of calculation, the conjectures about the past and the future from the present;—such things are great and are wholly man's property; yet all this rich store is held in common, some of it by the learned and unlearned, some of it by the just and unjust.

Look upward, therefore, and leap onto the fourth step, whereon begin goodness and all true praise. For here the soul ventures to set itself not only above its own body, whatever part of the universe it is, but also above the whole universe of bodily things, and to think that the good things of the latter are not its own good things, and, having compared them to its own power and beauty, to lay them aside and despise them. And the more it delights in its own gifts, the more it removes itself from base things, and makes itself altogether spotless and clean and adorned with beauty. It strengthens itself against all such things as strive to move it from its intent and purpose. It sets great store on human fellowship, and is unwilling to do anything to another which it would not have done to itself. It follows the authority and the counsels of the wise, and believes that through these God speaks to it. In this admirable action of the soul there yet remain toil and conflict great and most bitter with the pains and the blandishments of this world. For in the very business of cleansing itself there is an underlying fear of death, often not great, but often also most vehement. This fear is not great when the soul has the robust faith (for until it is perfectly cleansed it cannot *see* whether this be true or no) that all things are ordered by God with such providence and justice, that death cannot fall unfairly on any man, even though perhaps an unjust man inflict it upon him. But even on this step death is vehemently feared, since God's justice is the less firmly believed for the reason that it is the more anxiously sought; and it is seen the less clearly in so far as fear lessens that tranquillity which is essential in the investigation of obscure matters. Furthermore, as the soul by its very progress feels more and more how great the difference is between the clean soul and the unclean, it fears the more lest, when its body has been laid aside, God even

less than itself will be unable to endure its pollution. And there is no harder thing than both to fear death and to refrain (as the danger itself bids) from the snares of this world. But so strong is the soul that it may accomplish even this, with the help, of course, of the justice of sovereign and true God, whereby this whole universe is sustained and ordered, and whereby it is brought about not only that all things are, but also that they are in such wise that they could not be better. To this justice the soul piously and safely commits itself, to be aided and perfected in the difficult work of its cleansing. . . .

And when this has been accomplished, that is to say, when the soul has been freed from all corruption and washed from every stain, then at length it holds itself in utmost joy within itself; it has no manner of fear for itself, and suffers no anxiety concerning itself at all. This, then, is the fifth step; for it is one thing to achieve purity, another to hold it; and the action whereby the soul restores itself after defilement is other than that whereby it does not suffer itself to be defiled again. On this step the soul in every way forms a conception of how great it is, and having conceived this, it proceeds with incredibly powerful confidence towards God, that is, to the real contemplation of truth, and to that most high and secret reward which was the goal of all its pains.

But this action, that is, the striving to understand those things which truly and supremely are, is the highest form of vision of the soul, than which it has nothing more perfect and good and right. This therefore will be the sixth step of the soul's action; for it is one thing for the eye of the soul to be cleansed, so that it may not look in vain or without purpose, and not see amiss; another to preserve and strengthen that healthy state, and yet another to direct a serene and unswerving gaze upon that which it would see. And those who would do this before they are cleansed and made whole, are so stricken back by that light of truth, that they think there to be in it not only no good, but even much evil; and they take away from it the name of truth, and take refuge with a kind of miserable lust and delight in their own darkness. And therefore most fittingly does the Prophet, inspired by God, say: 'Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels' (Ps. 1, 12).

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For that spirit, I hold, is right, whereby in the search for truth the soul cannot turn from the right path and stray. And this spirit is assuredly not renewed in the soul unless the heart has first been made clean, that is, unless the very thought has set itself free from all desire of mortal things, and strained itself clear from the dregs thereof.

And now in the very vision and contemplation of truth, which is the seventh and last step of the soul, though this is not now a step but an abiding place reached by the other steps, how shall I tell of the joys which are there, of the enjoyment of the true and supreme good, of the spirit of peace and eternity breathing there?

For those therefore who are ascending upwards the first action may be called, for the sake of instruction, quickening; the second, sensation; the third, art; the fourth, virtue; the fifth, tranquillity; the sixth, entry; the seventh, contemplation. They may also be thus named: of the body, through the body, about the body, the soul towards itself, the soul in itself, towards God, with God. And again thus: beauty from another thing, beauty through another thing, beauty about another thing, beauty towards the beautiful, beauty in the beautiful, beauty towards Beauty, beauty in Beauty.

De quant. animae xxxiii, 70-76; xxxv, 79.

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For God wisheth us to be so suckled with milk, that we abide not therein; but, by growing through milk, that we may arrive at solid food. Man therefore ought not to raise his soul unto pride, but to raise it unto the teaching of the Word of God. For if the soul were not to be lifted up, it would not be said in another psalm, 'To thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul' (Ps. xxiv, 1). And except the soul overflow herself, she reacheth not unto the vision of God and unto the knowledge of that immutable substance. For while it is still in the flesh, it is thus addressed: Where is thy God? But the soul's God is within, and is within spiritually, and is lofty spiritually; not as it were by intervals of places, as places are higher through intervals. For if altitude of this kind is to be sought, the birds surpass us

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in approaching God. God is therefore lofty within, and spiritually lofty, nor doth the soul reach Him, except it transcend itself. For whatever thou thinkest concerning God according to the body, thou errest much. Thou art indeed an infant, if thou thinkest concerning God even according to the human soul, that God may either forget, or be wise in such manner that He may be unwise, or do anything and yet repent of it. For all these things are set out in the Scriptures, that, while we are yet unweaned, God may be commended to us; not that we may take those expressions about Him literally, and understand them as if God repented, and were now learning something that He knew not, and understanding what He understood not, and remembering what he had forgotten. Such things belong to the soul, not to God. Except therefore a man hath passed the measure of his own soul, he will not see that God is what He is, God Who said 'I AM WHO AM' (Exod. iii, 14). . . . Therefore it is not said to thee to be humble with a view that thou mayest not be wise. Be humble, in respect of pride; be exalted, in respect of wisdom. Hear a plain sentence in this matter. 'Do not become children in sense. But in malice be children: and in sense be perfect' (1 Cor. xiv, 20). It has been clearly explained, my brethren, where God would have us be humble and where exalted. Humble, in order to provide against pride; exalted to take in wisdom.

In Ps. CXXX, 12.

IV. BLESSED TRUTH

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Whereas knowledge and action make a man happy, as in knowledge error must be guarded against, so must wickedness be avoided in action. Now whosoever supposes that he can know truth while he is still living iniquitously, is in error. And it is wickedness to love this world, and those things that come into being and pass away, and to lust after these things, and to labour for them in order to acquire them, and to rejoice when they are abundant, and to fear lest they perish, and to be saddened when they perish. Such a life cannot see that

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Commend unto this Truth whatsoever it hath imparted unto thee . . . and they shall stay with thee and shall stand fast for ever in God's own presence, who is immutable and eternal.
Conf. IV, xi, 16.

IV. ALL-OVERCOMING GOOD

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All sins are contained in this one category, that one turns away from things divine and truly enduring, and turns towards those which are mutable and uncertain. And although the latter are rightly placed each in its order, and work out that beauty proper to them it is nevertheless the mark of a perverted and ungoverned mind to be in subjection to them as things to be pursued, when by the divine order and law it is set above them as things to be directed.

De lib. arb. I, xvi, 35.

228

The will that turns away from the immutable good common to all and turns towards its own good, whether outward to itself or downward, sins. It turns towards its own when it wills to be its own master; towards outward good, when out of curiosity it strives to know things which are the property of others, or which do not pertain to itself; to the lower good, when it loves the pleasures of the body. And in this way man, having become proud and inquisitive and licentious, is taken captive by another life, which in comparison with the higher life is death. Yet this other life is governed by the administration of the divine Providence, which orders all things in their proper place, and apportions to each his due according to his merit. Thus it comes to pass that neither are the good things striven for by sinners in any way bad, nor is free will itself, which we are told should be counted as holding a middle place among good things; but that evil is the turning away of the will from the immutable good, and the turning towards mutable goods. And since this turning away and this turning to are not forced but voluntary

actions, it is meet and right that their consequence should be the punishment of misery.

De lib. arb. II, xix, 35.

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Since truly no one is above the laws of the almighty Creator, the soul is not allowed not to pay back its debt. For either it pays it by using well what it has received, or it pays by losing that which it refused to use well. If therefore it does not pay by working justice, it will repay by suffering misery. . . . If it does not pay what it owes by works, it will pay what it owes by suffering.

De lib. arb. III, xv, 44.

230

Let man choose for himself what he will; the works of the Lord are not so constituted that the creature, constituted with a free will, should transcend the will of the Creator, even though he act contrary to His will. For God willeth not that thou shouldst sin, since He forbiddeth it. Yet if thou hast sinned, think not that a man hath done what he willed, and that that hath happened to God which He did not will. For as He would that man should not sin, so would He spare the sinner, that he may return and live. So too is it His will finally to punish one who persisteth in his sin, that the rebellious may not escape the power of justice. Thus whatever choice thou hast made, the Almighty will not be at a loss to fulfil His will concerning thee.

In Ps. CX, 2.

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When God punishes sinners, He does not inflict His evil on them, but leaves them to their own evil. 'Behold,' saith the Psalmist, 'he hath been in labour with injustice, he hath conceived toil; brought forth iniquity. He hath opened a pit and dug it: and he is fallen into the hole he made. His sorrow shall be turned on his own head: and his iniquity shall come down upon his crown' (Ps. vii, 15 *sqq.*). When therefore God punishes, He punishes as a judge those that transgress the law, not by bringing evil upon them from Himself, but by driving them on

to that which they have chosen, to fill up the sum of their misery.

In Ps. V, 10.

232

The ungodly are driven out from that inheritance which is possessed by seeing and knowing God; just as diseased eyes are driven out from the shining of the light, when what is gladness to others is pain to them. . . . To sinners the bread of truth is bitter. Whence they hate the mouth of him that speaketh the truth. These therefore have embittered God, who by sin have fallen into such a state of sickness, that, as if it were bitter gall, they cannot bear the food of truth, in which healthy souls delight.

In Ps. V, 14, 15.

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Evil, therefore, is that which falls away from essence and tends to non-being . . . It tends to make that which is to cease to be.

De mor. Eccl. II, ii, 2.

234

It is indeed not possible to know that this [motion, that is, the turning of the will away from God] is nothingness. Hold thou therefore fast to thy unshakable piety, that no good thing may befall thee, whether by thy senses, or thy understanding, or thy thoughts of whatever kind, which is not from God. For no nature is met with which is not from God. Every thing in which thou seest measure and number and order, that thing attribute to God, the Artificer, without hesitation. Indeed, if thou completely takest away from it these three qualities, absolutely nothing will remain. For even if an inchoation of a form remained, in which you found neither measure, nor number, nor order; since everywhere where these are is perfect form, you must needs remove even this inchoation of a form, which as material to be perfected seems to lie under the hand of the Artificer. For if the perfection of the form is good, the inchoation of the form is already some good. It follows that if all the good

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has been completely removed, there will remain not something which is not nothing, but absolutely nothing.

De lib. arb. II, xx, 54.

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He indeed always is, nor has He been and is not, nor is but has not been; but as He never will not be, so He never was not. And He is whole everywhere. And hence [the soul] 'lives, and moves, and is in Him' (Acts xvii, 28), and so it can remember Him. . . . But it is reminded of it, that it may turn to God, as to that light by which it was in some way touched, even when it was turned away from Him. Hence it is that even the ungodly think of eternity, and rightly blame and rightly praise many things in the conduct of men. And by what rules do they thus judge, except by those wherein they see how men ought to live, even though they themselves do not so live? And where do they see those rules? For they do not see them in their own nature; for though these things are without doubt seen by the mind, yet it is agreed that their minds are mutable; but these rules are seen as immutable by anyone who can see them at all. Nor again do they see them in the character of their own mind, since these rules are rules of justice, and their minds are confessedly unjust. Where indeed are these rules written, wherein even the unjust recognizes what is just, wherein he discerns that he ought to have what he himself has not? Where, then, are they written, unless in the book of that light which is called Truth? From this every just law is copied and transferred to the heart of the man that worketh justice, not by migrating to it, but by being as it were impressed upon it, as the impression from a ring passes into the wax, yet does not leave the ring. But he who worketh not justice, and yet sees how he ought to work, he is the man who is turned away from that light, which nevertheless touches him. He, however, who does not even see how he ought to live, sins indeed with more excuse, because he is not a transgressor of a law that he knows; but even he too is just touched sometimes by the splendour of the omnipresent truth, when after being admonished he confesses.

De Trin. XIV, xv, 21.

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