

St. Augustine: Philosophy, Religion and Mysticism

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The religious question is inevitable in the life of every man, given his rationality and consciousness. St. Augustine defines man in this way: «Homo a veteribus sapientibus ita definitus est: homo est animal rationale mortale.»¹ This rationality is the root of man's religious nature and orientation. It is also the source of man's capacity for wisdom, to love wisdom, to philosophize. In spite of contemporary man's propensity to avoid the issue of God, the reaction to the reality or non-reality of God cannot be avoided. Religion does not directly treat of God, although He is its ultimate goal. Religion is primarily concerned with man's reaction to the reality or non-reality of God and thus, any study of religion (in the case of this article the study is philosophical in nature) directly analyzes man's reaction. We can say that the religious question is the most spontaneous of all man's questions for it is the very ground of the so-called fundamental questions of whatness, whoness, whereness and whyhness with regards to existence.

¹ St. Augustine, *De Ordine*, II, 11, 31. Ibid., II, 2, 6. See also: *De Trinitate* XV, 7, 11. Ibid., VII, 4, 7. ("Homo est substantia rationalis constans ex anima et corpore.") In spite of the presence of the term "rational", Augustine was clearly platonic and not aristotelian with traces of eclecticism. In a curious text from the *Soliloquies*, Augustine states that even robbers have rational souls: "Et homines sunt, et eos amo, non eo quod animalia, sed eo quod homines sunt, id est, ex eo quod rationales animas habent, quas amo etiam in latronibus. Licet enim mihi in quovis amare rationem, cum illis iure oderim qui male utitur eo quod amo. Itaque tanto magis amo amicos meos, quanto magis bene utuntur anima rationali, vel certe quantum desiderant ea bene uti.", *Soliloquia*, I, 2, 7. Likewise, *Sermones*, 43, 2, 3; Ibid., 358, 3; *De Magistro*, 8, 24; *De Quant. Animae*, 25, 47.

To submit the “ground question” of man's religiosity to all these fundamental questions to philosophical analysis involves sophistication or maturity. In this sense, I find H. Duméry quite helpful when he says that: “GOD IS AFFIRMED first of all not by philosophical thought, but by spontaneous thought. Mankind had myths and religions very early, but metaphysics only much later. This is evidence that the needs of life, of psychology, and of society precede, and by a long time, methodical awareness of ideas and their ordering and classification. Criticism is always a fruit of maturity.”² However, what Duméry calls “needs of life, of psychology...” are latently philosophical or are innately philosophical, whose “kairos” comes only later after due growth, maturity and sophistication. Augustine, given his standpoint and interests, would inevitably give a philosophical answer from a christian viewpoint. For him, christian philosophy, compared to the pagan ones, is “quae una est vera philosophia.”³

Traditionally, and for convenience, the human religious reaction has been divided into two: acceptance and rejection of the reality of God. But, actually, the issue is much more complicated than this bipolarity. There are religions without god (such as Buddhism), or religions with an impersonal notion of god (such as Hinduism) or religions that limit themselves to moral codes with rites and symbols (such as Chinese traditional religions). There are many others who prefer to keep religion as a private matter and do not participate in mainstream liturgical activities nor are visible members of any mainstream or non-mainstream denominations such as the so-called religious sects. We can even say that religion is the most public and the most private question of man. It is also the most external and internal. In the same vein, it is the most abused question, given that mere formalities or externalities: code,

² H. Duméry, *The Problem of God in Philosophy of Religion*. Ch. Courtney (trans.) (Evanston, 1964), p. 3. In this connection, it is worth noting that Descartes upon commencing with his methodic doubt, affirms that God is the foundation of all epistemological foundation, of certitude. See: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, I. D.M. Clarke (trans.) (London, 1988).

³ St. Augustine, *Contra Iulianus Pelag.* IV, 14, 72. Cfr. E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*. (New York, 1960).

creed and cult are not guarantees to any authentic answers or satisfying evaluations of the religious phenomenon, especially on the individual level. What is empirically testable is what some label as the "Social Ecology of Religion"⁴. In fact, this social ecology has been the thrust of (at least) Western civilization's religious reflections. We can never tell what is going on in the heart and mind of every individual with his (God) given right to privacy and individuality. As a matter of fact, the earliest text of Natural Theology (some would wrongly call it using Leibnitz's term as "Theodicy"⁵) in the West has for its point of departure this social ecology.

I am referring to Plato's *Laws*, Book X. Plato commences this book by denouncing the three most common heresies or forms of impieties of his times, namely: a) that gods do not exist (atheism), b) they exist but are totally unconcerned about the world, (agnosticism, deism) and c) they exist and are concerned, but can be easily influenced by prayer or rites or sacrifice (religious perversion).⁶ These three heresies were dangerous for the Athenian society when Plato was already an old man.⁷ They could weaken the very basis of society. Perhaps, in this connection, we can agree with R. Girard's statement concerning public opinion and religion. More often than

⁴ See: V. Reynolds and R. Tanner, *The Social Ecology of Religion*. (New York, 1995).

⁵ In a previous article, I made methodological distinctions among Theodicy, Natural Theology, Philosophy of Religion and other related disciplines falling under the generic or broad category of "Religious Studies", see: M. Ofilada Mina, "Del Homo Religiosus al Homo Liturgicus. Planteamientos iniciales para la filosofía de la religión" *Studium* 40 (2000), p. 25.

⁶ Plato, *Laws*, X, 884-885b.

⁷ It would be worth our while to take into consideration this observation of Prof. C.C.J. Webb: "Plato, who was an old man when he wrote the *Laws*, and who speaks in them, through the Athenian Stranger as an old man, regards sheer atheism – as a youthful extravagance which will not stand the test of the experience of life. No one he thinks, persists to old age in this belief; but a few do persist in the other two heresies – the denial of divine providence on the one hand, or the belief in divine corruptibility on the other. Agnosticism and superstition, as we might say, outlast dogmatic atheism. probably the experience of other centuries will be found on the whole to confirm Plato here." *Studies in the History of Natural Theology*. (Oxford, 1915), p. 86.

not, religious matters fall under the domain of public opinion. "Scholars of religion devote themselves to the study of gods and divinity. They should be able to provide clear and concise definitions of these concepts, but they do not. They are obliged, of course, to decide what falls within their field of study and what falls outside it, yet they leave the crucial and most decisively scientific task of defining their subject to uninformed public opinion. Even assuming that it is possible – or justifiable – to stretch the concept of divinity to include each and everybody's idea of the divine, the so-called science of religion can neither do without this approach nor provide a convincing defense of it."⁸

Uninformed public opinion is the breeding ground for heresies. Plato and Augustine were aware of this. The latter in his apologetical works was in effect attacking public opinion as a sphere which has deviated from the truth. Hegel, in the *Philosophy of History*, echoes the platonic concern, vis-à-vis the realities of heresies, with regards to religion as crucial to the very basis of a society: "Religion is the sphere in which a nation gives itself the definition of that which it regards as the true... religion stands in the closest connection with the political principle. Freedom can exist only where Individuality is recognized as having its positive and real existence in the Divine Being... On this account it is that the State rests on Religion."⁹

Nevertheless, whatever may be the realm (private or public)¹⁰ the religious question is the most fundamental problem of man.

⁸ R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*. P. Gregory (trans.) (Baltimore, 1977), p. 315.

⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. J. Sibree (trans.) (Buffalo, NY, 1991), pp. 50-51.

¹⁰ "Religion and morality – in the same way as inherently universal essences – have the peculiarity of being present in the individual soul, in the full extent of their Idea, and therefore truly and really; although, they may not manifest themselves in it *in extenso*, and are not applied to fully developed relations. The religion, a peasant, e.g. – in its intensive concentration and limitation to a few perfectly simple relations of life – has infinite worth; the same worth as the religion and morality of extensive knowledge, and of an existence rich in the compass of its relations and actions." Ibid., 37.

This applies even to those who deny the reality of God. The very issue touches on man's limitation which he radically experiences as finitude and culpability¹¹: especially in the wake of death, of illness, of suffering man acknowledges his finitude, constructs symbols and rites to project this experience amidst the feeling of guilt. Wittgenstein says on this regard: "Any man who is half-way decent will think himself extremely imperfect, but a religious man thinks himself *wretched*."¹² In the long run, the issue is truly theodiceal in the leibnizian sense: the justification, justice of God, of reality in the wake of evil.¹³ We will not enter here into this thematic given its broadness and intricacies.

History, the objectivization of the Spirit which culminates in the state, and its philosophical treatment is, as Hegel affirms, "a Theodicea – a justification of the ways of God – which Leibniz attempted metaphysically, in his method, i.e., in indefinite abstract categories—so that the ill that is found in the World may be comprehended, and the thinking Spirit reconciled with the fact of the existence of evil."¹⁴ Theodicy, in this sense, is reflective of the problem of religion: the fundamental problem of man that would hopefully reach philosophical maturity and sophistication.

Religion, effectively, provides man with a model of reality, of comprehending and interpreting it; it provides the link, the key to be united with reality itself since it inquires as to the deepest spheres of our reality and our consciousness or our experience of it.

¹¹ This is the title of P. Ricouer's classic two-part work published in two volumes in English. *Fallible Man*. (New York, 1986); *The Symbolism of Evil*. (Boston, 1967).

¹² A. Kenny (ed.), *The Wittgenstein Reader*. (Oxford-Cambridge, Ma., 1994), p. 301.

¹³ I recommend that the reader interested in these themes consult a previous article of mine: "La dimensión teodiceal de la mística o la mística como teodicea: Justificar a Dios, justicia de Dios hacia la justicia de la realidad" *Angelicum* 56 (1999), pp. 221-244.

¹⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*., p.15.

1. The Search for Truth, The Search for the True Religion (Vera Religio)¹⁵.

The History of Philosophy is the History of the search for truth. Augustine was an important link or figure in this history. To study Augustine, is to do History of Philosophy. To study him, to learn from him would mean shedding historical light on the historical problem of religion. As Gilson puts it: "The historical approach to philosophy uses the history of philosophies as a handmaid to philosophy."¹⁶

"Augustine was" – in the words of a renowned scholar – "...philosopher, theologian, mystic, and poet in one, and this in an eminent degree. His lofty powers complemented each other and made the man fascinating in a way difficult to resist. He is a philosopher, but not a cold thinker; he is a theologian, but also a master of the spiritual life; he is a mystic, but also a pastor; he is a poet, but also a controversialist. Every reader thus finds something attractive and even overwhelming depth of metaphysical intuition, rich abundance of theological proofs, synthetic power and energy, psychological depth shown in spiritual ascents, and a wealth of imagination, sensibility, and mystical fervor."¹⁷

Religion, for Augustine, is man's search for God. It is a profound search. It goes beyond the categories of what is public and private. It is something profound and aimed towards the profound. Augustine assigns "interiority" as the primary "category of the" – not in the categorical sense as given by Aristotle and Kant, but in the lexical sense. "Noli foras ire; in te ipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas."¹⁸ Effectively, it is the search for truth. True philosophy, is identifiable with the true religion. "Sic enim creditur et docetur, quod est humanae salutis caput, non aliam esse philoso-

¹⁵ Acknowledgement is due to this introductory work which has somehow served as a point of departure for the present article: S. Alvarez Turienzo, "¿Alianza de filosofía y religión? Problema agustiniano." *Augustinus* 39 (1994), pp. 21-43.

¹⁶ E. Gilson, *God and Philosophy*. (New Haven & London, 1941), p. x.

¹⁷ A. Trapè, *Saint Augustine. Man, Pastor, Mystic*. M. J. O'Connell (trans.) (New York, 1986), p. 335.

¹⁸ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, XXXIX, 72.

phiam, id est sapientiae studium, et aliam religionem..."¹⁹ Collingwood's reflections could be enlightening on this regard: "Now if philosophy is the theory of the universe, what is religion? ... it was the theory of God, and of God's relations to the world and man. But the latter is surely nothing more nor less than a view of the universe. Indeed religion is quite as comprehensive as philosophy. For the religious consciousness in its true and complete form nothing is irrelevant, nothing is without its own unique and individual value. Religion and philosophy alike are views of the whole universe... God, so far as our conception has travelled, is merely at present a name for the unifying principle of the world, however that principle is regarded. Every philosophy has a God in this sense, just in so far as it is a philosophy and not a mere collocation of disconnected doctrines; in which case it has a number of different Gods whose relations it has not yet determined. And this is the only sense in which some religions (such as Buddhism) have a God. In the sense, then, in which all religions require a god, one is equally required by all philosophy. Since religion, on its intellectual side, is a theory of the world as a whole, it is the same thing as philosophy; the ultimate questions of philosophy are those of religion too."²⁰

True philosophy (which only once Augustine calls "Christian philosophy" as we have already seen) should not be identifiable with the false philosophies or false religions. It is a way of life that leads to God, that honors the true God making this God, who is the cause of all things, the foundation of all human endeavors, especially the endeavor towards the truth. "Cum omnis vitae bonae ac beatæ via in vera religione sit constituta, qua unus Deus colitur, et purgatissima pietate cognoscitur principium naturam omnium, a quo universitas et inchoatur et perficitur et continetur; hinc evidentius error deprehenditur eorum populorum, qui multos deos colere, quam unum verum Deum et Dominum omnium maluerunt, quod eorum sapientes, quos philosophos vocant, scholas habebant dissentientes et templa communia."²¹

¹⁹ St. Augustine, *Ibid.*, V, 8.

²⁰ R.G. Collingwood, *Religion and Philosophy*. (Bristol, 1994), 17 & 19.

²¹ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, I, 1.

“Religet ergo nos religio uni omnipotenti Deo, quia inter mentem nostram qua illus intelligimus Patrem, et Veritatem id est lucem interiorem per quam illum intelligimus, nulla interposita creatura est. Quare ipsam quoque Veritatem nulla ex parte dissimilem in ipso, et cum ipso veneremur, quae forma est omnium, quae ab uno facta sunt et ad unum nituntur.”²² The aforementioned interior light and the elevation of mind into an anthropological category signifies the Doctor of Hippo’s insistence in the profound dimension of man given that the question of God is a profound existential question. Given that it is profound, it is inevitable.²³

Augustine does not elaborate on his reaction to God, although he presupposes it. God, the omnipotent God, directly, is the object of his religious search. This search for God brings about a relationship with Him. Thus, there is a relationship, basically epistemological in nature, between man (or the soul²⁴) and God (“quia inter

²² St. Augustine, *Ibid.*, LV, 113.

²³ It would be worth our while for their forceful beauty and powerful expression to quote these texts from the *Confessions*: “Et quomodo invocabo Deum meum, Deum et Dominum meum? quoniam utique in me ipsum eum invocabo, cum invocabo eum. Et quis locus est in me, quo veniat in me Deus meus? quae Deus veniat in me, Deus qui fecit caelum et terram? Itane, domine Deus meus, est quicquam in me quod capiat te? An vero caelum et terra, quae fecisisti et in quibus me fecisti, capiunt te? An quia sine te non esset quidquid est, fit, ut, quidquid est capiat te? Quoniam itaque et ego sum, quid peto, ut venias in me, qui non essem, nisi esses in me? Non enim ego iam inferi, et tamen etiam ibi es. Nam etsi descendero in infernum, ades. Non ergo essem, Deus meus, non monino essem, nisi esses in me. An potius non essem, nisi essem in te, ex quo omnia, per quem omnia, in quo omnia? Etiam sic, Domine, etiam sic. Quo te invoco, cum in te sim, aut unde venias in me? Quo enim recedam extra caelum et terram ut inde in me veniat Deus meus, qui dixit: Caelum et terram ego impleo? Capiunt ergone te caelum et terra, quoniam tu imples ea? An imples et restat, quoniam non te capiunt? Et quo refundes quidquid impleto caelo et terra restat ex te? An non opus habes, ut quoquam continearis, qui contines omnia, quoniam quae imples continend imples? Non enim vasa, quae te plena sunt, stabilem te faciunt, quia etsi fragantur non effunderis. Et cum effunderis super nos, non tu iaces, sed erigis nos, nec tu dissiparis, sed colligis nos. Sed quae imples omnia, te toto imples omnia, an quia non possunt le totum capere omnia, partem tui capiunt? Et eandem partem simul omnia capiunt, an singulas singula et maiores maiora, minores minora capiunt? Ergo est aliqua pars tu maior, aliqua minor? An ubique totus es et res nulla te totum capit?”, *Conf.* I, 2-3.

²⁴ As an old man, Augustine clarifies his use of the word “soul” in the *Retractions*: “Hic animam pro universa creatura incorporali posui non loquens

mentem nostram qua illum intelligimus Patrem...") A relationship between God and man is the basis of the Augustinian problematic which resolves itself in the experience of encounter²⁵. God is the stimulus for the search for truth, for the philosophical search. "Tu excitas, ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te."²⁶ In the *Dialogues of Cassiciacum*, Augustine affirms this problematic which will keep him occupied all his life. "Deum et animam scire cupio."²⁷ Knowledge of God is beyond the senses. That is why, early on Augustine mistrusts the senses, a position similar to Descartes's methodical point of departure.²⁸

The epistemological nature of the search for God, which is religion, does not seek to convert God into a mere object of knowledge. Religion is not just merely knowledge of God. In the *Soliloquies*, Augustine makes this clarification: "Quia Deum ne sic quidem novi quodomodo Alpyium, et tamen Alpyium non satis novi."²⁹

Indeed, one has to search for God. The search is the ascesis, the exercise of religion given that "sed nemo...potest pervinere ad Deum, nisi Deum quaesierit."³⁰ Religion, as an epistemological path, as a philosophical search for knowledge, culminates in adoration, in

more Scripturarum, quae animam quando non translato verbo utuntur, nescio utrum velint intellegi nisi (58) eam qua vivunt animalia mortalia (cf. Io 12, 25) in quibus et homines sunt, quamdiu mortales sunt. Paulo post (37) autem eundem sensum melius sum breviusque complexus, ubi dixi (10, 19): *Non ergo creaturae potius quam Creatori serviamus, nec evanescamus in cogitationibus nostris* (cf. Rom 1, 25.21), *et perfecta religio est*. Creaturam quippe uno nomine utramque, id est spiritualem corporalemque significavi. Restat quod ibi dixi: *aut phantasmata sua*, propter quod hic dixi: *nec evanescamus in cogitationibus nostris*." *Retractationes* I, 13, 2. It is a term referring to man as a creature of God.

²⁵ Cf. the classical work on philosophy and phenomenology of religions of J.M. Velasco, *El encuentro con Dios*. Rev. ed. (Madrid, 1995). This author works within the spectrum of personalist philosophy.

²⁶ St. Augustine, Conf. I, 1, 1.

²⁷ St. Augustine, *Soliloquia*, II, 7.

²⁸ St. Augustine, *Soliloquia*, III, 8.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ St. Augustine, *De Beata Vita*, III, 19.

the religious act. "Quare ipsam quoque Veritatem nulla ex parte dissimilem in ipso, et cum ipso veneremur, quae forma est omnium, quae ab uno facta sunt et ad unum nituntur. Unde apparet spiritualibus animis, per hanc forma esse facta omnia, quae sola implet quod appetunt omnia."³¹ In another instance, our author writes: "Quaerentes enim inveniunt eum et inveniunt laudabunt eum. Quaeram te, Domine, invocans te et invocem te credens in te: praedicatus enim es nobis. Invocat te, Domine, fides mea, quam dedisti mihi, quam inspirasti mihi per humanitatem Filli tui, per ministerium praedicatoris tui."³² This is because of the fact that this encounter with the truth is due to the generosity of divine authority. God is the one who makes possible this encounter with Himself as Augustine observes in *De utilitate credendi*: "Sapepe rursus intuens quantam poteram, mentem humanam tam vivacem, tam sagacem, tam perspicacem, non putabam latere veritatem, nisi quod in ea quarendi modus lateret, eundemque ipsum modum ab aliqua divina auctoritate esse sumendum."³³ Or shall we say, divine generosity? That is why Augustine exhorts, placing the following lines in the mouth of reason, in the *Soliloquies* of the retreat in Cassiciacum: "Constater Deo crede, eique te totum committe quantam pores. Noli esse velle quasi proprius, et in tua potestate, sed eius clementissimi et utilissimi Domini te servum esse profiteri. Ita enim te ad se sublevare non desinet, nihilque tibi evenire permittet nisi quod tibi prosit, etiam si nescias."³⁴

* * *

Though we will not enter into the details demanded by the historical and cultural contexts of the augustinian texts, it is worth noting that in *De vera religione* Augustine is combating the polytheism of the peoples. For Augustine, this pagan polytheism is false philosophy and religion. The true religion is the Catholic Faith.³⁵ *De vera religione* is essentially an apologetical work. It

³¹ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, LV, 113.

³² St. Augustine, *Conf.* I, 1,1.

³³ St. Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, VIII.

³⁴ St. Augustine, *Soliloquia*, I, 15, 30.

³⁵ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, VI-VII.

was addressed to Romanus, Augustine's friend and benefactor, who was attracted to the manichean sects. Augustine's life and his flirtations with many movements or sects: manicheans, academics, platonists... has been characterized by a search for truth, a search for the true religion. The true religion, the Catholic religion, is the way to truth and the happy life: "Illud tamen fidentissime dixerim, pace horum omnium, qui eorum libros pervicaciter diligunt, christianis temporibus quatenam religio potissimum tenenda sit, et quae ad veritatem ac beatitudinem via est, non esse dubitandum."³⁶

The happy life has been Augustine's concern from the earliest stages of his philosophy. In fact, in Cassiciacum, Augustine composed a dialogue entitled *De Beata Vita*. This work commences affirming that it is through philosophy that one enters the land of happiness. This land is firm, epistemologically firm – here Augustine is attacking the skeptics. True philosophy is the promise of epistemological security and hence, happiness. "Si ad philosophiae portum, de quo iam beatae vitae regionem solumque proceditur, vir humanissime atque magne..."³⁷ He who searches for God is also happy: "Habet igitur – inquam – qui Deum quaerit, Deum propitium, et omnis qui habet Deum propitium, beatus est. Beatus est ergo et ille qui quaerit. Qui autem quaerit, nondum habet quod vult. Erit igitur beatus qui quod vult non habet."³⁸

³⁶ St. Augustine, *Ibid.*, III, 3.

³⁷ St. Augustine, *De Beata Vita*, I, 1.

³⁸ St. Augustine, *Ibid.*, III, 21. In this regard, it is worth taking into consideration the following observations of philosopher H. Arendt: "He [Augustine] became the first Christian philosopher because throughout his life he held fast to philosophy. His treatise *On the Trinity*, a defense of the crucial dogma of the Christian Church, is at the same time the most profound and the most articulated development of his own very original philosophical position. But the starting-point remained the Roman and Stoic quest for happiness... In his youth he had turned to philosophy out of inner wretchedness and as a man he turned to religion because philosophy had failed him. This pragmatic attitude... is typically Roman; it had a more lasting influence on the formation of Augustine's thought than did Plotinus and the Neoplatonists, to whom he owed whatever he knew of Greek philosophy. Not that the general human wish to be happy had escaped

Happiness is possession of the truth, the possession of God. Happiness is right living. "Mihi – iniquit – videtur Deum nemo non habere, se deum qui bene vivit, habet propitium, qui male, infestum."³⁹ Within a social and ecclesial context, one must not accept the so-called "uniformed public opinion" (Girard), which led the people (in Plato's Athens upto Augustine's time) to polytheistic heresies or in their concreteness or superstitions. Superstitions are not just mere falsehoods. They are unguided acts which do not lead to God, but to the effects of God such as the forces of nature. To worship the forces of nature is to be uninformed, unguided, uneducated. This is a sign of being narrow. There is no integrity. There is no justice – that is, justice to the true God. "Quae cum ita sint, neque in confusione paganorum, neque in purgamentis haereticorum, neque in languore schismaticorum, neque in caecitate iudaeorum quaerenda est religio, sed apud eos solos qui christiani catholici, vel orthodoxi nominantur, id est, integritatis custodes, et recta sectantes."⁴⁰

As an alternative to this and in the light of this, Augustine proposes authority, the authority of the true church, undoubtedly as guarantee of integrity and justice: "Nam vera religio, nisi credantur ea quae quisque postea, si se bene gesserit dignus que fuerit, assequatur atque percipiat, et omnino sine quodam gravi auctoritas

the attention of the Greeks... but this desire was not what made them do philosophy. Only the Romans were convinced that «there is no reason for man to philosophize unless in order to be happy.», *The Life of the Mind*. (San Diego-New York-London, 1978), pp. 84-85.

³⁹ St. Augustine, Ibid. "Sed et ipse adspectus, quamvis iam sanos oculos convertere in lucem non potest, nisi tria illa permaneant, fides, qua credat ita se rem habere, ad quam convertendus adspectus est, ut visa facita beatum: spes, qua, cum bene adspexerit, se visurum esse praesumat: charitas, qua videre perfruique desideret. Iam adspectum sequitur ipsa visio Dei, qui est finis adspectus, non quod iam non sit, sed quod nihil amplius habeat quo se intendat: et haec est vere perfecta virtus, ratio perveniens ad finem suum, quam beata vita consequitur. Ipsa autem visio intellectus est ille qui in anima est, qui conficitur ex intelligente et eo quod intelligitur: ut in oculis videre quod dicitur, ex ipso sensu constant arque sensibili, quorum detracto quolibet, videri nihil potest." *Soliloquia*, VI, 13.

⁴⁰ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, V, 9.

imperio iniri recte nullo pacto potest.”⁴¹ Religions apologetes have authority as their epistemological basis and God is the basis, the *grund*, the cause of this authority. Descartes did not develop the notion of authority, but like Augustine, posited God as the epistemological basis. God is wisdom in itself. The very object and basis of philosophizing, the love of wisdom. “Ego autem solam propter se amo sapientiam, cetera vero vel adesse mihi volo, vel deesse timeo propter ipsam, vitam, quietem, amicos.”⁴²

2. To Relink Man with the True God: Religare and Theologia.

In the tenth book of the *Confessions*, the author, amidst the great epistemological experience of having God as the *grund* of his very being and the search of his existence, clarifies what it means to know, and to love God. His words are testimonies of an intense experience: “Quid autem amo, cum te amo? Non speciem corporis nec decus temporis, non candorem lucis ecce istis amicis oculis,

⁴¹ St. Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, IX, 21. Previously in chapter VIII, Augustine spoke of the mode or method of finding the truth and “culminates” this epistemological search in the notion of authority in chapter IX. “So Augustine now has an authority, the Scriptures; and ‘knowledge’ of the most important events of the Christian past derives from that authority, which is itself guaranteed by the Catholic Church (the ‘body’ of Christ) which has ratified and handed on its canon... But the kind of information which authorities provide may not always be knowledge; perhaps that is why the subject of authority only arises at the end of *Against the Sceptics* where, against the Sceptics, Augustine simply wants to show that truth can be obtained, and not to linger long over the ways of obtaining it. Yet he also wants to establish that if there is a wise man, he will know wisdom. Christ is the wise man he has discovered.” J.M. Rist, *Augustine. Ancient Thought Baptized*. (Cambridge, 1994), p. 58. Rist errs in stating that the topic of authority only came up in *Against the Sceptics*. In the long run, it is truth, the goal that matters for Augustine. “O veritas, veritas, quam intime etiam tum medullae animi mei suspirabant tibi, cum te illi sonarent mihi frequenter et multipliciter voce sola et libris multis et ingentibus!”, *Confes.* III, 6, 10. In chapter XI of *De Vera Religione* Augustine repeats this distinction between those who have found the truth (or certitude) and those in search of it within the context of religion: “Duae enim personae in religione sunt laudabiles: una eorum qui iam invenerunt, quos etiam beatissimos iudicare necesse est; alia eorum qui studiosissime et rectissime inquirunt. Primi ergo sunt iam in ipsa possessione, alteri in via, qua tamen certissime pervenitur.” *De Vera Religione*, XI, 25.

⁴² St. Augustine, *Soliloquia*, XIII, 22.

non dulces melodias cantilenarum omnimodarum, non florum et unguentorum et aromatum suavilentiam, non manna et mella, non membra acceptabilia carnis amplexibus: non haec amo, cum amo Deum meum. Et tamen amo quandam lucem et quandam vocem et quandam odorem et quandam cibum et queandam amplexum, cum amo Deum meum, lucem, vocem, odorem, cibum, amplexum interioris hominis mei, ubi fulget animae meae, quod non capit locus, et ubi sonat, quod non rapit tempus, et ubi olet quod non spargit flatus, et ubi sapit, quod non minuit edacitas, et ubi haeret, quod non divellit satietas. Hoc est quod amo, cum Deum meum amo.”⁴³ Here Augustine presents two levels of experience: a) the *empirical* level which Augustine dissociates with God, given that God, the truth is beyond the reach and the impressions of the senses; for Augustine this level of experience is nothing but superficial; and b) the *profound* level or the level of interiority wherein all of creation testifies to God, but this testimony is internally or profoundly assimilated thus, all the empirical sensations do not have any place nor time; rather there is an eternal value beyond all empirical, temporal and spatial limitations.

This is God for Augustine. This is the “real” truth for him, which the false religions and philosophies cannot guarantee – in effect, Augustine is affirming that the polytheistic philosophies and religions cannot go beyond what is empirical or worldly. To go beyond the empirical and worldly, is to go beyond what the senses could perceive: “Sunt qui putant christianam religionem propterea ridendam potius quam tenendam, quia in ea, non res quae videatur ostenditur, sed fides rerum quae non videntur, hominibus imperatur. Nos ergo ad hos refellendos, qui prudenter sibi videntur nolle credere quod videre non possunt, etsi non valemus humanis aspectibus monstrare divina quae credimus, tamen humanis mentibus etiam illa quae non videntur credenda esse monstramus.”⁴⁴ The pagans, given their propensity for idols, tend towards limited horizons. They cannot go beyond what is empirical or superficial.

⁴³ St. Augustine, *Confes.* X, 6, 8.

⁴⁴ St. Augustine, *De Fide Rerum Quae Non Videntur*, I, 1.

The converted Augustine will always associate them with his past, with his philosophical⁴⁵ and religious past: the sum total of the errors of his restless youth. His youth will always be for Augustine the sum total of his experiences of searching along the byways of sheer experiential superficiality. Maturity for him meant the acceptance of the Catholic Faith and its truth system with its experiential implications. His conversion was indeed a moment of truth wherein he found the truth. Philosophy was the necessary path for this search for the truth. Without philosophy, nobody could attain the possession of the truth. "...nam ipsum uerum non uidebis, nisi in philosophiam totus intraueris."⁴⁶

Its experiential implications are nothing else but the truth, the liberating truth which has freed Augustine from the narrow and shallow systems of the pagan religions and philosophies. The truth can only be universal or catholic, liberating in Christ. This truth can provide him with a broad horizon to interpret history and human experience starting with his own in dialogue with those of his contemporaries and of the church of his times.

The broad horizon is only the effect of this experience of the truth. The genuine criteria is the profoundness of this truth. It must reach the very marrows of one's soul, of one's being. Truth must be experiential. For Augustine, this experientiality must be profound. It must touch the very core, the very fundamental questions of his existence giving it meaning, transforming it into life, a life that is open to the mystery such that the very same mystery, taken in personal and personalistic terms, could penetrate through the veins of his very self and its thirst for the truth.

This truth can only be enjoyed. To enjoy, to be happy is the experiential criteria of truth. The happy life is to enjoy the truth: "Hanc vitam beatam omnes volunt, gaudium de veritate omnes

⁴⁵ J. Ortega y Gasset contended that the philosophical past is the sum total of errors which have to be overcome by constant philosophizing. Cfr. *Obras Completas* IX, 349-366. See my article: "The Philosophical Past Revisited: From and Beyond Ortega" *Unitas* 70 (1997), pp. 61-75. Also: A. MacIntyre, "The Relationship of Philosophy to its Past" Several Authors, *Philosophy in History*. (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 31-48.

⁴⁶ St. Augustine, *Contra Academicos*, II, 3, 8.

volunt. Multos expertus sum, qui vellent fallere, qui autem falli, neminem. Ubi ergo noverunt hanc vitam beatam, nisi ubi noverunt etiam veritatem? Amant enim et ipsam, quia falli nolunt, et cum amant beatam vitam, quod non est aliud quam de veritate gaudium, utique amant etiam veritatem, nec amarent nisi esset aliqua notitia eius in memoria eorum. Cur ergo non de illa gaudent? Cur non beati sunt? Quia fortius occupantur in aliis, quae potius eos faciunt miseros quam illud beatos, quod tenuiter meminerunt. Adhuc enim modicum lumen est in hominibus; ambulent, ambulent, ne tenebrae comprehendant.”⁴⁷

Indeed, what matters truly for Augustine is the profound experience of the truth which discloses the mystery without totally revealing it. God then is experienced as a mystery, a mystery that presents its shades experientially through the attributes which are not mere qualities nor traits, but which are identifiable with God. The attributes are God’s experiential self-disclosure to man as truth. Spinoza writes that “an attribute is that which the intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence... and, therefore, must be conceived through itself.”⁴⁸ God, in profound experience, is “Deus meus”, my God. In chapter IV of the first book of the *Confessions*, we read: “Quid est ergo Deus meus? quid, ergo, nisi Dominus Deus? Quis enim Dominus praeter Dominum. Aut quis Deus praeter Deum nostrum? Summe, optime, potentissime, omnipotentissime, misericordissime et iustissime, secretissime et praesentissime, pulcherrime et fortissime, stabilis et incomprehensibilis, immutabilis mutans omnia; nunquam novus, nunquam vetus, innovans omnia; in vetustatem perducens superbos et nesciunt; semper agens, semper quietus; colligens et non egens, portans et implens et protegens, creans et nutriendus et perficiens; quaerens, cum nihil desit tibi. Amas nec aestuas, zelas et securus es, paenitet te et non doles, irasceris et tranquillus es, opera mutas nec mutas consilium; recipis quod invenis et nunquam amisisti; nunquam inops et gaudes lucris, nunquam avarus et usuras exiges. Supererogatur tibi, ut debeas: et quis habet quicquam non tuum, reddens debita nulli debens, donans

⁴⁷ St. Augustine, *Conf.* X, 23, 33.

⁴⁸ B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, I, prop. X, proof. R.H.M. Elves (trans.) *On the Improvement of the Understanding, The Ethics, Correspondence*. (New York, 1955), pp. 15-16.

debita nihil perdens? Et quid diximus, Deus meus, vita mea, dulcedo mea sancta, aut quid dicit aliquis, cum de te dicit? Et vae tacentibus de te, quoniam loquaces muti sunt.”⁴⁹

It is only within this profound experience of the truth, in the Catholic Faith, as discovered by means of the true religion, the true philosophy can one truly do theology or «God talk». Augustine was all too aware of this. In *De Civitate Dei*, citing Marcus Terentius Varro (whom he may have not read directly), Augustine groups the pagan theological discourse into three: *mythicon*, *physicon*, *civile*.⁵⁰ We will not enter into the details given that excellent commentaries abound on this matter.

Just as there are many religions and philosophies, there can be many theologies too. Augustine is not interested in the later medieval distinction between faith and reason, between theology and philosophy. Augustine was interested in the *verax veri Dei cultus*. Religion cannot be dissociated from philosophy: “Sic enim creditur et docetur, quod est humanae salutis caput, non aliam esse philosophiam, id est sapientiae studium, et aliam religionem, cum ii quorum doctrinam non approbamus, nec sacramenta nobiscum communicant.”⁵¹ He even severely criticizes those who try to divorce the religious question from the philosophical question: “Repudiatis igitur omnibus qui neque in sacris philosophantur, neque in philosophia consecrantur; et iis qui vel prava opinione, vel aliqua simul-tare superbientes, a regula et communione Ecclesiae catholicae deviarunt; et iis qui sanctarum Scripturarum lumen, et spiritualis populi gratiam, quod Novum Testamentum vocatur, habere noluerunt, quos quanta potui brevitate perstrinxi: tenenda est nobis christian religio, et eius Ecclesiae communicatio quae catholica est, et catholica nominatur, non solum a suis, verum etiam ab omnibus inimicis. Velint nolint enim ipsi quoque haeretici, et schismatum alumni, quando non cum suis, sed cum extraneis loquuntur, catholicam nihil aliud quam Catholicam vocant. Non enim possunt intelligi, nisi hoc eam nomine discernant, quo ab universo orbe nuncupatur.”⁵²

⁴⁹ St. Augustine, *Conf.* I, 4, 4.

⁵⁰ St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, VI, 5, 1.

⁵¹ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, V, 8.

⁵² St. Augustine, *Ibid.*, VII, 12.

What St. Augustine opposed was the true religion/philosophy with the false religions/philosophies, in plural. There can only be one truth. And he has found it and experienced it. His conversion in 387 was an epistemological twist in his experience. He had found the truth, the happy life and he wanted others to discover the very same path of wisdom and happiness.

The path was also open for others, for his friends and companions, for Romanianus to whom the *De Vera Religione* was addressed. This is the object of the discourse about God or God-Talk (theology) from the angle of the true religion/philosophy.

A God-Talk from this angle is liberating given that it is broad, universal. It is true given that it is profound. It is truly religious, in the way Augustine understood religion. Again let us quote that famous text from *De Vera Religione*: "Religet ergo nos religio uni omnipotenti Deo: quia inter mentem nostram qua illus intelligimus Patrem, et Veritatem, id est lucem interiorem per quam illum intelligimus, nulla interposita creatura est."⁵³

Centuries later, St. Thomas Aquinas, commenting on Augustine's preferred etymology, affirms that religion implies something that tends or is ordained towards God: "Sive autem religio dicatur a frequenti lectione, sive ex iterata electione eius quod negligenter amissum est, sive a religatione, religio proprie importat ordinem ad Deum. ipse enim est cui principaliter alligari debemus, tanquam indeficienti principio; ad quem etiam nostra electio assidue dirigi

⁵³ Cfr. also: *De Vera Religione* 55, 113; *De Civitate Dei*, X, 3, 2; *De Quantitate Animae* 36, 80; *Retractationes* I, 13, 9. Noteworthy indeed is how X. Zubiri utilizes the "religare" etymology in his own philosophy. Traces of augustinianism? Maybe so, better said most likely but we have to admit Zubiri's new focus and originality on the issue given the strong ontological base and ambiance, with its strong theological flavor, of his reflections. Here is an excerpt of a text of Zubiri: "Dios me está presente, me está fundamentando en mi religación, que es un momento de mi porpio Yo; me está religando precisamente en aquel momento en que el poder de lo real es más pudiente, por así decirlo... Como la religación es un momento formalmente constitutivo de mi persona, resulta que Dios y la persona están determinado constitutivo de mi persona, resulta que Dios y la persona están determinado en y por esa experiencia de Dios, por lo menos en tanto que fudnamentante. El hombre, dicho en términos de tesis, es experiencia de Dios. He aquí la radical unidad de Dios y de la persona humana", *El hombre y Dios*. (Madrid, 1986), pp. 309-310.

debet, sicut in ultimum finem, quem etiam negligenter peccando amittimus, et credendo et fidem protestando recuperare debemus.”⁵⁴

We must link ourselves to God, the cause of all things and our end. Here Aquinas projects the *exitus-reditus* scheme of the *Summa* which he inherited from Plotinus and the neoplatonists. Aquinas insists on consistency, constant conversion and overcoming of sin in order to give testimony to our faith.

God-Talk for Augustine must always start with and end with talking to God. God-Talk, as part of the philosophical and religious venture, has its perfection in talking to God, in prayer. Because the truth, who is God, is a person, is a relational being who alone gives virtue and science: “Iam te solum amo, te solum sequor, te solum quaero, tibi soli servire paratus sum, quia tu solus iuste dominaris, tui iuris esse cupio. Ibue, quaeso, atque impera quidquid vis; sed sana et aperi aures meas, quibus voces tuas audiam. Sana et aperi oculos meos, quibus nutus tuos videam. Expelle a me insaniam, ut recognoscam te. Dic mihi qua adtendam, ut adspiciam te, et omnia me spero quae iusseris esse gacturum. Recipe, oro, fugitivum tuum, Domine clementissime Pater, iam iam satis poenas dederim; satis inimicis tuis, quos sub pedibus habes, servierim; satis fuerim fallaciarum ludibrium. Accipe me ab istis fugientem falumum tuum, quia et isti me, quando a te fugiebam, acceperunt alienum. Ad te mihi redeundum esse sentio. Pateat mihi pulsanti ianua tua. Quomodo ad te perveniatur doce me. Nihil aliud habeo quam voluntatem. Nihi aliud scio nisi fluxa et caduca spernenda esse, certa et aeterna requirenda. Hoc facio, Pater, quia hoc solum novi; sed unde ad te perveniatur ignoro. Tu mihi suggere, tu ostende, tu viaticum praebe. Si fide te inveniunt, qui ad te refugiunt, fidem da: si virtute, virtutem; si sceintia, scientiam. Auge in me fidem, auge spem, auge caritatem. O admiranda et singularis bonitas tua!”⁵⁵

To link to God: this is the essence of the mystical vocation. Though Augustine does not use the term «mystic», effectively his notion of religion is mystical in nature. It is not a mysticism of mystical states although, we cannot help recall the famous extasis

⁵⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 81, a.1, respondeo.

⁵⁵ St. Augustine, *Soliloquia*, I, 1, 6.

at Ostia together with his mother Monica. His mysticism seeks a «direct experience of ultimate reality»⁵⁶, wherein there is consciousness of this direct experience and hence, the mystic is drawn into it, raised up and transformed by it. There is a beautiful text wherein Augustine expresses this “direct experience”: “Atque ita gradatim a corporibus ad sentientem per corpus animam atque inde ad eius interiorem vim, cui sensus corporis exteriora nuntiaret, et quousque possunt bestiae, atque inde rursus ad ratiocinantem potentiam, ad quam refertur iudicandum, quod sumitur a sensibus corpori; quae se quoque in me comperiens mutabilem erexit se ad intellegentiam suam et abduxit cogitationem a consuetudine, subtrahens se contradicentiubs turbis phantasmatum, et inveniret, quo lumine aspergeretur, cum sine ulla dubitatione clamaret incommutabile praeferendum esse mutabili, unde nosset ipsum incommutabile – quod nisi aliquo modo nosset, nullo modo illud mutabili certa praeponeret – et pervenit ad id, quod est in ictu trepidantis aspectus. Tunc vero «invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta» conspexi, sed aciem figere non evalui et repercussa infirmitate redditus solitis non mecum ferebam nisi amantem memoriam et quasi olefacta desiderantem, quae comedere nondum possem.”⁵⁷

This direct experience is not only the end, but the aim. Religion links man with God. This relinking “religatio” is precisely the way of life that religion proposes. It is a way of life that will relink man with God – for through the primordial fault there has been a separation.

For Augustine, the true God is that universal ultimate reality. It is singular and cannot be plural. Plurality signifies falsehood not options or ways towards the truth. There cannot be truth in plurality. For Augustine, at that stage in his life and after having experimented various ways of life, there can be no other alternative. Hence, options are definitely out of the question.

Thus, the true religion/philosophy, because it relinks man with God, invalidates the falsehood of this plurality in such a way

⁵⁶ D.L. Carmody & J. T. Carmody, *Mysticism. Holiness East and West*. (New York-Oxford, 1996), pp. 8ss.

⁵⁷ St. Augustine, *Conf.* VII, 17, 23.

that there is true freedom: freedom from error, from falsehood. This freedom has a purifying effect wherein the soul becomes pure from all superstition and error: "... cum ipsis adiuvantibus ad unum Deum tendentes, et ei uni religantes animas nostras, unde religio dicta creditur, omni superstitione careamus?"⁵⁸

This purifying mystical experience has a strong noetic basis and character, given that it is a process of elimination of errors. Likewise, it is ethical for it necessarily implies the elimination of false ways of life and thus, the truly happy life can be attained. This happy life, as noted earlier, is a life of truth, an experience of truth. The process of purification presupposes not only acceptance of the way of life, but a profound assimilation in experience of the consequences and implications of said acceptance. Truly, there is commitment. Not just blind commitment, but assimilated commitment done in freedom given the fact that said commitment is liberating or freedom-giving.

The only result of this liberating experience is a true, intense, direct contact with the truth in itself, the one true God that the true religion has been searching for as the true happiness, and that the true philosophy has discovered as the one and lasting truth for all times which will definitely outlive the cults to the pagan gods. Superstition is nothing else but falsehood which the true philosophy/religion must reject. Rejection and acceptance are the two dialectical poles in this lifestyle of the truth. Philosophy, given it is religion, is a lifestyle and as such has to be understood as a lifestyle that proceeds from a "conceptual system that provides an interpretation of the world and the place of human beings in it, bases an account of how life should be lived given that interpretation, and expresses this interpretation and lifestyle in a set of rituals, institutions and practices."⁵⁹

Augustine demands the aforementioned purification of thought, given the exigencies of the lifestyle and its hermeneutical (interpretative) nature, in order to have a purified and liberated

⁵⁸ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, LXV, 111.

⁵⁹ K. E. Yandell, *Philosophy of Religion. A Contemporary Introduction*. (London-New York, 1999), p. 16.

way of life. These are the prerequisites of the true religion and philosophy. Only a profound person, a person capable of a profound experience is capable of the true religion and philosophy. Superstition is false cult which the true religion repudiates. True religion seeks the truth and only the truth.⁶⁰

The true religion has God for its end: God who is the object of all relinking. The true philosophy only has God for its basis and finality: God who is the true wisdom. After the search has been concluded, the only valid response to this true God by the true religion and philosophy is none other than adoration: "Ecce unum Deum colo, unum omnium Principium, et Sapientiam qua sapiens est quaecumque anima sapiens est, et ipsum Munus quo beata sunt quaecumque beata sunt. Quisquis angelorum diligit hunc Deum, certus sum quod etiam me diligit. Quisquis in illo manet, et potest humanas preces sentire, in illo me exaudit. Quisquis ipsum habet bonum suum, in ipso me adiuvat, nec mihi eius participationem potest invidere. Dicant ergo mihi adoratores, aut aditatores partium mundi, quem non optimum sibi conciliet, qui hoc unum colit, quod omnis optimus diligit, et cuius cognitione gaudet, et ad quod principium recurrando fit optimus. Quisquis vero angelus excessus suos diligit, et veritati esse subditus non vult, et privato suo laetari cupiens a communi omnium bono et vera beatitudine lapsus est, cui omnes mali subiugandi et premendi, nullus autem bonus nisi exercendus in potestatem datur; nullo dubitante non est colendus; cuius laetitia est nostra miseria et cuius damnum est nostra reversio."⁶¹

To be able to adore God, the only principle of all things presupposes a deep, profound and authentic experience of Him. This is mysticism. In Augustine, this mysticism is a guarantee for truth since this very same God is encountered as the true Wisdom which illuminates all souls or men.

⁶⁰ It would be worth the while to quote M. de Unamuno in this regard: "Y bien, se me dirá: «¿Cuál es tu religión?» Y yo responderé: «Mi religión es buscar la verdad en la vida y la vida en la verdad, aun a sabiendas de que no he de encontrarla mientras viva; mi religión es luchar incesante e incansablemente con el misterio; mi religión es luchar con Dios desde el romper del alba hasta el caer de la noche, como dicen que con El luchó Jacob.»", "Mi religión", *Obras*. (Madrid, 1986), p. 256.

⁶¹ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, LXV, 112.

Bereft of this illumination, all rational efforts are useless and tend towards error and superstition. This illumination is likewise guarantee towards permanence, towards universality and therefore, it outlives the temporality and superficiality of the false cults and their superstitions. It is divine aid to man's rational faculties. "Et inde admonitus redire ad memet ipsum, intravi in intima mea duce te, et potui, quoniam «factus es adiutor meus». Intravi et vidi qualicumque oculo animae meae supra eundem oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam, lucem incommutabilem, non hanc vulgarem et conspicuam, omni carni, nec quasi ex eodem genere grandior erat, tamquam si ista multo multoque clarius claresceret totumque occuparet magnitudine. Non hoc illa erat, sed aliud, aliud valde ab istis omnibus, nec ita erat supra mentem meam, sicut oleum super aquam nec sicut caelum super terram, sed perior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea."⁶² This is the essence of the true religion identified by Augustine with the true philosophy.

The key here is love, love of God which is love of the true wisdom and hence, genuine philosophy. Religion fulfills its function as to truth, as to the experience of wisdom in as much as it plays a mystical role. Its mystical role can only be understood by the term "love", a word so abundant in the augustinian texts and which has served as the key for knowing, for experiencing God profoundly. To adore God in the true religion means possession of wisdom and of happiness. These are the guarantees of authenticity and profundity, which likewise brings about true freedom especially in the interior or profound dimension of man which the external circumstances of time and history can never take away from him.

Once again: "Religet ergo nos religio uni omnipotenti Deo; quia inter mentem nostram qua illum intelligimus Patrem, et Veritatem, id est lucem interiorem per quam illum intelligimus, nulla interposita creatura est. Quare ipsam quoque Veritatem nulla ex parte dissimilem in ipso, et cum ipso veneremur, quae forma est omnium, quae ab uno facta sunt et ad unum nituntur." This expresses that indissoluble augustinian union: that of the Father (religion) and the Truth (philosophy). This union is identification, an identification that is affirmed by a profound experience (mysticism) after a long

⁶² St. Augustine, *Conf.* VII, 10, 16.

and winding path of experience characterized by relentless, rather, restless searching moved by love (*caritas*) that makes all knowing possible. “Qui novit veritatem, novit eam, et qui novit eam, novit aeternitatem. Caritas novit eam. O aeterna veritas et vera caritas et cara aeternitas! Tu es, Deus meus, tibi suspiro die ac nocte. Et cum te primum cognovi, tu assumpsisti me, ut viderem, esse quod viderem, et nondum me esse, qui viderem. Et reverberasti infirmitatem aspectus mei radians in me vehementer, et contremui amorre et horrore: et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis, tamquam audirem vocem tuam de excelso: Cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. Nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me. Et cognovi, quoniam pro iniquitate erudisti hominem et tabescere fecisti sicut araneam animam meam, et dixi: Numquid nihil est veritas, quoniam neque per finita neque per infinita locorum spatia diffusa est? Et clamasti de longinquo: Immo vero ego sum qui sum. Et audiivi, sicut auditur in corde: et non erat prorsus unde dubitarem, faciliusque dubitarem vivere me quam non esse veritatem, quae per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspicitur.”⁶³

Religion/philosophy, for Augustine, has been a lifestyle characterized by restless searching. He has encountered what he has been searching for “in corde”, in the profound dimension of his being.

This profound dimension has made Augustine capable of clarifying the relinking dimension of religion as an act of freedom or choosing. In his old age, the philosopher from Hippo further stressed that *religio* is *eligio*: “Item alio loco; Ad unum Deum tendentes, inquam, et ei uni religantes animas nostras, unde *religio* dicta creditur, omni supersitione caremus. In his verbis meis ratio quae reddita est, unde sit dicta *religio*, plus mihi placuit, Nam non me fugit aliam nominis huius originem expuisse latini sermonis auctores, quod inde sit appellata *religio*, quod religitur, quod verbum compositum est a *legendo*, id est eligendo, ut ita latinum videatur *religo* sicut *eligo*...”⁶⁴

It is restless searching for the true God in order to relink with Him, in order to choose Him. Religion is an act of freedom and

⁶³ St. Augustine, *Ibid*.

⁶⁴ St. Augustine, *Retractationes*, I, 13, 9.

can only be exercised when the soul is free from errors, from superstitions and is aware of the choices and consequences of the option he makes. Augustine did not choose worldly wisdom, but wisdom that comes from on high to be found in the Catholic Faith.

The famous Memorial of Pascal offers a parallel experience worth reflecting for: "L'an de grâce 1654, Lundi 23 novembre, jour de St. Clément pape et martyr et autres au Martyrologe. Veille de St. Chrysogone martyr et autres. Depuis environ dix heures et demie du soir jusques environ minuit et demi. Feu. Dieu d'Abraham, Dieu d'Isaac, Dieu de Jacobo, non des philosophes et des savants. Certitude, certitude, sentiment, joie, paix. Dieu de Jésus-Christ Deum meum et deum vestrum. Ton Dieu sera mon Dieu. Oubli du monde et de tout homis Dieu. Il ne se trouve que par les voies enseignées dans l'Évangile. Grandeur de l'âme humaine. Père juste le monde ne t'a point connu, mais je t'ai connu. Joie, joie, joie, pleurs de joie. Je m'en suis séparé Dereliquerunt me fontem aquae vivae. Mon Dieu me quitterez-vous? Que je n'en sois pas séparé éternellement. Cette est la vie éternelle, qu'ils te connaissent seul vrai Dieu et celui que tu as envoyé J.C. Jésus Christ. Jésus Christ Je m'en suis séparé, je l'ai fui, renoncé, crucifié Que je n'en sois jamais séparé! Il ne se conserve que par les voies enseignées dans l'Évangile. Renonciation total et douce."⁶⁵

Pascal was clamoring for the true God: the God of the Fathers, the God of Jesuschrist and not the god or gods of the wisemen. Pascal was looking for wisdom in faith, in the true religion and not just mere speculation which effectively for him was uninformed opinion and hence, could lead to error and even perdition. Pascal was looking, like Augustine before him, for that way of relinking himself to the ultimate experience of direct contact with the true God.

3. Augustine's Testimony of the Mystical Path in Religion:

It is appropriate to commence this part of our article with the known appraisals of C. Butler of Augustine: "Augustine is for me the Prince of Mystics, uniting in himself, a matter I do not find in

⁶⁵ I followed the transcription based on the facsimile of: A. Bord, *La vie de Blaise Pascal*. (Paris, 2000), w.p.

any other, the two elements of mystical experience, ...the most penetrating intellectual vision into things divine, and a love of God that was a consuming passion.”⁶⁶ The mystical dimension of Augustine’s works is not a novelty and has been studied by experts.⁶⁷ We will not enter into the intricacies of this subject matter here.

What we hope to have achieved in this article are the following:

1. To highlight the epistemological or noetical nature of the philosophical and religious journey in Augustine.
2. To present the mystical dimension of religion in St. Augustine’s preferred etymology of religion (*religare*).
3. To rediscover Augustine’s works, particularly the *Confessions*, as a testimony of the mystical experience that which gives buttress to his other philosophical or theological works particularly *De Vera Religione*, his preferred text of “philosophy of religion”.

Augustine was a man in search for the truth and He found it in the God of the Christians. He spoke to this God of the Christians. His prayers are evidence of his intense experience of this God and hence, truly Augustine was a mystic. This God, wherein He found the truth drew Augustine’s restless being to Himself. Religion is this drawing of this God to Himself of man (Augustine). This drawing of God to Himself by means of religion necessarily implies a purification process wherein everything that is repugnant or with traces of errors and falsities is removed. In the following prayer with which Augustine concludes the first chapter of the *Soliloquies*, *religio* and *eligio* reveal their pristine dimension: that of being drawn to God. God is the one who has taken the initiative. Augustine asks God to convert Him into the true religion, into that profound experience of the true God which is freedom from error and is true love and knowledge of the true wisdom and possession of happiness in the reign of God: “*Pater sapientissime atque optime, et pro eo quod*

⁶⁶ C. Butler, *Western Mysticism*. (London, 1966), p. 20.

⁶⁷ For example: A. Trapè, “Agostino” Several Authors, *La mistica. Fenomenologia e riflessione teologica*. (Rome, 1984), pp.315-360. This study has a fine bibliographical list at the end; V. Grossi, “Agostino (santo)” Several Authors, *Dizionario di Mistica*. (Vatican City, 1998), pp. 58-65.

ad tempus admonueris deprecabor. Tantum oro excellentissimam clementiam tuam ut me penitus ad te convertas, nihilque mihi repugnare facias tendenti ad te: iubeasque me, dum hoc ipsum corpus ago atque porto, purum, magnanimum, iustum, prudentemque esse, perfectumque amatorem perceptoremque sapientiae tuae, et dignum habitatione, atque habitatorem beatissimi regni tui: Amen, amen."⁶⁸

In these dialogues, Augustine was desirous of entering into that mystical state of being purified and hence worthy of being united with God which is an experience characterized by love of wisdom (philosophia) and the happy life. This in effect, is being re-linked to God (religio). Augustine's prayer to God shows his election of the ways of the true of God (eligio).

The power to invoke God betrays the mystical closeness, the effect of the mystical function of religion (religare) which gives man knowledge of the most profound truths and of God's attributes: "Te invoco, Deus Veritas, in quo et a quo et per quem vera sunt quae vera sunt omnia. Deus, Sapientia, in quo et a quo et per quem sapiunt quae sapiunt omnia. Deus vera et summa Vita, in quo et a quo et per quem vivunt quae vere summeque vivunt omnia. Deus, Beatitude, in quo et a quo et per quem beata sunt quae beata sunt omnia. Deus, Bonum et Pulchrum, in quo et a quo et per quem bona et pulchra sunt quae bona et pulchra sunt omnia. Deus, intelligibilis Lux, in quo et a quo et per quem intelligibiliter lucent quae intelligibiliter lucent omnia. Deus, cuius regnum est totus mundus, quem sensus ignorat. Deus, de cuius regno lex etiam in ista regna describitur..."⁶⁹

Prayer is Augustine's best testimony, aside from the narrative character of his works especially the *Confessions*, that God is not just a mere reality for him. God is the reality for Him who is truly real for He is experienced. God is not just a mere reality, but He is truly real in profound experience, in the experience of truth. That is why Augustine, the philosopher and religious man, can say in an almost dialectical fashion that God is the most hidden and yet the most ever present, the most high or distant and yet the

⁶⁸ St. Augustine, *Soliloquia* I, 1, 6.

⁶⁹ St. Augustine, *Ibid.*, I, 1, 3.

nearest, the most outer and yet the most inner, more inward than me than my inward or most profound self and higher than that is supreme for me.⁷⁰

Augustine's long journey until he was converted into the true religion were characterized by mystical steps of erring and searching with a restless heart whose climax is that great reralization of what he had been missing all along upon being relinked, upon finding that truth which he had been looking for all along." *Late have I loved you...* Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi! Et ecce intus eras et ego foris, et ibi te quae-rebam et in ista formosa, quae fecisti, deformis irruebam. Mecum eras, et tecum non eram. Ea me tenebant longe a te, quae si in te non essent, non essent. Vocasti et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meam, coruscasti, splenduisti et fugasti caecitatem meam, fraglasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelio tibi, gustavi et esurio et sitio, tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam."⁷¹ This love for beauty is not just mere love for beauty (philocalia). When beauty is applied to God, the love becomes truly philosophical for only philosophy knows its origin, its cause: "...quid est enim philosophia? amor sapientiae. quid philocalia? amor pulchritudinis. Quare de Graecis. Quid ergo sapientia? Nonne ipsa uera est pulchritudo? Germanae igitur istae prorsus et oedem parente procreatae: sed illa uisco libidinis detracta caelo suo et inclusa cauea populari uiciniam tamen nominis tenuit ad commonendum aucupem, ne illam contemnat. Hanc igitur sine pinnis sordidatam et egentem uolitans liberer soror saepe agnoscit, sed raro liberat; non enim philocalia ista unde genus ducat, agnoscit nisi philosophia."⁷²

This mystical realization upon the completion of the mystical journey points out the presence of God in all creation. But in the beginning man is not aware of this presence. Man has to search within himself, to discover this intimate, loving and mystical presence. God Himself took the initiative in a silence unheard by

⁷⁰ St. Augustine, *Conf.* I, 4,4; VI, 3, 4; IX, 4, 10; III, 6, 11.

⁷¹ St. Augustine, *Ibid.*, X, 27, 38.

⁷² St. Augustine, *Contra Academicos*, II, 3, 7.

man's superficial preoccupations and interests. The realization may come late in life, but the encounter is definitive; there will be no more separation. One has to constantly listen within himself to be aware of this intimate presence in the very profound depths of our being. This is the function of religion: "Ubi ergo te inveni, ut discerem te? Neque enim iam eras in memoria mea, priusquam te discerem. ubi ergo te inveni, ut discerem te, nisi in te supra me? Et nusquam locus, et recedimus et accedimus, et nusquam locus. Veritas, ubique praesides omnibus consulentibus te simulque respondes omnibus etiam diversa consulentibus. Liquide tu respondes, sed non liquide omnes audiunt. Omnes unde volunt consulunt, sed non semper quod volunt audiunt. Optimus minister tuus est, qui non magis intuetur hoc a te audire quod ipse voluerit, sed potius hoc velle quod a te audierit."⁷³

In this mystical experience, there can be no room for doubt, for doubting God, the source of all truth: "Et cognovi, quoniam pro iniquitate erudisti hominem et tabescere fecisti sicut araneam animam meam, et dixi: Numquid nihil est veritas, quoniam neque per finita neque per infinita locorum spatia diffusa est? Et clamasti de longinquo: Immo vero ego sum qui sum. Et audivi, sicut auditur in corde: et non erat prorsus unde dubitarem, faciliusque dubitarem vivere me quam non esse veritatem, quae per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspicitur."⁷⁴ This is why Augustine in *De Vera Religione* insists on faith and reason, authority and rationality. These opposing or contradicting poles must coexist for they are the two ways or two-prong path towards the mystical union for which religion aims: "Quamobrem ipsa quoque animae medicina, quae divina Providentia et ineffabili beneficentia geritur, gradatim distincteque pulcherrima est. Distribuitur enim in auctoritatem atque rationem. Auctoritas fidem flagitat, et rationi praeparat hominem. Ratio ad intellectum cognitionemque perducit. Quanquam neque auctoritatem ratio penitus deserit, cum consideratur cui sit credendum: et certe summa est ipsius iam cognitae atque perspicuae veritatis auctoritas. Sed quia in temporalia devenimus, et eorum amore ab aeternis

⁷³ St. Augustine, *Conf.* I, 26, 37.

⁷⁴ St. Augustine, *Ibid.*, VII, 11, 17.

impedimur, quaedam temporalis medicina quae non scientes, sed credentes ad salutem vocat, non naturae et excellentiae, sed ipsius temporis ordine prior est.”⁷⁵

The mystical experience is characterized by love: love of God (who is Wisdom in Himself) and love of others. This is the effectivity of religion as a mystical way, of philosophy as the way or lifestyle of truth. It is only in love that God becomes certainly clear amidst the darkness caused by our superficiality, which in turn is caused by our selfishness or our refusal to love: “Qui enim non diligit fratrem, non est in dilectione: et qui non est in dilectione, non est in Deo, quia Deus dilectio est. Porro qui non est in Deo, non est in lumine; quia Deus lumen est, et tenebrae in eo non sunt ullae (1 Io 1,50. Qui ergo non est in lumine, quid mirum si non videt lumen, id est, non videt Deum, quia in tenebris est? Fratrem autem videt humano visu, quo videri Deus non potest. Sed si eum quem videt humano visu, spirituali caritate diligeret, videret Deum qui est ipsa caritas, visu interiore quo videri potest. Itaque qui fratrem quem videt non diligit, Deum, quem propterea non videt, quia Deus dilectio est, qua caret qui fratrem non diligit, quomodo potest diligere? Nec illa iam quaestio moveat, quantum fratri caritatis debeamus impendere, quantum Deo: incomparabiliter plus quam nobis Deo, fratri autem quantum nobis ipsis: nos autem ipsos tanto magis diligimus, quanto magis diligimus Deum. Ex una igitur eademque caritate Deum proximumque diligimus: sed Deum propter Deum, nos autem et proximum propter Deum.”⁷⁶

He who refuses to love does not only refuse wisdom. To refuse to love is to refuse the happy life! It is refusal to be happy! It is a blatant rejection of living, for to live is to search for the truth and only in the truth can man live happily.⁷⁷

* * *

Over and over again, in reading the philosopher from Tagaste, one must go back to his heart. Augustine opens his heart in a

⁷⁵ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, XXIV, 45.

⁷⁶ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII, 8, 12.

⁷⁷ St. Augustine, *Contra Academicos*, I, 2, 5.

special way in his *Confessions*. In this work, the experiential basis of all his teachings can be found. Experience lies at the root of Augustine's philosophy and theology and his search for truth or wisdom and happiness as a philosopher and man of religion who constantly speaks about God. Upon the rediscovery of Augustine's experiential base, then, truly we can call him not only a mystic, but also master. He is not only somebody who has had an intense experience of God, but someone who shares it with others. In other words, he is both *mystic* and *master*. His experiential writings have the aim of initiating others into the dynamics of the search for the true religion and philosophy. Truly, Augustine is a mystagogue.⁷⁸ This is the dimension of his that we are starting to discover within the context of his religious and philosophical search. Hopefully, this essay is just the start and would serve as an appetizer to the main course for the interested scholars among my readers!

Augustine's *De Vera Religione* concludes with a trinitarian confession. The *religare* of religion is a relink, an election of the Triune God of the Christians. This calls for baptism and a living commitment to the faith received. The Trinity is the most sublime of all mysteries of faith. Augustine's trinitarian confession and its ecclesiastical context qualify his discourse as truly theological and not just merely religious in nature. His testimony is truly theological for its link and context in the true faith of the Church whose beginning and summit is the Trinity. It is theological for it tends towards God who is One in Three Divine Persons. This is where Augustine wants to lead Romanianus and all men of goodwill. This is the mystery wherein Augustine the mystagogue, because he was a mystic first as well as religious man and philosopher, wants to initiate and lead his readers who have learned with him the dynamics of religion and its mystical function whose highest point is

⁷⁸ For general appraisals of mystagogy, see: M. Aguilar Schreiber, "Mistagogia. Comunicazione e vita spirituale" *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 28 (1977), pp. 3- 58; L. Borriello, "Note sulla mistagogia o dell'introduzione all'esperienza di Dio" *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 32 (1981), pp. 35-89; J. Castellano Cervera, "Mistagogia pastorale e spiritualità", Several Authors, *La spiritualità. Ispirazione, ricerca, formazione*. (Rome, 1986), pp. 20-42; M. Ofilada Mina, "Possible Relationship Between Mystagogy and Philosophy and its Bearing on Theology and Spirituality" *Philippiniana Sacra* 34 (1999), pp. 219-246.

the intimate and profound experience of the love of God in Three Persons: "unde apparet spiritualibus animis, per hanc formam esse facta omnia, quae sola implet quod appetunt omnia. Quae tamen omnia neque fierent a Patre per Filium, neque suis finibus salva essent, nisi Deus summe bonus esset; qui et nulli naturae, quae ab ipso bona esse posset, invidit; et in bono ipso alia quantum vellent, alia quantum possent, ut manerent dedit. Quare ipsum Donum Dei cum Patre et Filio aequae incommutabile colere et tenere nos convenit; unius substantiae Trinitatem, unum Deum a quo sumus, per quem sumus, in quo sumus: a quo discessimus, cui dissimiles facti sumus, a quo perire non permissi sumus: principium ad quod recurrimus, et formam quam sequimur, et gratiam qua reconciliamur: unum Deum quo auctore conditi sumus, et similitudinem eius, per quam ad unitatem formamur et pacem qua unitati adhaeremus: Deum qui dixit, Fiat; et Verbum per quod factum est omne quod substantiater et naturaliter factum est; et Donum benignitatis eius, quo placuit et conciliatum est auctori suo, ut non interiret quidquid ab eo per Verbum factum est: unum Deum quo creatore vivimus, per quem reformati sapienter vivimus, quem diligentes et quo fruentes beate vivimus: unum Deum ex quo omnia, per quem omnia, in quo omnia, ipsi gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen."⁷⁹ □

⁷⁹ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, 55, 113. Cfr. the following introductory studies on Augustine's trinitarian theology: S. Alvarez Turienzo, "S. Agustín. Imagen de la Trinidad en su concepción antropológica" *Estudios Trinitarios* 23 (1989), pp. 31-58; A. Turrado, "S. Agustín" Several Authors, *El Dios Cristiano. Diccionario teológico*. (Salamanca, 1992), pp. 15-25; H. Seidl, "Die Trinität Gottes in seiner Selbsterkenntnis und liebe nach Augustinus' «De Trinitate»", Several Authors, *Sein-Erkennen-Handeln. Interkulturelle, ontologische und ethische Perspektiven. Festschrift für Heinrich Beck zum 65. Geburtstag*. (Frankfurt, 1994), pp. 427-438; J.M. Rovira Belloso, "La fe se hace teología refleja (S. Agustín)" *Estudios Trinitarios* 39 (1995), pp. 419-441.