

## St. Augustine's *Caritas et Scientia*

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In his search for happiness, St. Augustine sought out the truth that could fully satisfy what his mind endlessly yearned for. It was in Jesus, through the reading of the Scriptures, that Augustine found the true knowledge (*Scientia*). He also discovered that living the perfect love of Jesus (*Caritas*) was his heart's and man's absolute happiness.

To guide the people of his generation to find the Truth, as revealed in the Scriptures and contained in the Catholic faith, Augustine produced numerous writings through scriptural exegeses, apologetic articles, books, lectures, treatises (tractates), sermons and letters. His writings have influenced as well the succeeding generations up to the present time.

### What is Knowledge (*Scientia*) for St. Augustine?

In the book *Confessiones* (*Confessions*) of St. Augustine, written from 397 to 401 AD, he described that true knowledge consists in the acquisition of or the ascent of the mind to the truth (*veritas*) that is both "*immutable and eternal.*" The Truth is no other than God, who alone is both immutable and eternal (*Confessiones*, 7.10.16-11.17; 7.17.23; 10.22.32-33; 10.24.35; Crouse, 1999: pp. 486-487).

It can be deduced from his explanation in his book *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*, written between 392 to 426) that knowledge (*Scientia*) is a state when a man learns the truth about God's immense love for man in Christ as revealed in the Scripture, and the truth about man's obligation and failure to reciprocate God's love (*Doctrina Christiana*, 2.7.10).

All creations, on the other hand, for Augustine are finite and changing as St. Paul regarded them: "*While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal*" (2 Cor 4:18; *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, 20.37; Letter 18.2). However, all are good in themselves since they are all created by God ("*Thou didst make all things good, nor is there any substance at all that was not made by Thee... individually they are good, and altogether very good, because our God made all things very good*"

*"itaque vidi et manifestatum est mihi quia omnia bona tu fecisti et prorsus nullae substantiae sunt quas tu non fecisti... quia singula bona sunt, et simul omnia valde bona, quoniam fecit deus noster omnia bona valde"* *Confessiones* 7.12.18) and they all exist in Him ("*they were all bounded in Thee... Thou holdest all things in Thine hand in truth*" "*in te cuncta finite... sed quia tu es omnitenens manu veritate*" *Confessiones* 7.15.21). Thus, all knowledge about creation are temporal truths ("*all things are true in so far as they have a being*" "*omnia vera sunt in quantum sunt*" *Confessiones*, 7.15.21; "*all thought which is thus varied is mutable, and nothing mutable is eternal*" "*omnis porro intentio quae ita variatur, mutabilis est*" *Confessiones*, 12.15.18).

True happiness is not temporal happiness but only what lasts forever which cannot be found in the knowledge of temporal things but only in God (*Confessiones* 5.4.7). To find the Truth is to find God: "*For where I found truth, there found I my God, who is the Truth itself*" ("*ubi enim inveni veritatem, ibi inveni deum meum, ipsam veritatem*". (*Confessiones*, 10.24.35). To rejoice in the Truth (God) is to live in happiness: (*Confessiones*, 5.3.7) "*And the happy life is this,—to rejoice unto Thee, in Thee, and for Thee; this it is, and there is no other*" ("*et ipsa est beata vita, gaudere ad te, de te, propter te: ipsa est et non est altera*") (*Confessiones*, 10.22.32); "*For this is joy in Thee, who art "the truth,"*" 863 O God, "*my light,*" 864 "*the health of my countenance, and my God*" ("*hoc est enim gaudium de te, qui veritas es, deus, inluminatio mea, salus faciei meae, deus meus*") (*Confessiones*, 10.22.33).

God the Truth is present in man's heart ("*Behold, there is He wherever truth is known.. He is within the very heart*" "*ecce ubi est, ubi sapit veritas: intimus cordi est, sed cor erravit ab eo.*" *Confessiones*, 7.10.16). Thus, to arrive at the knowledge of God, man has to "*return to the heart*" (*redite... ad cor*) and to look deeply inside himself with the eye of the soul ("*I saw with the eyes of my soul*" "*vidi qualicumque oculo animae meae*" *Confessiones*, 7.10.16). The human mind requires the aid of righteous faith (*De Trinitate*, 1.2.4), which nourishes and guides it to the truth. But man can only see this never-changing and never-ending Truth when God enlightens man's soul. ("*Thou liftedst me up, that I might see there was that which I might see... pouring forth upon me most strongly Thy beams of light*" "*tu adsumpsisti me ut viderem esse quod viderem, et nondum me esse qui viderem... radians in me vehementer*" *Confessiones*, 7.10.16).

Augustine acknowledges different branches of learning such as language, the art of communication (rhetoric), history, numbers and natural science (*Doctrina Christiana*, 2.1-37). The learned on these things are regarded as wise by Augustine if God is acknowledged, praised and loved as the ultimate source of his intelligence (*cognitio*). Otherwise, one may be learned but not wise at all. (*Doctrina Christiana*, 2.38.57).

To be wise (*Sapientia*), knowledge is required which is the fourth of the six steps to reach wisdom. Knowledge comes after the fear of God (*Dei timor*) as the first, and piety (*Pietas*) as second. A characteristic of this is humility that will lead the person to the fourth – “*strength and resolution (fortitudo) – in which he (man) hungers and thirsts after righteousness.*”

At the top of all this is Wisdom (*Sapientia*), which is a state of endless joy and tranquility of man brought about by having detached completely from temporal things, by purifying himself from “*base desires,*” exercising diligently the love of neighbor including his enemies, as described in the fifth step, called counsel of compassion (*Consilio misericordiae*) and finally in the sixth step, the purification of the heart (*iam ipsum oculum purgat*), by loving God more than anyone else and oneself (*Doctrina Christiana, 2.7.9-11; Confessiones, 7.17.23*).

Through love that is conformed to Jesus, the Eternal Truth, man becomes completely united to God. (“*It is through love, then, that we become conformed to God*” “*Fiet ergo per caritatem ut conformemur Deo*” *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, 13.22-14.24*).

### **What is Charity (*Caritas*) for St. Augustine?**

In his book *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae (On the Morals of Catholic Church)* in 388 AD, love for Augustine can be simply described as doing good in accordance to Christ (11.18 – 28.58). Augustine enumerated four kinds of things that man ought to love: “*first, that which is above us (God); second, ourselves; third, that which is on a level with us (our neighbors or fellow humans); fourth, that which is beneath us (our body)*” (*Doctrina Christiana, 1.23.22*).

He said loving ourselves is a common experience to everyone. Man should provide proper care for his body, to preserve its health and protect it from harm (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, 27.52*). However, he emphasized that it should be controlled by the soul so that man may not do anything that may harm the soul thereby becoming a slave of the body. Man should give more importance to the soul than the body since the immortality of the body depends on the immortality of the soul (*Doctrina Christiana, 23.23 & 28*).

When man loves his neighbor, he should do good to his neighbor both body and soul (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, 27.52-28.56*). One expression of love of neighbor is generosity, which consists of helping and not harming anyone (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, 26.49*). Compassion is another expression of loving the body of the neighbor by delivering them from evils and sufferings (“*those who seasonably and wisely supply all the things required for warding off these evils and distresses are called compassionate*” “*Quare illa omnia, quibus huiusmodi malis incommodisve resistitur, qui officiose atque humiliter praebent, misericordes vocantur*” from *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, 27.52-54*).

Loving the soul of the neighbor is done through discipline, “*What benefits the body is called medicine; what benefits the soul, discipline.... by which the health of mind is restored, without which bodily health avails nothing for security against misery (Ad corpus quod pertinet, medicina nominata est, ad animam autem disciplina... per quam ipsi animo sanitas instauratur, quae si absit, nihil ad depellendas miserias salus illa corporis valet.)*” Discipline, as the medicine of the mind (*quae animi medicina est*), consists of restraint and instruction so that persons may develop fear and love of God respectively. (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, 27.52, 28.56*)

However, one very important thing to note about loving one’s neighbor is to help him reach the highest good. “*For you do not love him as yourself, unless you try to draw him to that good which you are yourself pursuing (Non enim eum diligis tamquam teipsum, si non ad id bonum ad quod ipse tendis, adducis.)*” And the highest of good of one’s neighbor is “*that he may love God with a perfect affection (etiam ipse perfecto amore Deum diligit.)*” To achieve this, one should start by being benevolent which means not harboring evil thoughts and intentions against anyone. (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, 26.49*)

But above all, in his book *Enchiridion (Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love, 421 AD)* the love of God must be more than the love of man and of oneself. When man has perfected the love of God, his soul will rest in God since God is love (*Handbook on Faith, Hope and Love 31.117-32.121; De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, 15.25*).

Virtue is love of God in its perfection “*I hold virtue to be nothing else than perfect love of God*” “*nihil omnino esse virtutem affirmaverim nisi summum amorem Dei*”. It is divided into four forms of love: temperance, fortitude, justice and prudence. “*temperance (temperantia) is love giving itself entirely to that which is loved; fortitude (fortitudo) is love readily bearing all things for the sake of the loved object; justice (iustitia) is love serving only the loved object, and therefore ruling rightly; prudence (prudencia) is love distinguishing with sagacity between what hinders it and what helps it.*” (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, 15.25*)

With God as the object of love, he says “*temperance is love keeping itself entire and incorrupt for God; fortitude is love bearing everything readily for the sake of God; justice is love serving God only, and therefore ruling well all else, as subject to man; prudence is love making a right distinction between what helps it towards God and what might hinder it.*” (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, 15.25*)

On Temperance (*temperantia*). Covetousness is the root of all evils (1 Tim 6:10). Temperance consists of disliking intensely worldly things and earthly pleasures in order to render undivided love to God alone. These worldly things may be used, however, only “as life requires” but with care that men may not become slaves of such things. (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, 19.35-21.39)

On Fortitude (*fortitudo*). Fear arises from the ignorance of the soul on the power of God’s love and grace to overcome bodily sufferings and death. When a person entrusts himself to God’s love, his soul will be enlightened and will bear the loss of earthly things and desire even death. Augustine also describes this as patience (*patiens*) (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, 22.40-23.43)

On Justice (*iustitia*). Justice consists of serving God the Creator, as “*the highest good, the highest wisdom, the highest peace*” while other things as merely God’s creatures should be ruled over. (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, 24.44)

On Prudence (*prudentia*). Temperance, fortitude and justice are dependent on prudence since it means the ability to distinguish “*what is to be desired and what to be shunned.*” (*De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, 24.45)

### **Caritas et Scientia (Charity and Knowledge)**

He said, “*let knowledge therefore be used as a kind of scaffolding by which may be erected the building of charity (Sic itaque adhibeatur scientia tanquam machina quaedam, per quam structura caritatis assurgat quae maneat in aeternum, etiam cum scientia destruetur.)*” (Letter 55, to Januarius, 21.39) He continued saying, “*knowledge, if applied as a means to charity, is most useful (quae ad finem caritatis adhibita multum est utilis.)*” (Letter 55, to Januarius, 21.39)

He wrote this statement in the year 400 AD as a bishop of Hippo in response to the letter of a certain Januarius, who was seeking for the truth on various practices of the Catholic Church, such as on the frequency of the reception of the Holy Communion; the scheduling of the Holy Sacrifice on Holy Thursday; the reasons for not having a fixed specific date for the yearly celebration of the Holy Week; and other superstitious or pagan practices.

Using his keen reasoning and excellent communication skills, Augustine explained all these extensively and sufficiently in his two reply letters to Januarius, as he cited the Scriptures, the teachings and practices of the Apostles and the pronouncements of the Catholic Church authorities. Januarius highly regarded him for being very knowledgeable, but then Augustine humbly claimed that he was still ignorant of countless things, like the Scriptures, even if he was already a bishop and produced numerous writings on the Scripture.

As the last piece of advice to him for having an inquisitive mind, Augustine strongly stressed to use his knowledge in the loving service of God and humanity: “*let knowledge therefore be used as a kind of scaffolding by which may be erected the building of charity (Sic itaque adhibeatur scientia tanquam machina quaedam, per quam structura caritatis assurgat quae maneat in aeternum, etiam cum scientia destruetur.)*” (Letter 55, to Januarius, 21.39)

Likewise, Augustine warned Januarius that if the latter would not use his knowledge for charity, then his knowledge would be useless and may even be destructive to others and to himself: “*knowledge, if applied as a means to charity, is most useful; but apart from this high end, it has been proved not only superfluous, but even pernicious (quae ad finem caritatis adhibita multum est utilis; per se autem ipsa sine tali fine, non modo superflua, sed etiam perniciosa probata est.)*” (Letter 55, to Januarius, 21.39)

Augustine is obviously enlightened by God in the words of St. Paul: “*And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains and have not charity, I am nothing.*” (1 Cor. 13:2) Later between 406 and 430 AD, in his *Tractates* (treatise or essay) on the Gospel of John, Augustine wrote this similar statement: “*“knowledge puffeth up (inflates).” Then, ought we at once to hate knowledge? Far from it! And what means “Knowledge puffeth up (inflates)”? Knowledge alone, without charity... “but charity edifieth (builds up).” Therefore... add to knowledge charity, and knowledge will be profitable, not by itself, but through charity.*” (Augustine, *Tractates* 27 no. 5)

Thus, building knowledge (Scientia) to improve one’s love of God and fellow human beings (Caritas) is the goal of learning.

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