

**MYSTICAL LOVE IN *CONFESSIONS X*:  
An Inquiry on the Name of the Divine**

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**Abstract**

“God ” is, in the first place, a name. Before being a person or Being, the name “God” could be anything imaginable. “What’s in a name?”<sup>1</sup> “Who is the one that we love and how could we finally give account to it?” Such are the questions this paper will try to answer. This study will conduct a reading based largely on Augustine’s *Confessions X*, and will be dissected into two smaller parts. In the first part, I will propose the possibility of applying a mystical approach to address this issue. Then I will examine how the saint travels across his memory in search for God, as a demonstration of the mystical journey into love.

Keywords: Augustine, love, memory, mysticism, negative theology

**Introduction**

“What then do I love when I love my God?”  
(Augustine, *Confessions X.7.11*)<sup>2</sup>

Paraphrasing the saint,<sup>3</sup> John Calvin writes that, due to our present existence in this flesh, we can only love God insofar as our knowledge leads us (*Institutes II.7.5*).<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, he states,

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 2. As Romeo accounts afterward, a name serves as a divider, an identity marker that falls short to convey what it should.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 185. Except particularly noted, this paper will use Chadwick’s translation; henceforth, “*Conf.*” This question is also expressed in slightly different manner in X.6.8.

<sup>3</sup> “[W]hat is neither known nor believed cannot be loved” [Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter xxxvi.64* in *Augustine: Later Works*, ed. John Burnaby (London: SCM, 1955), 248].

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.354, my paraphrase. In his commentary on John’s first epistle, Calvin adds that, “to know God is immediately to love him. ... The knowledge of God leads us to fear him and to love him.” [*Commentaries on the*

“Knowledge undoubtedly goes before love.”<sup>5</sup> All these sayings are not affirming that one’s love for God proves that one knows him, because such would be fallacy of illicit conversion. On the contrary, they lead us to a vast pasture of questions on how could we get to know God, and then, to love him. It is on this ground that Augustine leaves extensive accounts on the enigmatic nature of memory, where the trace of past acquaintance and encounter with the divine is stored.

In memory, we recall the God whom we knew, and whom we might lately love. We need to lead an investigation into our own memory in order to conduct a search for the divine (*Conf.* X.24.35-26.37). However, the divine whom Augustine finds in his memory (*memoria*) is also named as the truth itself; which “remains hidden from it [*animus*]”<sup>6</sup> (*Conf.* X.23.34). In memory, one recalls the forgotten name. Here, in this seat of the mind, one might even recall the image of forgetfulness itself (*Conf.* X.19.28; 25.36). As with names and images, is the hidden truth may also be fabricated in (and by) the memory (*Conf.* X.19.28; 21.31)? At the heart of this question is: are the knowledge of God and love for him mere fabrications of our memory? Since the inquiry I propose would assess a mystical way, it seems better to start with the saint’s personal affinity with mysticism.

### Autobiographical Mystery Tour

It is infamously known that Augustine, the highly-respected bishop of Hippo, once led a wayward life in his early stage. To certain extent, the saint’s conversion bears some marks of mysticism, largely affected by his mother’s persistent prayer and strong personal influence. *Conf.* IX.10.23-25 records his sharing of mystical vision with his mother. Resulting from conversation with God whom he calls the truth itself, here Augustine demises the pleasure of bodily senses.

Pertaining to the issue addressed in this essay, it seems that the preceding discourses in *Conf.* VII.10.16; 17.23 are more relevant than the saint’s conversion. In the first text, Augustine already made

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*Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 174]. By so doing, he implicitly emphasizes a sub-sequential order of knowledge and love.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Gospel according to John*, 2 vols., trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), I.841.

<sup>6</sup> In Latin, “*animus*” could mean either “mind” or “soul”. The word could convey both faculty of reason and power of reflection in man’s soul [cf. Augustine, *On the Trinity* 12.1; Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 93-94].

an appeal to love who knows the eternal truth, to the eye of soul (*animus*) who sees the Being, who is the divine that transcends his mind (*mens*). In the second, the saint relates his surprise of his own love to God, which already took place, to the discovery of the “unchangeable and authentic eternity of truth” (*Conf.* VII.17.23), transcending over his mutable mind [*supra mentem*] as he himself transcends beyond bodily senses.

Nevertheless, reading Augustine in the mystical tradition has been controversial. After two centuries of debates over the saint’s mysticism,<sup>7</sup> McGinn lays a couple of fair notifications in the overheated pond. On the one hand, the term “mysticism” was not yet formed before the seventeenth century. So, there is no question that “[t]he mystical aspects of his [Augustine’s] thought were part of a totality oblivious to such compartmentalization.”<sup>8</sup> But, on the other hand, being fully aware of its meaning (i.e. “secret” or “hidden”), Augustine obviously uses “the qualifiers *mysticus* and *mystice* frequently” to signify certain inner, deeper meaning in a mystical setting. As William Franke puts it, even if Augustine does not develop a mystical or negative theology,<sup>9</sup> “his whole theology is based on the premise that God cannot be known as he is in himself” and that God “must be approached rather by way of *love*.”<sup>10</sup>

Within the limit of the agreement above, reading Augustine with mystical approach is far from being whimsical. The saint’s frequent reference to the supremacy of the faculty of reason (mind) does not make his inquiry less mystical because, as Ninian Smart emphatically notifies, for anything that happens within the horizon of human experience, it has neither absolute transcendence, nor it is totally indescribable.<sup>11</sup> In other words, there is no real contradiction

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<sup>7</sup> Tracing the trail to 1863, Mandouze finds that the earliest issue was raised by Mathieu Marais. [André Mandouze, “Où en est la question de la mystique augustinienne?” in *Augustinus Magister : Congrès International Augustinien* Vol. 1 (Paris: Études Augustinennes, 1954), 104].

<sup>8</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* Vol.1 (NY: Crossroad, 1991), 252.

<sup>9</sup> As a quasi-comprehensive definition, negative theology is “a theology that says what God is not rather than what He is; that insists on His radical otherness from all human images of Him and that affirms His absolute unknowability, incomprehensibility and irreducibility to human thought.” [Arthur Bradley, *Negative Theology and Modern French Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004), 12].

<sup>10</sup> William Franke, ed., *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts* Vol. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 154. My italics.

<sup>11</sup> Ninian Smart, “Understanding Religious Experience,” in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 17, 19-

between the pleroma of mystical experience and the poverty of its linguistic expression. However insufficient their expression might be, the mystics have “NO *pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences.*”<sup>12</sup> As Augustine himself admits, even the ineffable (Lat. *ineffabilis*) God is named (Lat. *dicitur*) after syllables in which He is not properly recognized as Himself.<sup>13</sup> Here in this case, name serves as a finite sign, by whose mediation the unspeakably speakable God might be inadequately represented.<sup>14</sup> Thus, our positive knowledge of God, if there is any, is “a positive ignorance;”<sup>15</sup> a knowledge that one “knows nothing of God, except that it is ignorant and why.”<sup>16</sup>

With regard to the *Confessions*, this classic is nominated as “a mystic work,”<sup>17</sup> even “the primary resource” into Augustine’s mystical thought.<sup>18</sup> This autobiography ranks as the primary and principal reference where we might seek the traces of his mysticism.<sup>19</sup> And it is based on this corpus (among some others) that Augustinian scholars in *Collectanea Augustiniana* III finally conclude that the saint “may be called a mystic,” even “a ‘founder’ of medieval mysticism.”<sup>20</sup>

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20. As Augustine states, “God should not even be called unspeakable because even when this word [“Deus”] is spoken, something is spoken.” [*De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 17].

<sup>12</sup> Steven T. Katz, “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 26. Capitals and italics original.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* I.6.13. This address “summarized his [Augustine’s] negative theology” (McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 241).

<sup>14</sup> More on this, see *Conf.* IX.10.23-24; cf. Roger Dragonetti, “L’image et l’irreprésentable dans l’écriture de Saint Augustin,” in *Qu’est-ce que Dieu?* 33 (1985): 408-409.

<sup>15</sup> Dragonetti, “L’image et l’irreprésentable,” 395-396.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *On Order* II.2.18.47. English translation by Silvano Borruso (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007), 113.

<sup>17</sup> P. Fulbert Cayré, *La contemplation Augustinienne: Principes de spiritualité et de théologie* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1954), 12.

<sup>18</sup> McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 229.

<sup>19</sup> Gerald Bonner, “Augustine and Mysticism,” in *Augustine: Mystic and Mystagogue*, ed. Frederick Van Fleteren, Joseph C. Schnaubelt, & Joseph Reino (NY: Peter Lang, 1994), 129. Bonner looks back to the saint’s mystical experiences in Milan and Ostia (*Conf.* VII.10.16; 17.23; IX.10.23-25). These passages are also characterized as mystical by John M. Quinn, “Mysticism in the Confessions: Four Passages Reconsidered,” in *Augustine: Mystic and Mystagogue*, 253,259,266, 271,274). *Conf.* X.40.65 is the extra passage in Quinn’s examination. This list can also be found in Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of SS. Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life* (London: Kegan Paul, 2000), 20 and McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 231ff.

<sup>20</sup> Editors’ conclusion in *Augustine: Mystic and Mystagogue*, 551,552. For stricter sense of the term “mystic,” the editors refer to “the definition of spiritual

In the *Confessions*, a work of autobiography and prayer, we meet a convergence of both “critical pretensions” and “irrational longings,”<sup>21</sup> of language and silence,<sup>22</sup> of intellectual vision and spiritual light.<sup>23</sup> Here we find Augustine’s earnest search for the very Other and, at the same time, for one’s own self; an exploration of *anamnesis* that he brings to the full extent in Book X (27.38).<sup>24</sup> And it is in the first half of this book that the text, O’Donnell writes, “becomes itself a mystical experience.”<sup>25</sup>

### In Memoria(m): God

“and when I call you my love, my love, is it you I am calling or my love?<sup>26</sup> You, my love, is it you I thereby name, is it to you that I address myself? I don't know if the question is well put, it frightens me. But I am sure that the answer, if it gets to me one day, will have come to me from you. You alone, my love, you alone will have known it.”

(Derrida, *The Post Card*.)<sup>27</sup>

Book X of the *Confessions* is an account of a mystical search for God and self through “recollection and introversion.”<sup>28</sup> Memory is the locus of this conduct (*Conf.* X.8.12; 24.35), and love is the initial question that ignites the search (*Conf.* X.6.8; 7.11). This inquiry of

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vision given in *De genesi ad litteram* XII” (ibid., 553). For bibliographical details, see ibid., 548.

<sup>21</sup> Carl A. Keller, “Mystical Literature” in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 85.

<sup>22</sup> William Franke, ed. *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts* Vol. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 152,154.

<sup>23</sup> François-Joseph Thonnard, “La notion de lumière en philosophie Augustinienne,” in *Recherches Augustiniennes* Vol. 2 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1962), 163.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Conf.* I.2.2. Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 57-58.

<sup>25</sup> James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine Confessions III: Commentary on Books 8-13* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 151.

<sup>26</sup> It reminds us of the annulment of the beloved because the lover loves love itself. We might trace this old story back to Barthes, who, in his part, looks back further into Goethe’s *Werther* [Roland Barthes, *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 39-40]. Quite surprisingly, such is the love that we read also in *Conf.* III.1.1.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 8.

<sup>28</sup> Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 31.

love is a “deeply mystical prayer,”<sup>29</sup> and the way it is written enhances the display of such pilgrimage.

The heart of a confession<sup>30</sup> is the urge to know oneself through the other, and to submit one’s will under the other’s will (*Conf. X.2.2*). And as its reason: so that one might know God, and so that his soul may dive into the knowledge (*Conf. X.1.1*). Yet, since there would be neither knowledge nor true servitude without truth, thus we read how the saint questions the credibility of his own confession quite early in the beginning (*Conf. X.3.3*). However, on his way to attain such certitude, Augustine realized that only those who love him will *believe* his account (*Conf. X.3.4*). Therefore, in other words, *caritas* is “inadequate for fullness of speech.”<sup>31</sup> One can only believe, but not truly know the truth of his confession.

But how about he who confesses, Augustine himself? Regarding his interior ascent, is it possible for the saint to be sure about his own confession? The answer would be a preliminary key to ponder further if there is any chance to be certain that one loves the true God. To serve this purpose, we need to look for a clarification on how memory should be understood.

### The Memory of a Confessor

In *Conf. X.17.26*, the self (“*ego ipse sum*”) is equated to the memory in its infinite multiplicity (*memoriae*), as it is to the mind (*animus*).<sup>32</sup> As memory is a borderless, mysterious cavern (*Conf. X.8.12-15*), so the inner self is unfathomable (*X.5.7; 16.25*). Therefore, Guitton concludes, “The mystery of the memory is nothing but the mystery of the spiritual person (*ego animus*),”<sup>33</sup> and so, to address his initial search, Augustine needs to examine his memory.

However, Augustinian recollection is not identical to Platonic *anamnesis* because the saint is not looking for the same sort of

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<sup>29</sup> Harvey D. Egan, *Christian Mysticism: The Future of A Tradition* (NY: Pueblo, 1984), 50.

<sup>30</sup> O’Donnell, *Augustine Confessions III*, 158.

<sup>31</sup> O’Donnell, *Augustine Confessions III*, 162.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. “*ego animus*” in *Conf. X.6.9; 16.25*. Due to the shortage of English vocabulary to portray such complex notions, “memory” (*memoria*) is often rendered equivalent to the “mind” (*animus*). Such obscure uses may create confusing ambiguity when we arrive at *Conf. X.14.21; 17.26*. In the French edition, Labriolle chooses “l’esprit,” whose meaning carries both senses of “*animus*.”

<sup>33</sup> Jean Guitton, *Le temps et l’éternité chez Plotin et Saint Augustin* (Paris: Boivin, 1933), 250. My translation. In this light, Guitton adds, one might understand spiritual life only by understanding memory (*ibid.*, 256).

primordial imprint in one's soul.<sup>34</sup> His inward journey is driven by a restless heart, longing for God as "the deepest Ground of all things within our own innermost being."<sup>35</sup> As the saint believes, there are things which have not yet known to him, and how he needs the Truth—which is God himself (*Conf.* X.37.62)—to teach him (X.40.65).<sup>36</sup> His trait of *anamnesis* is "mystical,"<sup>37</sup> and his restless yearning is, perhaps, best described as a call to mysticism.<sup>38</sup> It is precisely because of this "appetite for God" that he is considered a "born mystic,"<sup>39</sup> and that restlessness as "the guiding principle of Augustine's mystical theology."<sup>40</sup>

This *anamnesis* is also mystical because the seeking subject is fundamentally enigmatic. In *Conf.* X.3.4 and 4.6 we read that he who confesses is confessing who he is at that present time. Nonetheless, at that very moment that confession is made, the confessor also confesses what he does not know of himself (*Conf.* X.5.7; 16.25). In fact, his present self is not who he is, but he as what his memory recalls (*Conf.* X.8.14). He who lays bare his present self is actually navigating along the endless hallway of memory, as if haunted by the ever present possibility of betrayal.<sup>41</sup>

What we have here is not a schizophrenic expression, and not a mere demonstration of rhetorical parlance. This paradoxical self-interrogation demonstrates Augustine's understanding of memory and its infinite multiplicity (*Conf.* X.8.15, 17.26). Memory (*memoria*) is not only rational mind (*mens*) or recollection of the objects of consciousness. It restores the unconscious, the other self within oneself (*Conf.* X.6.8).<sup>42</sup> It presents meaningful apprehensions on what

<sup>34</sup> Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*, 99-100. Since *The Retractions* I.4.4, the saint has also explicitly denounced Plato's doctrine of soul's pre-existence (in *Phaedo* 72e; Guittou, *Le temps et l'éternité*, 247).

<sup>35</sup> Bruno Borchert, *Mysticism: Its History and Challenge* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1994), 43; *Conf.* X.1.1.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Conf.* XI.3.5.

<sup>37</sup> Quinn, "Mysticism in the Confessions," 271. This mystical longing of memory also appears in several other passages in book X.17.26; 23.32-33; and 27.37 (McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 235-236).

<sup>38</sup> Cayré, *La contemplation Augustinienne*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Henry, *The Path to Transcendence: From Philosophy to Mysticism in Saint Augustine*, trans. by Francis F. Burch (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick, 1981), 83-84.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 134.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Conf.* IV.1.1. V.6.11 mounts Augustine's acute awareness toward this issue of recollection (remembrance) by imploring God as the judge of his conscience (*conscientiae*).

<sup>42</sup> Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 142; cf. Etienne Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin* (Paris, J. Vrin, 1949), 134-135.

mind and (its) affection may endure (*Conf.* X.14.21). Therefore, “if memory fails, though intellect and will survive, the individual loses something essential of the ‘self.’”<sup>43</sup>

Back to the initial question: how could Augustine find out who is God his Beloved by examining such memory? How does his memory remember God, so that he might know Him, and then, lately, love Him?

### The Memory of Love

Love is the concern and the way of Augustinian mysticism.<sup>44</sup> And, as Borchert writes, “The language of love and the language of mysticism have much in common.”<sup>45</sup> Augustine is fully certain that he does love God.<sup>46</sup> In this particular case of mysticism, he holds that, for the sake of our love, however mystical it might be, God could not be incognito.<sup>47</sup> In order to love God, knowledge is inevitably necessary. This necessity of knowledge will unravel the mystery, and thus, defying the unknown. The Beloved of this mystical investigation is the true Love whom Augustine apprehends, thanks to his mystical ascent, in a journey across his own memory (*Conf.* X.29.40).<sup>48</sup>

By this knowledge, he pictures God as the absolute Being, He who is,<sup>49</sup> the Truth itself (*Conf.* X.24.35; 26.37). God the “supreme *Vere Esse*” is the beatific Truth that all man desire.<sup>50</sup> Comparable to what is known as the ontological vision of the Absolute in mystical tradition, this Augustinian joy of the sublime Beauty as self-evident testimony for God (*Conf.* X.6.9,10) is also considered as the discovery

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<sup>43</sup> O'Donnell, *Augustine Confessions* III, 184.

<sup>44</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Preeminent Study of the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (NY: Doubleday, 1990), 85.

<sup>45</sup> Borchert, *Mysticism*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> As *Conf.* VII.17.23 and X.6.8 record, the saint loves God himself (not a mere phantom of him), and with conscious certainty.

<sup>47</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction above, Calvin refers to *On the Spirit and the Letter*. As an additional support, Gilson points out the same issue in *On the Trinity* X.1 & 2. Using its conversion, Gilson explains that whoever seek the unknown with a desire to unravel it, this person loves not the incognito. Knowledge will eradicate the incognito from existence. (Gilson, *Introduction*, 131-132).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Conf.* VII.10.16; John Peter Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Rereading the Confessions* (NY: Routledge, 2005), 91.

<sup>49</sup> “[I]d quod est” (*Conf.* VII.10.16).

<sup>50</sup> Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*, 27,140.

of the Truth (X.23.33-24.35; 27.38).<sup>51</sup> And, being defined as a search for happiness, longing for God is universal (*Conf.* X.20.29; 21.31; 23.33) and certain (X.6.8; 20.29; 21.31).

However, these assertive points are fertile with complexities, and so the initial question now reverbs with epistemological twist: Does not he also find that, despite of his certain love, the appetites of his senses do distract and compromise his loving devotion?<sup>52</sup> With regard to the frail love and joy of his, how can the saint know that it is this true God, that he once learned and has not forget (*Conf.* X.24.35-25.36), the One that he actually loves?

On the one hand, this search does not, and could not possibly happen outside memory or mind (*Conf.* X.19.28). However, this interior place is, in fact, not a place (*Conf.* X.9.16). God is the true life that transcends memory—the force of life through which the ascent takes place (*Conf.* X.17.26). Therefore, on the other hand, this search is not a question of place (*Conf.* X.26.37). As Kristo notices from this reference (i.e. *Conf.* X.26.37), “Book ten suggests that ... his deepest self was a complete mystery to him.”<sup>53</sup> As Augustine testifies in a number of passages and variations, God was in him, but he himself was outside, self-exiled (*Conf.* X.27.38).<sup>54</sup> God is more inward and, at the same time, higher.<sup>55</sup>

To meet God, it is not enough for one to surpass above the realm of the senses. Reading *Conf.* X.8.12 side by side with 10.17, Cayré discovers that memory’s immense multiplicity is an inner feebleness, a compartment of broken, inferior reason, a dwelling place far too tiny to constrain the ubiquitous God. One needs to climb higher than the domain of superior reason, where unity is found and Truth resides as beauty (*Conf.* X.16.25-17.27).<sup>56</sup>

Nonetheless, traveling across the borderless memory by using the power of the memory itself, even the saint admits the unmet, ineffaceable distance (*Conf.* X.7.11; 8.12,15; 40.65).<sup>57</sup> His ascent in

<sup>51</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, 21; Cayré, *La contemplation Augustinienne*, 140-141,145,150-151; Michel Pellegrino, *Les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris: Alsatia, 1960), 212. Perhaps, scalable to this is the truth within himself (*Conf.* X.6.10; 10.17).

<sup>52</sup> These obstructing senses befall not only to the others (*Conf.* X.23.33-34), but also to Augustine himself. These obstacles also surround and drag the saint along with his fellow sinners (*Conf.* X.27.38-41.66).

<sup>53</sup> J. G. Kristo, *Looking for God in Time and Memory: Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Augustine’s Confessions* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 128.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Conf.* V.2.2; X.5.7; 16.25.

<sup>55</sup> *Conf.* III.6.11.

<sup>56</sup> Cayré, *La contemplation Augustinienne*, 206-209,212.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Henry, *The Path to Transcendence*, 88.

*Conf.* X.6.9 is thoroughly interrogative and mentioning no direct address to the divine.<sup>58</sup> Even when Augustine addresses God as a second person (*Conf.* X.25.36), he is right on his way to confess that the Lord who dwells in his memory (*memoria*) is nowhere in his mind (*animus*).<sup>59</sup> How then could he actually apprehend his Beloved?

### In the Name of the Sign

Human experience of God is far too fleeting and brief (*Conf.* X.40.65). As an integral part of a person, the very foundation of memory itself seems to be hidden from the reach of cognitive power. All that the mind restores from the bottom of its depth is like being brought anew from someplace (*Conf.* X.11.18).<sup>60</sup> To remember God is not like grabbing a static image from a fixed altar, it is more like attending (“prêter attention”) His “perpetual presence.”<sup>61</sup> His presence in the memory is not His presence, it is a consequence of His omnipresence.<sup>62</sup> As we have seen before, His presence within memory is transcendental. Relative to our memory, God is there, and God is not there (*Conf.* X.24.35; 25.36).

Memory is a presence of absence (as in oblivion) and, at the same time, an absence of presence (in recollection).<sup>63</sup> Augustine states that what is hidden in memory is not the image of image (*Conf.* X.15.23), but the image as realities themselves (X.10.17). By so doing, his inquiry does not fall into endless significations. Quite the contrary, here the thinking mind rearranges images in a way comparable to how mind treats nonsensical principles (*Conf.* X.11.18).

Memory is not a mere storehouse, but it is like factories that produce (*prodeunt*)<sup>64</sup> whatever a subject requires to recall (*Conf.* X.8.12). It is like a cavern in which images are created (*fabricatae*; *Conf.* X.8.13).<sup>65</sup> It is here, in this memory, that the saint might even

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<sup>58</sup> O'Donnell, *Augustine Confessions* III, 169.

<sup>59</sup> This is particularly striking because *animus*, as we have seen, could be equivalent to *memoria*.

<sup>60</sup> Pellegrino, *Les Confessions de saint Augustin*, 209-210.

<sup>61</sup> Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*, 139. Translation and italics are mine.

<sup>62</sup> Here Gilson referred to *On the Trinity* XIV.15: “And He is whole everywhere, and on that account it loves, moves, and has its being in Him [Acts 17:28], and, therefore, it [i.e. the mind] can remember Him.” (1963, p.440).

<sup>63</sup> *Conf.* X.16.24; Guitton, *Le temps et l'éternité*, 245.

<sup>64</sup> De Labriolle translated this verb as “present themselves” (Fr. *se presentent*).

<sup>65</sup> De Labriolle rendered the sentence into passive reflexive, “being formed (itself)” (Fr. *se sont-elles formée*).

produce (*profero*; *Conf.* X.9.16; 10.17) *colors* as images, thanks to recollection (cf. X.8.15). In its over-whelming power to fabricate images, “[m]emory has the power to supplement ‘reality’” for a “more authentic reality.”<sup>66</sup>

However, distinct from the “images of numbers as mental concepts which truly belong to the realm of being” (*Conf.* X.12.19) and which presents itself to the memory as itself (X.15.23), the recollection of images leads to “the notions of the things” (X.14.22). Yes, these images are to be recalled as images (*Conf.* X.16.25)<sup>67</sup> and not as endless chain of images. Yet, still, God is not remembered in the same way as numbers are (*Conf.* X.21.30). Unlike the immediate presence of intellectual stuff, it is closer to the affective notions or impressions of joy (*Conf.* X.17.26; 21.30).

Memory fabricates knowledge as name or word (*Conf.* X.19.28; 21.31). As knowledge is stored as images (*Conf.* X.8.13), so is the Beloved known and recalled after images (X.15.23). With respect to our fickle presence in time, “[e]ven when something is present to us, hearing its name does not direct us to the thing itself, but to memory, where we connect things with signs. Hence language is in memory: the Word is present only in the past tense.”<sup>68</sup> What is remaining, recorded, testified, and confessed as the ascent<sup>69</sup> is not the vision or experience itself, but a “loving memory (*amantem memoriam*)”<sup>70</sup> of a name.

The confessing pen is trading in the language of the past, commemorating a love of supplementing image; ever tracing, ever searching, ever yearning. It is made after a memory of a subject who is looking for himself by searching for a Beloved who transcends what language can express. The eternal truth who transcends our mind, whom we already loved too lately, is He whose name is a “bottomless collapse,” an “endless desertification of language.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> O’Donnell, *Augustine Confessions III*, 178. It is very important to notice that “to supplement” can also mean “to substitute.” [Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 207ff.; *La dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 208ff.]. This possibility is strikingly noticed by O’Donnell himself in his previous note about Plato’s disquietude in *Phaedrus* 275a (*Augustine Confessions III*, 177).

<sup>67</sup> Here Augustine also says that memory does not recall forgetfulness itself, but the image of forgetfulness.

<sup>68</sup> O’Donnell, *Augustine Confessions III*, 185.

<sup>69</sup> In *Conf.* VII, IX, and X, as listed above in previous subsection. As a contact with the objective reality, this ascent itself is an idealized experience (Cayré, *La contemplation Augustinienne*, 205,209-210).

<sup>70</sup> *Conf.* VII.17.23 ; O’Donnell, *Augustine Confessions III*, 189.

<sup>71</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Sauf le nom,” in *On the Name*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 55-56. Closely related to this, Augustine explains in *On the Trinity* X.2 that knowing God is analogous to knowing

### Conclusion: A Not-so-Final Remark

Encountering God is an *intimate* intellectual<sup>72</sup> ascent (*Conf.* X.6.8).<sup>73</sup> However, being intellectual in nature, this ascent is not attained by the way of mere abstraction. It requires the inquisitor to be an ardent lover because it is love that knows God,<sup>74</sup> and therefore, we read how the *Confessions* “cried aloud” in love (*Conf.* X.2.2).

But Augustine’s certain love (*Conf.* X.6.8) is not immune from paradox. Quite the contrary, it is right after he made such declaration of love that he poses this initial question: “what do I love when I love you, my God?” Such inquiry rises not out of mere cerebral curiosity, but of his intense passion for God. Before the eternally burning Love, whom lately he loves, Augustine acknowledges that his senses often keep him from the unity of love and, therefore, not loving Him enough (*Conf.* X. 27.38; 29.40). Nonetheless, instead of debilitating his yearning, as he testifies in *Conf.* X.7.11, this chasm between knowing and loving drives him to seek his Beloved even more restlessly.

Yes, there are strong notions of affirmation in his amorous longing. Yet, Augustinian happiness, which is supposed to be certain and universal as one meets the beatific Truth, is unknowingly known (*Conf.* X.20.29). This ultimate happiness is something that the saint himself does not possess. Even when he is confessing for his present self, the saint is aware how unworthy he is for such pinnacle of all delight (*Conf.* X.22.32).

Loving God means loving Him *whom* we find not even in our ascent, but *who* transcends our ascent in no-place. The motive of our search for the divine is for more yearning, more love, not for a sort of eminent knowledge. Here the mystical approach is obviously

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a sign as a sign (that is, a trace that represents something else). Here lies the certainty that, even if one has no knowledge whatsoever about its signification, one could know for certain that it is, indeed, a sign (instead of the thing in itself). Thus, even if such mark is not unknown, there might still be something “[i]mpossible de s’y méprendre” (Gilson, *Introduction*, 28).

<sup>72</sup> More on this intellectual character of mystical theology, rational capacity is functioning properly only as a divine gift, in accordance with the image of God in mankind. As reference, he points to the elaboration of “nisi crederitis, non intelligetis” in *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.II.12.17 (Cayré, *La contemplation Augustinienne*, 220-223).

<sup>73</sup> Gunnar Hultgren, *Le Commandement d’amour chez Augustin: Interprétation philosophique et théologique d’après les écrits de la période 386-400* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1939), 146

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Conf.* VII.10.16.

manifest in Augustine. As Turner notes, “Dissatisfied longing ... is the key to Augustine’s conception of ‘remembering God’.”<sup>75</sup>

Realizing that one too often loves God not for God himself, and how men fall short of doing what is commanded by God, Augustine sees that he, a wretched sinner (*Conf.* X.28.39; 32.47) most lustful of self-justification (X.36.58; 37.61), needs a Mediator (X.42.67-43.70). In the words of Thomas Merton, we love God because, in hope of His mercy (*Conf.* X.35.57), we have already found his love. Our hope “seeks God knowing that it has already been found by Him”<sup>76</sup> (cf. *Conf.* X.1.1). Therein, if we seek Him with all our heart, we shall find Him (Jer. 29:13), and thereafter, as Augustine writes, “discovery should not terminate that seeking, by which love is testified, but with the increase of love the seeking of the discovered One should increase.”<sup>77</sup>

### About the Author

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<sup>75</sup> Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 65.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Merton, *No Man Is An Island* (NY: Harcourt, 1955), 17.

<sup>77</sup> *Homilies on Psalm CV.3* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* Vol.8, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. A. Cleveland Coxe (NY: Christian Literature, 1886), 521.

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