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“The Way of the Heart” in the Experience and Reflection of St. Augustine¹

Abstract: In the writings of St. Augustine, the Latin word *cor* occurs more than 8,000 times, being one of the most important, though ambiguous, terms of his anthropology and spirituality. As a synonym for the inner man (*homo interior*) it encompasses the whole affective, intellectual, moral and religious life. In this sense, it is the privileged place for a personal encounter with God.

The analysis of Augustine’s writings reveals a link between the concept of the Trinity and indications concerning the spiritual life of man. Reflections on the “heart” can be put into a kind of triptych: creation “in the image of God,” illumination by Christ, and dilatation by the Holy Spirit. The impact of God on the human heart should find its completion in a voluntarily adopted attitude of adoration, humility and love.

Keywords: St. Augustine, heart, God’s image, inner senses, charity, humility, prayer, Holy Trinity

“For You have made us for Yourself [O Lord], and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”² This sentence by Saint Augustine is probably one of the most famous early Christian

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² Augustine, *Confessionum Libri XIII* [= *Conf.*] I, 1.1: “fecisti nos ad te, [Domine] et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te” (all Latin quotation in the series: *Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana*, Roma: Città Nuova, available also at www.augustinus.it), English translation: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1101.htm>.

thoughts, which, moreover, has lost none of its relevance. It is significant that it was cited as the first patristic quotation in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 30) at the end of “The Desire for God” chapter.³ Indeed, the term “heart,” with all its semantic capacity, has for centuries indicated this intimate and personal reality in which man encounters himself, the others and God himself.

Antoine Guillaumont believed that no anthropological concepts are as semantically diverse as “soul,” “spirit,” “heart.”⁴ This is because they are not limited to the boundaries of space and time, but penetrate the sphere of transcendence.⁵ Although the heart is a universal symbol, it has had specific semantic shades in different epochs and cultures. Early Christian thought was essentially influenced by two factors: Holy Scripture and the world of Greek-Roman culture. In the books of both the Old and New Testaments, as well as in the works of the post-Apostolic era, we are dealing with a metaphorical understanding of the “heart” as the centre of inner life (emotional, moral, intellectual, religious). In the third century, especially in the Alexandria environment, the dominant influence of Hellenism and Platonic philosophy led to a narrower, though more uniform interpretation, consisting in identifying it with the “intellect” (*nous, animus*). The Latin Fathers, on the other hand, remained generally faithful to biblical ambiguity and terminology, as exemplified by the Vulgate.

The aim of this study is to show the diversity of meaning and the spiritual implications of the Latin term *cor* in the work of St. Augustine (†430). Due to the frequency of the term appearance, the analysis will be based essentially on his commentaries on the Psalms, the Gospel of St. John and the First Letter of St. John,

³ CCC 27: „The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.”

⁴ Cf. A. Guillaumont, *Les sens des noms du coeur dans l'antiquité*, “Études carmélitaines” 29 (1950), 41–81.

⁵ Cf. M.A. Wagner, *A Reflection on the Use of “Heart” in Select Prayer Texts in Early Christianity*, in: H. A. Luckman, L. Kulzer, *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature. Essays in Honor of Juana Raasch, O.S.B.*, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999, 131–139; É. Dubreucq, *Le Cœur et l'écriture chez saint Augustin. Enquête sur le rapport à soi dans les Confessions*, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2003.

although there will also be references to other works. References to "Confessions" will help to illustrate the impact of the personal experience of the famous Bishop of Hippo on the specificity of his deliberations. Indeed, for many years he searched for happiness and sense of life, traversing the paths of knowledge, career and pleasure. His inner wandering, marked by various philosophical and religious fascinations, led him even to the edge of doubt. At the age of 32, he experienced an internal breakthrough that led him to the faith in Christ and joining the community of the Church. After such an experience, he confessed that peace of heart can only be found in God, thus marking out the way for spiritual growth for future generations.

1. The Semantic Ambiguity of the Term *cor*

St Augustine is often depicted in pictures with a heart pierced with an arrow and surrounded by flames. These symbols of overwhelming love are an iconographic expression of his extremely personal words: "You had penetrated our hearts with Your charity"⁶ and "You have stricken my heart with Your word, and I loved You."⁷ In Augustine's writings the term *cor* appears more than 8,000 times,⁸ most often when quoting and commenting on the Bible and in descriptions of personal experiences.

For Augustine, the "heart" is the centre of the person and is synonymous with the internal man (*homo interior*).⁹ It is the centre

⁶ *Conf.* IX, 2.3: "sagittaveras tu cor nostrum caritate tua."

⁷ *Conf.* X, 6.8: "percussisti cor meum verbo tuo, et amavi te."

⁸ Cf. G. Madec, *Cor*, in: *Augustinus-Lexicon*, ed. C. Mayer, Basel: Verlag 1996–2002, vol. 2, 1–6.

⁹ Cf. A. Solignac, *Homme intérieur: Augustin*, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, t. VII/1, Paris 1969, 655–658; J. Campos, *El „homo interior"*, "La Ciudad de Dios" 187 (1974), 5–28; S. Kato, *Cor, praecordia, viscera. Remarques sur quelques expressions psychosomatiques des Confessions d'Augustin*, in P. Ranson (ed.), *Saint Augustin*, Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1988, 312–326; P.A. Deprost, *La quête augustinienne du sublime dans les Confessions, un parcours sur les chemins de l'intériorité*, „Cahiers des études anciennes" (Open Edition) 56 (2019), 225–237; Idem, *Les voies du sublime dans les Confessions de saint Augustin: Chemins d'intériorité et de mémoire*, „Revue Theologique de Louvain" 3, 341–360.

of affective, intellectual, moral and religious life. It expresses spiritual dynamism and typically human action. It is an inner force that allows man to move freely towards good or evil and to take responsibility for decisions and actions taken. It is, finally, a habitat of wisdom and a privileged place for God to manifest Himself, even if He is not fully recognised.

In the initial phase of his activity, that is just after his conversion, Augustine was permeated with Platonic mentality, which was reflected in his philosophical treatises. At this stage he tried to avoid the ambiguous term *cor*, using instead the Platonic anthropology and more precise concepts such as *mens*, *intelligentia* or *animus*.¹⁰ This philosophical tendency was also evident later on. In his commentaries on the Psalms, Augustine sometimes identifies the “heart” with intellectual power.¹¹ To think is to talk to each other in the heart.¹² It also includes the power that allows one to judge what is good and what is bad.¹³ Augustine notes that even a bad person can judge properly if he does not come worse off while doing this.¹⁴ This assumes the existence of some form of natural law called the “golden rule”: “What you would not have done to yourself, do not to another.”¹⁵

Unlike the Christian authors who completely followed the principles of Platonism, Augustine did not avoid relating heart to affections. What is more, he considered them to be one of the more important forces influencing the dynamics of heart. In his opinion, it is these that determine its status, that is to say its belonging to Babylon, the kingdom of pride, or to Jerusalem,

¹⁰ Cf. Augustinus, *De Quantitate Animae Liber Unus* 14, 23; 33, 75.

¹¹ Cf. Augustinus, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* [= *En. Ps.*] 7, 9; 57, 1. In some considerations, Augustine *cor* seems to be a broader concept than *conscientia*, cf. E. de la Peza, *El significado de „cor” en san Agustín*, Paris 1962, 87; I. Bochet, *Cor*, in: A. D. Fitzgerald (red.), *Agostino: dizionario enciclopedico*, Roma: Città Nuova, 2007, 524.

¹² Cf. Augustinus, *De Trinitate Libri Quindecim* XV, 10.19.

¹³ Cf. Augustinus, *In Evangelium Ioannis Tractatus Centum Viginti Quatuor* [= *Ev. Io. Tr.*] 18, 10. Broader on this topic: M. Terka, *O sumieniu. Przyczynki do synedejzologii św. Augustyna*, in: R. Ceglarek, M. Sztaba, *Być człowiekiem sumienia. Interdyscyplinarny namysł nad fenomenem sumienia*, Częstochowa 2015, 159–194.

¹⁴ Cf. *En. Ps.* 57, 1.

¹⁵ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 49, 12.

the capital of God.¹⁶ The Bishop of Hippo emphasized that only love can unite people and integrate hearts,¹⁷ while affections are “legs”¹⁸ thanks to which one passes from the love of the world (*amor saeculi*) to the love of God (*amor Dei*), from lust (*cupiditas*) to love (*caritas*).

The concept of the “heart” as a synonym for the human being (*homo interior*) found its expression in attributing to it the possession of various invisible senses, similar to those of the body: eyes, ears, taste, smell, touch, as well as hands, mouth, tongue, stomach, etc.¹⁹ The “taste of the heart” allows one to enjoy the truth. If, on the other hand, it is contaminated, the Word of God has a bitter taste.²⁰ The “eye of the heart” makes it possible to see true intentions, justice, honesty, gentleness, loyalty, love, etc.²¹ When it is damaged or even completely blind, the person goes astray.²² The tongue may also disagree with the heart because of fear of something or a desire to cheat. Although by nature speech is not capable of expressing the inner reality of the heart, man should always strive for the truth and be its witness.²³ When speaking of the “senses of the heart,” however, it should not be forgotten that in Augustine’s anthropology the basic opposition is the soul (heart) and the body. He stressed that it is possible to be close to Christ bodily and at the same time be afar in one’s heart,²⁴ like Judas was,²⁵ as well as the soldiers who crucified Christ.²⁶ The Bishop of Hippo also held that the heart itself can be divided.

¹⁶ Cf. *En. Ps.* 136, 2.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 39, 5.

¹⁸ Cf. *En. Ps.* 64, 2; 94, 2.

¹⁹ Cf. *En. Ps.* 125, 8; *Ev. Io. Tr.* 18, 10; 32, 4.

²⁰ Cf. Augustinus, *In Epistolam Ioannis Ad Parthos Tractatus Decem* [= *Ep. Io. Tr.*]: Prologus.

²¹ Cf. *En. Ps.* 33 (2), 15; *Ev. Io. Tr.* 18, 10.

²² Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 2, 16; 14, 12; 18, 11; 35, 9; *En. Ps.* 57, 22. More: cf. G. Gillette, *Purity of Heart in St. Augustine*, in: H. A. Luckman, L. Kulzer, *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature. Essays in Honor of Juana Raasch, O.S.B.*, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999, 176–178.

²³ Cf. *En. Ps.* 39, 16–17.

²⁴ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 32, 1; 61, 2.

²⁵ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 50, 10.

²⁶ Cf. *En. Ps.* 37, 17–18.

In his commentaries on various books of Scripture, Augustine most often remained faithful to biblical terminology. In the case of the term *cor*, he was a fully conscious choice because it allowed him to use a whole range of meanings, depending on which aspect of the “heart” he wanted to emphasize in a particular reflection. Semantic richness can be extracted especially from Augustine’s commentaries on the Psalms and to the writings of John. In “Confessiones,” in turn, apart from all the richness of biblical meanings, another additional meaning of the term “heart” can be distinguished. It is the most intimate part of every person, where the drama of existence in all its inner truth is played out. The words which Augustine says of his heart: “where I am whatsoever I am”²⁷ sound like a kind of manifesto of such meaning.

Analysing the descriptions of personal experiences and reflections of a spiritual nature, one can notice Augustine’s tendency to use the term *cor*. Thanks to it, he did not limit himself to the intellectual sphere, but could at the same time include emotional, affective and even bodily connotations. The description of the vision of Ostia is a very telling attempt to combine the biblical and philosophical language. When reenacting a conversation about happiness with his mother Monica, just before her death, Augustine used many terms taken from Plotinus (e.g., *mens*, *intelligentia*, *cogitatio*),²⁸ but at the climax he used the word *cor* to denote the highest part of the soul, which contemplates Wisdom itself: “And while we were thus speaking, and straining after her, we slightly touched her with the whole effort of our heart.”²⁹

Augustine attempted to illustrate the metaphorical meaning of the term *cor* through many comparisons, inspired by biblical expressions. In the symbolic sense, “heart” is, for example:

- soil of God (*En. Ps.* 58 (2), 1; 99, 2; *Ev. Io. Tr.* 3, 1);
- the boat on which Jesus falls asleep (*En. Ps.* 34 (1), 3);
- the temple of God (*Sermo* 23, 7);

²⁷ *Conf.* X, 3.4: “[cor meum,] ubi ego sum quicumque sum.” Cf. *Ibid.* VIII, 8.19; 11.27; 12.28.

²⁸ Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* I, 6 and V. More: P. Henry, *La vision d’Ostie*, Paris: J. Vrin, 1938.

²⁹ Cf. *Conf.* IX, 10.24: “Et dum loquimur et inhiamus illi, attingimus eam modice toto ictu cordis.”

- the house / tent of God (*En. Ps.* 44, 23; 100, 4);
- the hidden room in which man is to pray (*En. Ps.* 4, 6; 35, 5);
- a case / treasury (*En. Ps.* 55, 19; 90 (2), 13; 123, 9);
- an altar (*De Civitate Dei* 10, 3.2).

The ultimate goal of the comparisons given above was to show God's indwelling and action in man. However, in order to express the depth and incomprehensibility of heart, Augustine used the term "chasm / deep" (*abyssus*).³⁰ He stressed that no one can fully get to know even their own heart, let alone the inside of someone else. Even a friend's heart is covered in the mist of mystery.³¹ Only God can penetrate and fathom it.³²

2. The Heart: The Masterpiece of the Triune God

In his writings, Augustine depicted a kind of "triptych of the heart" corresponding to the dogma of faith in the Holy Trinity. The heart, defined fundamentally by its relationship to God, is called to existence by the Creator, illuminated by Christ, constantly expanded by the Holy Spirit. And in relation to the heart, God appears as: *Auctor, Doctor, Largitor suavitas intimae*.³³

2.1. The heart created in "God's image"

The truth about the creation of man in the "image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26–27) is one of the fundamental elements of Christian anthropology. Saint Augustine specified that this "image" is in the heart and therefore is a privileged place to meet God.³⁴ Commenting on the verse of Ps 33(32):15a: *He who fashions the hearts of them all*, he made it clear that it is God Himself, in His graciousness and mercy, who directly creates each heart, making it unique and one of

³⁰ Cf. *En. Ps.* 41, 13–15.

³¹ Cf. *En. Ps.* 55, 9.

³² Cf. *En. Ps.* 7, 9; 39, 16. 23; *Ev. Io. Tr.* 13, 11; 44, 3; 46, 5.

³³ Cf. I. Bochet, *Cor*, op. cit., 524–534; M. O'Rourke Boyle, *Cultural Anatomies of the Heart in Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Harvey*, Palgrave Macmillan 2018, 35–66.

³⁴ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 18, 10.

a kind. These qualities do not, of course, deny the interpersonal unity which is a participation in the one body of Christ.³⁵

Augustine maintained that God dwells in the heart and sustains it in existence. Even sin cannot completely destroy the “image of God” in man, although it can obscure it and distort the likeness.³⁶ It is not God who leaves man, but man separates himself from God.³⁷ The Creator remains faithful and shows His power even to the unfaithful heart, dwelling in its vast depths.³⁸ Therefore the path of conversion leads through the heart and the renewal of its iconic character.³⁹

Augustine refuted the claim that God was the cause of man’s unbelief and unfaithfulness, as could be suggested by the verse from Isaiah 6:10, paraphrased in John 12:40. “Hardening of the heart” attributed in these verses to God’s action should rather be understood as the suppression of ordinary help and graciousness towards the one who is stubborn and closed inwardly. This constant judgment of God is hidden from human eyes, but always just, for it is the evil will of man that causes inner blindness and unbelief. Augustine also suggested that “hardening of the heart” somehow fits into the mysterious plans of salvation, in the sense that the repentant sinner is given the chance to humble himself and start looking for the Lord.⁴⁰ Augustine described his personal path and the individual stages of “crumbling the heart” in his “Confessions,” showing there God’s constant – albeit mysterious – guidance.

2.2. The heart redeemed and illuminated by Christ

Augustine very often repeated that God does not cease to speak to the human heart.⁴¹ A key place in this dialogue is occupied by the Incarnation, which is not only a historical event but also an operative spiritual reality. The Bishop of Hippo was convinced that human sermons would be fruitless if there was no inner Teacher, i.e.,

³⁵ Cf. *En. Ps.* 32 (3), 21.

³⁶ Cf. *En. Ps.* 4, 8; 57, 3.

³⁷ Cf. *En. Ps.* 99, 5.

³⁸ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 117, 5.

³⁹ Cf. *En. Ps.* 99, 5.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 53, 6–11.

⁴¹ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 22, 1; 39, 6; 40, 5.

the Word that can become flesh in the heart of every human being.⁴² He pointed to the Light that enlightens and the Source that quenches thirst as the main images showing the activity of the inner Teacher. In contrast to the "image of God" written on the heart, illumination requires the engagement of will and the opening of the heart.

Augustine claimed that Christ, the Truth, is present everywhere and illuminates everyone, just as the rays of the sun penetrate the world. However, just as the blind cannot see the day, not everyone has the "eyes of the heart" to see the light of truth.⁴³ Faith in the Word that assumed the weakness of the body is the healing of the inner sight. Through the Incarnation, Christ can help the blind person so that he can finally see, that is, understand the truth of the Divine Word.⁴⁴

Augustine explained the importance of drawing on the source of the Truth using the example of the Last Supper. John, who rests on the Lord's chest, imagines a man who draws from the deepest mysteries of the Heart of Jesus. Humility is the vessel and it allows one to penetrate the intimate depths and drink from them as if from a spring of living water.⁴⁵

The Bishop of Hippo has repeatedly stressed that a change of heart is possible thanks to the fruit of the Passover of Christ. He took upon himself the human weakness to be able to transform the human heart and make it righteous.⁴⁶ For his part, a man experiencing a storm in his life, that is, feelings of anger, fear, lust and other temptations, should immediately turn to Christ, awaken Him who seems to sleep in the boat of his heart to silence the dangerous waves.⁴⁷

⁴² Cf. *Ep. Io. Tr.* 3, 13; *Ev. Io. Tr.* 97, 1. More: G. Collini, *Cristo Maestro interiore e cammino verso il Padre*, in: *La ricerca di Dio. La dimensione contemplativa della esperienza agostiniana. Corso Internazionale di Spiritualità*, Roma 1–19 luglio 1979, Roma: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane 1981, 31–59; G. Madec, *Saint Augustin et le maître intérieur*, "Connaissance des Pères de l'Église" 48 (1992), 16–20; I. Bochet, *L'Écriture et le maître intérieur selon Augustin*, "Revue des sciences religieuses" 72 (1998), 20–37.

⁴³ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 35, 4; *En. Ps.* 57, 21–22.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 2, 16.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 18, 1.

⁴⁶ Cf. *En. Ps.* 31 (2), 26; 100, 6.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 49, 19; *En. Ps.* 108, 5.

2.3. The heart enlarged by the Holy Spirit

In the Church of the West, Augustine was one of the most eminent authors to reflect on the Trinitarian mystery. He developed the problem of the relationship between grace and man's will, that is the way the Holy Spirit acts in man's heart, primarily in the so-called Pelagian dispute. In many texts from that period he contrasted the commandments of the Law engraved on stone tablets with the Law of love written on living hearts by the Spirit of God.⁴⁸ The fundamental difference between them concerns not so much the content, but the way people perceive them. Augustine emphasised that the Old Testament regulations were only fulfilled by external acts, for fear of punishment. Christ's law, on the other hand, has an internal character. The basis for Augustine's reflection was the verse of Romans 5:5: *God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Spirit that was given to us*. In interpreting it, he stressed that the Spirit draws one towards the good, and that fulfilling the commandment of love in full freedom of heart brings it the gift of Divine sweetness.

Augustine based many of his reflections on the play on words: *delectatio* – *dilectio*. He noted, for example, that when a man's heart is filled with spiritual love, his good deeds do not come from coercion (*invitus*), but are voluntary (*voluntate*) and even bring pleasure (*voluptate*). Love is therefore a gift of the Spirit, who expands the heart, gives it security and the ability to do good. Love, understood in this way, expands hearts, because God makes them capable of loving even enemies.⁴⁹

The heart as a symbol of the inner man is inseparably related to the will. In Augustine's ethical system, love has a central place. Only acts and affections that come from love, not fear, are considered to come from the depths of the heart. That is why God must be offered one's will, because He does not demand blood sacrifices, but

⁴⁸ Cf. *De Spiritu et Littera Liber Unus* 17, 29 – 25, 42.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ep. Io. Tr.* 10, 6–7. More on the work of the Holy Spirit in the history of the world and man in Augustine, cf. N. Cipriani, *Lo Spirito Santo, Amore che unisce. Pneumatologia e spiritualità in Agostino*, Roma: Città Nuova, 2011, 94–196.

hearts.⁵⁰ In this sense, the process of expanding the heart continues till the end of one's life. The anxiety of the heart is a sign of the pursuit of the fullness of destiny, that is to say, of the rest and solace that it can only find in God.⁵¹

3. The Way of Perfecting One's Heart

The triple activity of the Triune God corresponds to the internal dynamics of man wounded by sin, defined by three heart movements: wandering outside (*foris*), entering inside oneself (*intus*), rising above oneself (*supra*).⁵² These three stages are an individual response to the previous and salvific actions of God, namely: creation, illumination and sanctification.

3.1. From the wandering outside to the inside of one's heart

Augustinian spirituality is a derivative of his anthropology, which is based on the conviction that God dwells in the heart of man. From this personal experience, purified and grounded in philosophical and theological reflection, the conviction arises that God can be found above all in the most intimate part of the heart. He is always there, even when man has made it a wasteland.⁵³

Augustine was deeply convinced that the path to God leads not so much through the outside world as through the inside of man. "First return to your heart."⁵⁴ It is not, of course, a matter of mere emotionality, but of involving the deepest subjectivity. Only a self-conscious person can experience the encounter with God. The author of "Confessions" describes the years of his own wandering: "And where was I when I was seeking You? And You were before me, but I had gone away even from myself; nor did I find myself, much less You!"⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Cf. *En. Ps.* 134, 11.

⁵¹ Cf. *Conf.* I, 1, 1.

⁵² Cf. *En. Ps.* 41, 7–8; *Ev. Io. Tr.* 20, 11–13.

⁵³ Cf. *Conf.* V, 2.2; *En. Ps.* 74, 9.

⁵⁴ *Ev. Io. Tr.* 18, 10: "Primo redi ad cor tuum."

⁵⁵ *Conf.* V, 2, 2: "Et ubi ego eram, quando te quaerebam? Et tu eras ante me, ego autem et a me discesseram nec me inveniebam: quanto minus te!"

According to the Bishop of Hippo, the main obstacle on the road to God is living outside oneself. Yes, the whole created world leads to God, “worships God,” but only man was created in His image and likeness. So by entering inside his heart, experiencing himself and the truth about himself, man discovers a reality greater than himself and can experience the truly intimate presence of God: “You were more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest.”⁵⁶

Augustine is aware that facing the truth of one’s heart, especially when this truth is bitter and painful, is acting against the spontaneous impulses and urges to run away into the ease of oblivion. Comparing heart to the “inner house” (*domus interior*) he writes so: “Whoever has a bad house in this, is driven out of doors. For whoever is oppressed within his heart by a bad conscience, just as any man in consequence of the overflow of a waterspout or of smoke goes out of his house, suffers not himself to dwell therein; so he who has not a quiet heart, cannot happily dwell in his heart.”⁵⁷

A consequence of the pathetic internal state is the tendency to live outside oneself and seek joy “in trifles, in spectacles, in luxuries, in all evils.”⁵⁸ Augustine warns against illusory sleepiness or heart being obscured by transient pleasures or practical atheism.⁵⁹ He considers the anxiety that arises in this state to be most welcome. For “a restless heart” forces man to search a source of peace and opens the way to conversion.

Returning to one’s own self, to the interior life, is a fundamental step on the road to God. However, it requires courage and self-denial, a struggle declared against easy life and conformism. Augustine is aware of this hardship, which he himself experienced. Therefore, he does not beguile anybody with cheap promises, but

⁵⁶ *Conf.* III, 6.11: “Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo.”

⁵⁷ *En. Ps.* 100, 4: “Hanc domum quisquis habet malam, pellitur ab illa foras. Quisquis enim in corde premitur mala conscientia, quomodo quisque ab stillicidio exit de domo sua, aut a fumo, non ibi se patitur habitare: sic qui non habet quietum cor, habitare in corde suo libenter non potest.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: “Tales foras exeunt a seipsis animi intentione, et de his quae foris sunt circa corpus delectantur; quietem in nugis, in spectaculis, in luxuriis, in omnibus malis quaerunt.”

⁵⁹ *Cf. En. Ps.* 106, 4.

prepares for this hardship wisely: "Yet in order for someone to come to know himself, he needs the great habit of withdrawing from the senses and of collecting his soul into himself and holding himself there."⁶⁰ Undertaking the effort of internal integration is, nevertheless, necessary because in a state of disorder and without the right disposition of the heart one cannot draw close to the truth.⁶¹

3.2. Internal healing: from sin towards righteousness

According to Augustine, a Christian is called upon to be internally integrated, emotionally and morally mature. Therefore, entering into oneself is a milestone, but it is only the beginning of the road. A man who takes a journey into his own heart decides to face the Truth. In the face of God, he discovers his inalienable dignity and most sublime vocation, but at the same time he learns about his own smallness and entanglement with evil. The experience of one's heart being split or torn thus becomes the beginning of the path of conversion, that is, the integration of the interior and its deep healing.⁶² "Our whole business then, Brethren, in this life is to heal this eye of the heart whereby God may be seen."⁶³

The very numerous references in Augustine's writings to the reality of the heart, also expressed by its synonyms, make it almost impossible to classify them exhaustively. However, the antithetical division of the heart's disposition according to the criterion of its conformity with God's Will is very clear.⁶⁴ One of the most important distinctions is heart *straightforward* (*cor rectum*) and

⁶⁰ Augustinus, *De Ordine Libri Duo* I, 1.3: "Qui tamen ut se noscat, magna opus habet consuetudine recedendi a sensibus, et animum in seipsum colligendi atque in seipso retinendi," transl.: <https://books.google.pl/books/yup?id=5IsAEAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁶¹ Cf. Augustinus, *De Agone Cristiano Liber Unus* 13.14.

⁶² Cf. G. Gillette, *Purity of Heart*, op. cit., 178–183; E. Moiseeva, *The inner life of sinners: Saint Augustine on penance as disciplina morum*, "Augustiniana" 69 (2019) no. 1, 29–54.

⁶³ *Sermo* 88, 5.5: "Tota igitur opera nostra, fratres, in hac vita est, sanare oculos cordis, unde videatur Deus."

⁶⁴ Cf. B. Król, „Serce” w „*Enarrationes in Psalmos*” św. Augustyna, "Studia Sandomierskie" 11 (2004) nb. 3, 77–79.

heart *twisted* (*cor non rectum / distortum / pravum / curvum*).⁶⁵ Augustine also points to a split heart (*duplex*) and simple (*simplex*)⁶⁶ and an impure (*immundum*) and pure (*mundum*)⁶⁷ heart, etc. The condition of the heart is particularly evident at the time of a trial. A man of an unrighteous heart, encountering unforeseen difficulties, begins to accuse God and deny His providence, instead of accepting His Will in humility, as did David when cursed by Shimei, the son of Gera, of the House of Saul.⁶⁸

Augustine, recalling the image of a warped board that does not fit into a straight floor, wants to illustrate the inability of *cor distortum* to fit into the righteousness of God.⁶⁹ In sharp words he criticises people with an unrighteous heart who want to bend God's commandments to their own plans and decisions. "The people with twisted hearts, the ones whose hearts are not straightforward, are those who sit and argue about how God ought to have acted. Instead of praising him for what he has done, they find fault with it. They want to put him right. Not content with simply refusing to be corrected by him, they go further."⁷⁰ The unrighteousness of Christians has most often a veiled form, for fear of public condemnation or contempt. However, such people live an inner lie, a kind of spiritual schizophrenia. Their hearts are split (*cor duplex*) because they declare their belonging to Christ, but they also leave room for the devil, for example through the practice of superstitions, magic, fortune-tellers, etc.⁷¹ The attraction to the pleasures of the flesh and earthly wealth makes the heart hard and heavy.⁷²

⁶⁵ Cf. *En. Ps.* 31 (2), 25; 44, 17; 77, 21; 93, 19; 100, 6.

⁶⁶ Cf. *En. Ps.* 133, 3; *De Sermone Domini in Monte* [=S. Dom. M.] II (many); *De Mendacio Liber Unus* 3, 3.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Sermo* 19, 3.

⁶⁸ Cf. *En. Ps.* 50, 15; *Ev. Io. Tr.* 25, 17; 28, 7.

⁶⁹ Cf. *En. Ps.* 44, 17.

⁷⁰ *En. Ps.* 124, 2: "Pravicordes ergo sunt, id est, qui rectum cor non habent, qui sedent et disputant quomodo debuit facere Deus; non laudando quod fecit, sed reprehendendo. Corrigere illum volunt: parum est quia corrigi ab eo nolunt," transl.: <https://books.google.pl/books?id=pcwHg1EszuQC&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁷¹ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 7, 7.

⁷² Cf. *En. Ps.* 4, 3; *Ev. Io. Tr.* 1, 7.

Moreover, there is no harmony between heart and lips.⁷³ The call to the conformity of speech and body gestures with the truth of the heart is in fact an invitation to the interiorisation of faith. Augustine stresses that it is not enough to manifest outwardly the signs of faith, such as the cross, but to mark the heart with it first, that is, to love humility.⁷⁴

On the contrary, *cor rectum*, no matter if God's will is sweet (*dulcis*) or bitter (*aegrotas*), always agrees with it.⁷⁵ This is not just about decisions and actions, although these are crucial in assessing the state of the heart. A kind of harmony is also achieved in the sphere of desire. The righteous heart seeks God for the sake of Himself, and not for the benefit or reward.⁷⁶ It is integrated, and its simplicity is expressed in the search for goodness in every act.⁷⁷ It pays no attention to human praise, but is guided only by the judgment of the conscience, trusting that God will one day reward it.⁷⁸ We are dealing here with a kind of synergy, because seeking God results in the purification of the heart. "His heart was right and straight because it was fixed in God. God is right and straight, so when you fix your heart in him he becomes a pattern for you, on which you can straighten your heart. Establish your heart, then, and it will be straight."⁷⁹

Both reflections and observations, as well as personal experience, led Augustine to believe that the heart is the cradle of bad thoughts, images and desires.⁸⁰ From his writings a long list of "heart diseases" can be drawn up, the common denominator of which is the inability to know the divine realities. That is why the purity of heart, consisting in seeing God, is not so much a state as a desire.

⁷³ Cf. *En. Ps.* 74, 9.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 3, 2.

⁷⁵ Cf. *En. Ps.* 35, 16.

⁷⁶ Cf. *En. Ps.* 77, 21.

⁷⁷ Cf. *S. Dom. M.* II, 11; *En. Ps.* 4, 9.

⁷⁸ Cf. *En. Ps.* 72, 32–33; 55, 17.

⁷⁹ *En. Ps.* 93, 19: "Quia fixum cor in Deo, ideo rectum: quia enim rectus est Deus, quando in illo figis cor, forma tibi sit, ut sit tibi cor rectum Fige ergo cor tuum in illo, et rectum cor erit."

⁸⁰ Cf. *En. Ps.* 102, 6.

Man is unable to achieve true peace of heart on earth. Even when he wants to be good, he is often overwhelmed by various dilemmas and temptations. The heart is therefore a battlefield.⁸¹ In a way against one's will, bad thoughts and feelings somehow get through to the heart. It is necessary to fight them persistently, which brings with it the possibility of injuries and internal suffering. In order to illustrate these violent feelings, which flood the heart of a good man, Augustine referred to the episode of the storm on the lake (cf. Mk 4:35–41). In his metaphorical interpretation, “wind” symbolises unjust invectives, while “waves, flooding the boat” mean anger and desire for retaliation that takes control of the heart.⁸² The Bishop of Hippo emphasised that the only rescue if one does not want to succumb to the temptation to respond to evil is to “awake Christ,” i.e., have recourse to faith,⁸³ because it alone opens the heart to receive grace.⁸⁴

Indeed, Christ is a *medicus interior*,⁸⁵ who heals all weaknesses and tears iniquity out from the heart without disturbing the free will, drawn by the most sublime sweetness.⁸⁶ The healing of the heart, that is, overcoming the chronic illness of sin, is not the end of the process of sanctification. Man's ultimate goal is infinitely loftier and reaching beyond himself. Augustine stresses that the road to God leads through the heart.⁸⁷

This is the most important and ultimate step in the Augustinian spirituality. Man is not called to achieve a human perfection of some kind, but to be unified with God. This key point of Augustine's thought, in a way his personal manifesto, finds its expression in one of his first works, the “Soliloquies,” being a record of an internal dialogue: “Behold I have prayed to God. *What then would you*

⁸¹ Cf. *En. Ps.* 99, 11.

⁸² Cf. *En. Ps.* 54, 10; 108, 5.

⁸³ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 49, 19.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 39, 3.

⁸⁵ Cf. R. Arbesmann, *The Concept of “Christus medicus” in St. Augustine*, “*Traditio. Studies in ancient and medieval history, thought and religion*” 10 (1954), 1–28; *Christ, the “Medicus humilis” in St. Augustine*, in: *Augustinus Magister*, vol. 2, Paris 1954, 623–629.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Conf.* IX, 1.1.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Sermo* 311, 14.13: “Redi ad cor, et inde ad Deum.”

know? [...] God and the soul, that is what I desire to know. *Nothing more?* Nothing whatever."⁸⁸

Out of this personal desire one of the best-known prayers grew: "God, always the same, let me know myself, let me know You."⁸⁹

These two realities: God and man, are always connected. Augustine studied the heart of man to know God; he tried to know God to understand man. God's transcendence is always combined with His immanence. God is Existence, therefore by His nature He transcends everything; but He is also a Creative Power and therefore, by His nature, He is present everywhere, especially in man. He is present and absent at the same time: because He is present – man knows Him, because He is absent – man is always searching for Him.

Philosophical reflection and experience of faith led Augustine to the point where these two realities meet most fully, the point where human reason is embraced by the light of revelation. This point is Christ, the Only-begotten image of the invisible God, God who has become man. Augustine confessed: "And I sought a way of acquiring strength sufficient to enjoy You; but I found it not until I embraced that *Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus* (1Tm 2:5) who is over all, *God blessed for ever* (Rom 9:5)."⁹⁰

Christ's salvific role, according to Augustine, consists not only in His overcoming sin and redeeming the whole world, but in being the one who has the power to transform every human heart. "Christ was born; let no one hesitate to be reborn."⁹¹ Augustine's description of this "rebirth" is one of the most beautiful pages of his "Confessions," pages full of admiration and a passionate desire for God:

"Too late did I love You, O Fairness, so ancient, and yet so new! Too late did I love You! For behold, You were within,

⁸⁸ Augustinus, *Soliloquiorum Libri Duo* I, 2.7: "Ecce oravi Deum. *Quid ergo scire vis?* Deum et animam scire cupio. *Nihilne plus?* Nihil omnino."

⁸⁹ *Soliloquiorum Libri Duo* II, 1.1: "Deus semper idem, noverim me, noverim te."

⁹⁰ *Conf.* VII, 18.24: "Et quaerebam viam comparandi roboris, quod esset idoneum ad fruendum te, nec inveniebam, donec amplecterer *mediatorem Dei et hominum, hominem Christum Iesum, qui est super omnia Deus benedictus in saecula.*"

⁹¹ *Sermo* 189, 3: "Nemo dubitet renasci, Christus natus est."

and I without, and there did I seek You; I, unlovely, rushed heedlessly among the things of beauty You made. You were with me, but I was not with You. Those things kept me far from You, which, unless they were in You, were not. You called, and cried aloud, and forced open my deafness. You gleamed and shine, and chase away my blindness. You exhaled odours, and I drew in my breath and do pant after You. I tasted, and do hunger and thirst. You touched me, and I burned for Your peace.”⁹²

The return to the heart and discovering the Uncreated Beauty there is the beginning of a long road of making the heart conform to the image of God. In *Sermon 20*, Augustine gives guidance based on *Psalms 50:12: Create, God, a pure heart in me*. He stresses that the author of the Psalm is a man who has fallen, repents and wants to regain lost hope. He does not justify his sin, does not pass the blame on to others, but begs for great mercy. “Great mercy is implored by a great sinner. It is a serious wound that requires serious treatment.”⁹³ That is why it is necessary to stand in the truth, as it were, to put oneself before the court of one’s own heart and condemn one’s own sin.

Augustine points to three temptations and dangers arising in the situation after sin:

- self-justification or passing the blame on to someone or something else;
- despair, i.e., loss of hope for forgiveness;
- leniency or exaggerated hope, i.e., the conviction that God always forgives, even without the repentance of the heart and the desire to improve.

⁹² *Conf. X, 27.38*: “Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi! Et ecce intus eras et ego foris et ibi te quaerebam et in ista formosa, quae fecisti, deformis irrueram. 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; fragrasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelo tibi, gustavi, et esurio et sitio, tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam.”

⁹³ *Sermo 20, 2*: „Magnam misericordiam magnus peccator implorat. Magnam medicinam magnum vulnus desiderat,” transl. E. Hill, *The works of Saint Augustine: Sermons on the Old Testament*, vol. II (20–50), New York: New City Press 1990, p. 16.

In consequence, such attitudes of heart lead to the further kindling of passions and all kinds of sinful acts. Aware of this, Augustine was looking for a safe place to avoid the trap leading to destruction.⁹⁴ In his opinion, it is to be found in the immediate repentance and cry of the heart for forgiveness that God willingly gives. "You rise better, if He raises you who falls not. For He who falls not descends unto you."⁹⁵

3.3. Widening the heart for God's love

The path of internal improvement does not end with a return to the heart and its integration. Augustine is not a eulogist of spiritual narcissism or, in the language of psychology, of sinking into the subjective self. The call to return to oneself is not an invitation to an egotistical and self-centred dance around one's own plans, problems, worries, expectations and hopes. The next stage, which begins on earth but never ends, is drawing closer to God:

"Return to your heart: why go from yourselves, and perish from yourselves? Why go the ways of solitude? You go astray by wandering: return. Where? To the Lord."⁹⁶

The ultimate goal, and at the same time the reward for anyone who has loved God with a pure heart, will be to be united with God and to see Him as He is.⁹⁷ The full state of purity of heart will only be achieved in the *eschaton*. On earth its perfection is a constant desire. Therefore the heart should be constantly purified by prayer and fed by the Word of God and follow the path of humility. In this way it is prepared to receive Christ, who takes it as His dwelling-place: "Cleanse your heart so that He Himself may enlighten you, that He whom you invoke may take possession of you. Be you His

⁹⁴ Cf. *Sermo* 20, 4.

⁹⁵ *En. Ps.* 95, 7: "Melius surgis, si te ille erigat qui non cadit. Descendit enim ad te ille qui non cadit."

⁹⁶ *Ev. Io. Tr.* 18, 10: "Redite ad cor: quid itis a vobis, et peritis ex vobis? quid itis solitudinis vias? Erratis vagando; redite. Quo? Ad Dominum."

⁹⁷ Cf. *En. Ps.* 55, 17.

dwelling place and He will be your dwelling place.”⁹⁸ The heart cleansed from sin becomes the dwelling place of God: “Where does God dwell, except in His temple? What is His temple? Is it surrounded with walls? [...] And wherein is He contained? In the quiet soul, in the righteous soul: that is it that contains Him.”⁹⁹

The constant presence of God in the heart is the fruit of faith which works through love.¹⁰⁰ When faith is strong, it bears the fruit of peace, but when it weakens and “falls asleep,” storms and anxieties break out. Augustine, especially in the context of the Pelagian controversy, stressed the primacy of God’s grace. He pointed to the Holy Spirit as the one who always leads and accompanies man in his spiritual progress, helps to overcome his weaknesses, strengthens his powers and leads him to holiness, which is love flowing from a pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith (1Tim 1:5). Augustine even believed that such love would not end with death, but would continue to grow, for it is the Holy Spirit who is its inexhaustible source.¹⁰¹

The concern to demonstrate God’s prior grace in relation to human merits also emerges from the commentaries to Psalm 118. Analysing verse 32, Augustine spoke of the dilatation of the heart (*dilatatio cordis*): “The widening of the heart is the delight we take in righteousness. This is the gift of God, the effect of which is, that we are not straitened in His commandments through the fear of punishment, but widened through love, and the delight we have in righteousness.”¹⁰² He stresses that man multiplies good not by his own power and strength. It is the Holy Spirit himself, who is love, who writes God’s Law in human hearts. It is not an external precept

⁹⁸ Cf. *En. Ps.* 30 (4), 8: “Purgate cor, ut ipse illuminet, et quem invocatis intret. Esto domus eius, et erit domus tua: habitet in te, et tu habitabis in eo,” transl.: S. Hebgin, F. Corrigan, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, vol. II (Psalms 30–37), Ancient Christian Writers, New York: The Newman Press 1960, p. 53.

⁹⁹ *En. Ps.* 92, 6: “Ubi habitat Deus, nisi in templo suo? Quod est templum eius? Parietibus instruitur? Absit. [...] Et ubi capitur? In anima quieta, in anima iusta: ipsa illum portat.”

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *En. Ps.* 108, 32; *Sermo* 53, 10.11.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Augustinus, *De Natura et Gratia Liber Unus* 70, 84.

¹⁰² *En. Ps.* 118 (10), 6: “Cordis dilatatio, iustitiae est delectatio. Haec munus est Dei, ut in praeceptis eius non timore poenae angustemur, sed dilectione, et delectatione iustitiae dilatemur.”

that must be memorized, but an internal precept that translates into concrete life. The Bishop of Hippo repeatedly stressed the role of love which widens the heart, as opposed to the fear that closes it.¹⁰³ He considered it senseless to fear that the Holy Spirit coming to the heart might limit its space. He is certainly neither an intruder nor a despot. He does not destroy human freedom, but actually enhances it. For when he tears sadness out of one’s heart, He expands it and fills it with joy.¹⁰⁴

A heart filled with love, that is to say, with the Holy Spirit, is open and dilated.¹⁰⁵ However, because of its past condition, it can experience scruples.¹⁰⁶ Remorse clearly shows how difficult and painful it is to progress in holiness. It is a constant pilgrimage, climbing to the top on the path of truth and humility. In his commentaries on the Gradual Psalms, written probably between 406 and 407, Augustine described the rising of the heart, starting from the valley of crying, which symbolises the need for humility, to the heights of God himself, revealed in Christ.¹⁰⁷ Progress on this path is the fruit of love, regress – the result of pride.¹⁰⁸

The concept of the ascent of the soul to God is not uniform in Augustine’s thought.¹⁰⁹ In the writings composed in the first years after his conversion it is very much permeated with philosophical terminology. After taking over the bishopric of Hippo, the foundation of his reflections was essentially the Holy Scriptures. The “Commentaries on the Psalms” written in 392–418 reflect very clearly his internal evolution. It is not possible to render in a few sentences all the richness of his ascetic and mystical concepts. Among Augustine’s key indications concerning the development of the spiritual life, it seems worthwhile to distinguish three,

¹⁰³ Cf. *En. Ps.* 118 (11), 1; M. Pellegrino, “*Sursum cor*” nelle opere di sant’Agostino, “*Revue d’Études Augustiniennes et Patristiques*” 50 (2004) no. 1, 179–206.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Sermo* 169, 12.15.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *En. Ps.* 4, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *En. Ps.* 45, 3–4.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *En. Ps.* 119, 1; 120, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *En. Ps.* 120, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Frederick Van Fleteren, *Ascesa dell’anima*, in: A. Fitzgerald, *Agostino: dizionario*, op. cit., 239–245.

corresponding to the elements of his anthropology described above. What mean is prayer (purification of the image of God in the heart), humility (imitation of Christ) and love (submission to the guidance of the Holy Spirit). These three key elements of the Christian life are interconnected and condition each other.

3.3.1. Prayer

Augustine did not leave any treatise on prayer, although the *Letter 130: To Proba* could be regarded as one. The most comprehensive expression of his reflections, spiritual experiences, meditations, meditations on the Word of God is certainly his “Commentaries on the Psalms,” written for over a quarter of a century. And many examples of personal prayer are contained in the “Confessions.”

From the writings of the bishop of Hippo emerges the reality of prayer understood as a daily “food” of the Christian.¹¹⁰ Even though there are different forms of prayer, the most lofty one is worship. It is its true goal, as it expresses a total and selfless dedication to God.¹¹¹ The heart, thanks to such prayer, is constantly purified of former attachments, kindled with the love of God and filled with the desire to sing a joyful *Hallelujah* through the entire eternity.¹¹² Augustine stresses that not only the words we utter, but the very desire of God – even the one that is not fully realised – is prayer.¹¹³ Although God knows man’s needs, even before they are spoken, he wants man’s desire to be constantly exercised in order to receive a gift from Him.¹¹⁴ Prayer must not be chaotic, but systematically

¹¹⁰ More: cf. R. Weaver, *Preghiera*, in: A. Fitzgerald, *Agostino: dizionario*, op. cit., 1151–1156; T.A. Hand, *St. Augustine on Prayer*, Westminster: Newman Press, 1963; A.-M. Besnard, *Saint Augustin: Prier Dieu*, Paris: Cerf, 1964; G. Antoni, *La prière chez saint Augustin. D’une philosophie du langage à la théologie du Verbe*, Paris: J. Vrin, 1997.

¹¹¹ Cf. *S. Dom. M.* II, 2, 15.

¹¹² Cf. *Sermo* 252, 9; *En. Ps.* 86, 9.

¹¹³ Cf. *En. Ps.* 37, 14.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Epistula* 130, 8.17: “exerceri in orationibus desiderium nostrum, quo possimus capere quod praeparat dare.”

nourished and formed by the teaching of the Holy Scripture.¹¹⁵ Saint Augustine points to the Lord's Prayer as a model, whose individual invocations determine the nature and directions of the development of Christian spirituality.¹¹⁶

3.3.2. Humility

Prayer nourished with the Word of God is inseparably connected with the attitude of humility,¹¹⁷ which makes it possible to find delight in God's beauty and get to know the truth of one's heart. Humility is necessary not only for the transformation of life, but also for the study of Scripture. Augustine confesses that it was precisely because of his youthful pride that he was not open to the wisdom contained in God's Word: "when as a lad I wanted to tackle the divine scriptures with the techniques of clever disputation before bringing to them the spirit of earnest inquiry. [...] I was presuming to seek in my pride what can only be found by humility."¹¹⁸

The primacy of God at every stage of salvation, both universal and individual, makes humility, according to Augustine, a *sine qua non* condition not only for spiritual development, but for Christian life in general.¹¹⁹ Humility has to precede, accompany and follow every good deed.¹²⁰ It is a guiding virtue, because it imitates the kenosis of Christ, which is a model for the formation of the Word of God in the human heart. "He that comes to me becomes humble; he who adheres to me will be humble, because he does not his own

¹¹⁵ Cf. M. Cameron (ed.), *Essential Expositions of the Psalms by Saint Augustine*, New York: New City Press, 2015, 17–24.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Sermo* 56, 3.4; *Epistula* 130, 11–12.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *En. Ps.* 74.2. More: D.W. Reddy, *Umiltà*, in: A. Fitzgerald, *Agostino: dizionario*, op. cit., 1414–1422; P. Andès, *L'humilité à l'école de saint Augustine*, "Revue d'ascétique et de mystique" 31 (1955), 28–46; J.A. Galindo Rodrigo, *La humildad en san Agustín*, "Teología Espiritual" 30 (1986), 207–220.

¹¹⁸ *Sermo* 51, 5.6: "Cum primo puer ad divinas Scripturas ante vellem afferre acumen discutiendi, quam pietatem quaerendi [...]. Superbus enim audebam quaerere, quod nisi humilis non potest invenire."

¹¹⁹ Cf. *En. Ps.* 31 (2), 11; *Ev. Io. Tr.* 15, 25; 81, 2.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Epistula* 118, 3.22.

will, but the will of God.”¹²¹ Augustine assures everybody of the Saviour’s special support for those who follow the path of being humble. “If you lift yourself high up, he withdraws far away from you; if you humble yourself low, he bends down to you.”¹²² At the same time he warns against the danger of pride¹²³ and even its sublime form of false humility. The latter is an attitude which poisons good deeds with a surreptitious search for one’s own glory.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, true humility, marked by solidarity with one’s neighbour, is intended to worship God, who exalts his faithful at the right time.

3.3.3. Love

In his quest, Augustine wanted to find the most universal truths and basic principles from which he could derive all the others. Just as the heart was for him a symbol of the inner man, so love (*amor, caritas, dilectio*) was a fundamental attitude towards God, one’s neighbour and oneself.¹²⁵ “Therefore love your neighbour; look at the source of your love of your neighbour; there you will see, as you may, God.”¹²⁶

According to Augustine, the aim of all biblical teaching is the call for building on love. “The fulfillment and the end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is love [...]. Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such

¹²¹ *Ev. Io. Tr.* 25, 16: “qui ad me venit, humilis fit; qui mihi adhaeret, humilis erit; quia non facit voluntatem suam, sed Dei.”

¹²² *Sermo* 21, 2: “Si extollis te, longe secedit a te; si humilias te, inclinat se ad te,” transl. E. Hill, *Sermones on the Old Testament* (vol. II), New York: New City Press 1990, p. 30.

¹²³ Cf. *En. Ps.* 124, 1.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Epistula* 118, 3. 22.

¹²⁵ Cf. T. J. Van Bavel, *Amore*, in: A. Fitzgerald, *Agostino: dizionario*, op. cit., 175–186; A. Solignac, *La conception augustinienne de l’amour*, “Bibliothèque Augustinienne” 14 (1962), 617–622; S. Kowalczyk, *Koncepcja miłości św. Augustyna jako węzłowej aktywizującej wartości życia ludzkiego*, “Vox Patrum” 4 (1984) vol. 6–7, 187–207; R. Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine*, Heverlee–Leuven 1993.

¹²⁶ *Ev. Io. Tr.* 17, 8: “Dilige ergo proximum: et intueri in te unde diligis proximum; ibi videbis, ut poteris, Deum.”

an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought."¹²⁷

In Christ God has revealed most fully that He is Love. Without love He is incomprehensible. Therefore, in the Christian version, it is such a fundamental attitude that it even determines proper cognition, "for the only way to truth is by love."¹²⁸ Love of oneself is a natural commandment.¹²⁹ However, it finds its basis and fulfilment only in the love of God with all one's heart, which we are enabled to by Christ. Analysing the dynamics of the Lord's Nativity, Augustine stresses the importance of openness and human involvement: "He wishes to be entertained at your house; make room for Him. What is, *make room for Him?* Love not yourself, love Him."¹³⁰

Love is the greatest commandment, because it unites the heart with its object, i.e. God Himself, and allows one to participate in His life.¹³¹ Because this is man's ultimate purpose, therefore loving God with all one's heart is the true love of oneself. Egoism, despite the apparent concern for oneself, is in fact a form of self-hatred.¹³² In contrast, self-denial for God is an expression of love.¹³³ This is the logic behind the key idea of Augustine's monumental work, "The City of God":

¹²⁷ Augustinus, *De Doctrina Christiana Libri Quatuor* [= *Doctr. Chr.*] I, 35, 39 – 36, 40: "Legis et omnium divinarum Scripturarum plenitudo et finis esse dilectio [...] Quisquis igitur Scripturas divinas vel quamlibet earum partem intellexisse sibi videtur, ita ut eo intellectu non aedificet istam geminam caritatem Dei et proximi, nondum intellexit."

¹²⁸ Augustinus, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum Libri Triginta Tres* [= *C. Faust.*] 32, 18: "non intratur in veritatem nisi per caritatem."

¹²⁹ Cf. *C. Faust.* 21, 5; *Doctr. Chr.* I, 24, 24.

¹³⁰ *En. Ps.* 131, 6: "Hospitari apud te vult; fac illi locum. Quid est, fac illi locum? Noli amare teipsum, illum ama."

¹³¹ Cf. *Ep. Io. Tr.* 8, 14.

¹³² Cf. *En. Ps.* 11, 5; *De Trinitate Libri Quindecim* [= *Trin.*] XIV, 14.18.

¹³³ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 51, 10.

“Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.”¹³⁴

For Augustine, love is not a sublime feeling, nor is it an attitude of spiritual egocentrism that feeds on pride dressed in the robe of piety. True love is open to others and is proved in the vicissitudes of life. Although love of God is first in the order of precepts (*ordo praecipendi*), love of neighbour has priority in execution (*ordo faciendi*).¹³⁵ Based on the theology of Saint John (1 Jn 4:20), Augustine demonstrated the profound inner unity of the two commandments and claimed that he who loves his brother at the same time sees God who is love.¹³⁶ At the same time he stressed that the words of Christ “as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12) are the measure and model of love. Perfect love, compared with that of the purely human one, is not confined to man and his temporal capacities, but its ultimate aim is to bring man to God, so that He *may be all in all* (1 Cor 15:28).¹³⁷ The Bishop of Hippo also maintained that the inner presence of the Holy Spirit is the root from which the sprouts of human love and the fruit of good deeds grow.¹³⁸

Monastic life was a particular form of implementation of the commandment of love for Augustine, the ideal of which he found in the verse of Acts 4:32. He stressed that it is a radical form of Christian life, consisting in the union of hearts that realise the love instilled in them by the Spirit, which is at the same time an image of the union of the Three Divine Persons.¹³⁹

Love was for Augustine the way to know the greatest mystery of the Holy Trinity: “you see the Trinity, if you see love.”¹⁴⁰ The reflection on Trinitology is a separate chapter in the thought and

¹³⁴ *De Civitate Dei Contra Paganos Libri XXII* 14, 28: “Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo, terrenam scilicet amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, caelestem vero amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui.”

¹³⁵ Cf. *Sermo* 265, 8.9; *Ev. Io. Tr.* 17, 8.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Ep. Io. Tr.* 5, 7.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 83, 3.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Ev. Io. Tr.* 87, 1; *En. Ps.* 51, 12.

¹³⁹ Cf. M. F. Berrouard, *La première communauté de Jérusalem comme image de l'unité de la Trinité. Une des exégèses augustinienne d'Act 4, 32a*, Würzburg 1987, 207–224.

¹⁴⁰ *De Trinitate Libri Quindecim* VIII, 8.12: “vides Trinitatem, si caritatem vides.”

spirituality of the great Bishop of Hippo. However, it is worthwhile to conclude by emphasizing the deeply personal and relational concept of the Trinity, which corresponds to Augustine's reflections on the pure and loving heart.

"By means of love, which in the Holy Scriptures is called God, by which, first of all, those who have understanding begin also, however feebly, to discern the Trinity, to wit, one that loves, and that which is loved, and love."¹⁴¹

This Love, the Holy Spirit, when he fills the heart, expands it. Therefore, the process of growth does not end on earth, but will continue in eternity, because love connects earth to heaven and the heart of man to God.

Conclusion

"Heart" (*cor*) is one of the key but ambiguous terms in the anthropology and spirituality of St. Augustine. It appears many times and in various contexts as a symbol of the inner man (*homo interior*), being the focus of all his dimensions: carnal, affective, volitional, intellectual, spiritual.

The analysis of Augustine's writings shows the link between his Trinitarian concept and the indications concerning the spiritual life of man. Reflections on the "heart" can be put into a kind of triptych: creation in the "image of God," illumination by Christ, dilatation by the Holy Spirit. God's impact on the human heart should find its fulfilment in a voluntarily adopted attitude of praise, humility and love. The Augustinian term *cor* expresses the dynamics and personal aspect of man's relationship with God:

"*No man has seen God at any time* (1 Jn 4:12): He is a thing invisible; not with the eye but with the heart must He be sought. [...] wishing to see God, let us purge the eye by which God can be seen. Where is this eye? Hear the Gospel: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Matt 5,8) [...] There is something you may imagine, if you would see God. *God is Love* (1 Jn 4,16). [...] he that

¹⁴¹ *De Trinitate Libri Quindecim* XV, 3.5: "per caritatem, quae in Scripturis sanctis Deus dicta est, per quam coepit utcumque etiam Trinitas intellegentibus apparere, sicut sunt amans, et quod amatur, et amor."

has charity sees the whole at once. Inhabit, and you shall be inhabited; dwell, and you shall be dwelt in.”¹⁴²

¹⁴² *Ep. Io. Tr. 7, 10*: “*Deum nemo vidit unquam*: res est invisibilis; non oculo, sed corde quaerendus est. [...] volentes videre Deum, oculum quo Deus videri potest, purgemus. Ubi est iste oculus? Audi Evangelium: *Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt*. [...] Est quod cogites, si vis videre Deum: *Deus Dilectio est*. [...] intellectu totum simul videt qui habet caritatem. Habita, et inhabitaberis; mane, et manebitur in te.”