



# WINNOWING FAN

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## NEW EVANGELIZATION

PART NINETEEN

### The Importance of Conversion - The Conversion of St. Augustine

The 'Year of Faith' had begun. The Holy Father had given his opening address repeating the importance of 'Conversion,' the first step in the whole process of Evangelization. In a Mass at the Vatican with participants of the Bishop's Synod attending, the Pope received a portrait of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness under whose protection the "New Evangelization" leading to "Porta Fidei" had been entrusted. We shall see later the significance of this gesture. But today everybody is talking about something

else. A bishop in a large diocese here, talking in Catholic TV mentioned 'the New Evangelization' and wandered off to the hermeneutics of discontinuity. He cleverly started with the hermeneutics of continuity, which the Pope says is the right one, then slowly switched into the hermeneutics of discontinuity without anyone noticing the excursion into dangerous heretical grounds. Bishops with rejected pet projects during Vatican II had not stopped insisting on their ideas up to the present and will do so again during the Bishop's Synod. This bishop is known to belong to the Bologna group that believes in the hermeneutics of discontinuity. Another young bishop from the States had, also, openly declared that everything before

Vatican II was horrible while everything after Vatican II is heavenly. No different from the hermeneutics of discontinuity which the Pope had contradicted in many of his talks.

We have presented St. Therese as the model of conversion. Though she was the most natural in her conversion she is not the model for most conversions. St. Augustine is the model for most. Like St. Therese he was born with the semi-permanent state of having a mind conscious of ONESELF face to face with the Creator who is superior to oneself. Augustine, also, had the humble attitude of wishing to submit himself to the superior Creator but his natural desire to submit himself did not persist, maybe

due to an unnatural environment since he lived in a pagan age. Because his father was a pagan, though his mother was a devout Christian, Augustine did not get a thorough Christian education. And so, his natural situation, where his mind was conscious of the MYSELF face to face with God the Creator plus his decision to submit himself to the Creator did not last long enough for him to maintain his humility and make him deserving of the initial grace of conversion. In no time, he lost all: his mind's consciousness of himself, his mind's consciousness of the greatness of his Creator and his consciousness of his obligation to submit himself to the Creator. His mind wandered far and wide.

While wandering far and wide the above natural thoughts were forgotten but were permanently registered in his memory. That is what memory is for. Let us go back briefly to St. Therese. St. Therese's mind was focused on the "MYSELF" and at the same time was face to face with God, the Creator of the self to which she must subject herself totally. Of course at her early age her knowledge of 'MYSELF' and of God was insignificant, but it was not that but the assent of her mind and consent of

her will, of which she was competent to do at her earliest age, that made her worthy to receive the grace from God that began her conversion.

Prior to his conversion St. Augustine confessed to his inability to think of God as a spiritual substance or of the human blessedness reserved for those destined to be saved.

In the case of St. Augustine, his mind was on the 'MYSELF' face to face with the Creator. His knowledge of the MYSELF and of the Creator was according to his very young age. But he was not able to make the assent of his mind and the consent of his Will to the truth he was faced with. And so we would suppose that he did not receive the grace of conversion from God. Thus he went on his wanderings away from God.

In Augustine's quest for all kinds of truths he wandered away from God, searching among all the garbage in the world until completely dissipated by his useless search he began to recall his youth and the thoughts he had during that time. He remembered his thoughts

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St. Teresa of Avila

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about himself which grew as it accumulated during the years. He, also, recalled the God he was face to face with which also grew during the passage of time. Of course, by the time he was an adult his knowledge of himself and of God was still full of errors. So an assent of the mind and a consent of the Will towards those errors would be useless. Augustine was moved to return to the Scriptures where his errors were dissipated. Once again he had a natural knowledge of the 'MYSELF', improved this time due to his excursions into different philosophies especially of Plato. Also improved was his natural knowledge of God, his Creator. Then his mind made its assent and his will made its consent to subject himself completely to the God he now knew again. He had begun to be a child again and received the grace because it is for such as this that the Kingdom of God is for, as Christ would say. Because the mind of St. Augustine was very mature during this time his assent was more mature and his consent was more mature in which case the grace with the accompanying Faith he received from God was more mature.

As St. Augustine described it: he came unto himself and rediscovered his nature as a man. But most importantly he discovered his personality which had for a moment during his restless years deteriorated into unnaturalness. But with his retreats in the mountains of Cassiciacum, while his human nature remained the same, his personality that made up his humanity together with his human nature learned to love. That was a great improvement from the initial

conversion he had experienced in Milan. This was an improvement not in his nature but in his personality. The former cannot be improved as it is, the latter can be improved depending on the object of its love.

Here St. Augustine showed his greatest fear. Realizing that grace for initial conversion that will guide a soul all through Faith, Hope, Charity and Eternal Life is given freely by God, he asked why does God give it to some and not to others. In humility he answers: that is not for us to ask of our Creator. Even if God answered we would not understand His answer. As for us we know that God gives it to those who have become like children because it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

Prior to his conversion St. Augustine confessed to his inability to think of God as a spiritual substance or of the human blessedness reserved for those destined to be saved. Without conversion a soul is completely ignorant of the spiritual world.

St. Augustine's conversion is similar to that of the Prodigal Son. Blessed John Cardinal Newman's was slightly different but likewise outstanding. For many Catholics today, the three above models are very difficult to duplicate that is why there is a need for a "New Evangelization". This is not essentially different from that of the Prodigal Son. The difference is only similar to the difference between the monasticism of John Climacus and the monasticism of Saint Benedict.

## SERMON *in a sentence*

So it is with all holy men, they love to be not where sumptuous banquets are, but where holiness flourishes.

Discord, whereby a man holds to his own way of thinking, and departs from that of others, is reckoned to be a daughter of vainglory.

Without grace it is impossible to avoid sins.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty of death, the uncertainty of the judgment conduces to watchfulness.

Exaltation in this life does not lessen the reward of the other life, except for him who seeks his own glory from that exaltation: whereas he who turns that exaltation to the profit of others acquires thereby a reward for himself.

Life is God's gift to man, and is subject to His power. . . . The passage from this life to another and happier one is subject not to man's free-will but to the power of God.

Natural reason tells man that he is subject to a higher being, on

account of the defects which he perceives in himself, and in which he needs help and direction from someone above him.

If we obtain something from God through His eternal will, it is due, not to our merits, but to His goodness.

Those who represent themselves as being greater than they are, are a source of annoyance to others, since they seem to wish to surpass others: whereas those who make less account of themselves are a source of pleasure, since they seem to defer to others by their moderation.

Humility makes us honor others and esteem them better than ourselves, in so far as we see some of God's gifts in them.

Pride is accounted the common mother of all sins.

To fall away from reverence for Him is the first part of pride.

God alone is perfect. . . . Humility, considered as a special virtue, regards chiefly the subjection of man to God.

We may consider two things in man, namely that which is God's and that which is man's. Whatever pertains to defect is man's: but whatever pertains to man's welfare and perfection is God's.

