

~Other Speakers A-F: St. Augustine:

10. Thus I fell among men, delirious in their pride, carnal and voluble, whose mouths were the snares of the devil--a trap made out of a mixture of the syllables of thy name and the names of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Paraclete.[65] These names were never out of their mouths, but only as sound and the clatter of tongues, for their heart was empty of truth. Still they cried, "Truth, Truth," and were forever speaking the word to me. But the thing itself was not in them. Indeed, they spoke falsely not only of thee--who truly art the Truth--but also about the basic elements of this world, thy creation. And, indeed, I should have passed by the philosophers themselves even when they were speaking truth concerning thy creatures, for the sake of thy love, O Highest Good, and my Father, O Beauty of all things beautiful.

O Truth, Truth, how inwardly even then did the marrow of my soul sigh for thee when, frequently and in manifold ways, in numerous and vast books, [the Manicheans] sounded out thy name though it was only a sound! And in these dishes--while I starved for thee--they served up to me, in thy stead, the sun and moon thy beautiful works--but still only thy works and not thyself; indeed, not even thy first work. For thy spiritual works came before these material creations, celestial and shining though they are. But I was hungering and thirsting, not even after those first works of thine, but after thyself the Truth, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." [66] Yet they still served me glowing fantasies in those dishes. And, truly, it would have been better to have loved this very sun--which at least is true to our sight--than those illusions of theirs which deceive the mind through the eye. And yet because I supposed the illusions to be from thee I fed on them--not with avidity, for thou didst not taste in my mouth as thou art, and thou wast not these empty fictions. Neither was I nourished by them, but was instead exhausted. Food in dreams appears like our food awake; yet the sleepers are not nourished by it, for they are asleep. But the fantasies of the Manicheans were not in any way like thee as thou hast spoken to me now. They were simply fantastic and false. In comparison to them the actual bodies which we see with our fleshly sight, both celestial and terrestrial, are far more certain. These true bodies even the beasts and birds perceive as well as we do and they are more certain than the images we form about them. And again, we do with more certainty form our conceptions about them than, from them, we go on by means of them to imagine of other greater and infinite bodies which have no existence. With such empty husks was I then fed, and yet was not fed.

But thou, my Love, for whom I longed in order that I might be strong, neither art those bodies that we see in heaven nor art thou those which we do not see there, for thou hast created them all and yet thou reckonest them not among thy greatest works. How far, then, art thou from those fantasies of mine, fantasies of bodies which have no real being at all! The images of those bodies which actually exist are far more certain than these fantasies. The bodies themselves are more certain than the images, yet even these thou art not. Thou art not even the soul, which is the life of bodies; and, clearly, the life of the body is better than the body itself. But thou art the life of souls, life of lives, having life in thyself, and never changing, O Life of my soul.[67]

11. Where, then, wast thou and how far from me? Far, indeed, was I wandering away from thee, being barred even from the husks of those swine whom I fed with husks.[68] For how much better were the fables of the grammarians and poets than these snares [of the Manicheans]! For verses and poems and "the flying Medea"[69] are still more profitable truly than these men's "five elements," with their various colors, answering to "the five caves of darkness"[70] (none of which exist and yet in which they slay the one who believes in them). For verses and poems I can turn into food for the mind, for though I sang about "the flying Medea" I never believed it, but those other things [the fantasies of the Manicheans] I did believe. Woe, woe, by what steps I was dragged down to "the depths of hell"[71]--toiling and fuming because of my lack of the truth, even when I was seeking after thee, my God! To thee I now confess it, for thou didst have mercy on me when I had not yet confessed it. I sought after thee, but not according to the understanding of the mind, by means of which thou hast willed that I should excel the beasts, but only after the guidance of my physical senses. Thou wast more inward to me than the most inward part of me; and higher than my highest reach. I came upon that brazen woman, devoid of prudence, who, in Solomon's obscure parable, sits at the door of the house on a seat and says, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." [72] This woman seduced me, because she found my soul outside its own door, dwelling on the sensations of my flesh and ruminating on such food as I had swallowed through these physical senses.