

Speaking of God

Honest Christianity for a World Seeking Hope

A Prayer of St Augustine

Late Have I Loved You

As we just mentioned,
we all experience an inborn hunger
for an encounter with the Holy.
Ronald Rolheiser calls this yearning
“The Holy Longing.”ⁱ
It’s found expression in thousands of poems,
songs,
psalms and stories,
rituals and sacred objects.
Choosing just one example that illustrates this is difficult
but let’s re-visit St Augustine
with this paraphrase of his lovely prayer.ⁱⁱ



"I have only come to love you recently,
late in my life," he wrote.ⁱⁱⁱ
And yet you are a Being ever-ancient and ever-new.
You are of great Beauty!
Oh, you were certainly within me all along,
but I was outside of myself
searching for you in vain.
I thought I could encounter you
in all the things of Earth
—all that you have created—
but I sank into blind unloveliness.

Hence, you were with me,
but I was not with you.
The very gifts you gave me kept me from you
even though without you,
these things would not have existed.
You called to me,
you shouted,
and you broke through my deafness.
And then, oh my!
You flashed and shone as a bright light
and you healed my blindness
so that I could see you in that light.
You lavished me with your sacred fragrance.
I drew in that first breath of divine aroma
and now I long for you.
I have tasted your goodness and love
and now I hunger and thirst for more.
You touched me, and I long deeply for your peace.
I have only come to love you recently,
late in my life.
And yet you are a Being ever-ancient and ever-new.
You are of great Beauty! Amen.”

ⁱ Ronald Rolheiser OMI, *The Holy Longing*. You can find this title and others by him here: <https://ronrolheiser.com/books/>. In this *Holy Longing*, Rolheiser walks with his readers on a journey from restlessness to peace. It’s a master class in spirituality.

ⁱⁱ *Confessions*. Book 10, chapter 27, article 38. (Oxford University Press, 1st edition, August 14, 2008). The paraphrase is mine.

ⁱⁱⁱ Here is the original text of St Augustine cited just above: “Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness, I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you, yet they would not have been at all if they had not been in you. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in a breath, and now I pant for you. I have tasted you; now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.”