

## 4. Our Hearts are Restless until they Rest in "Thee" Oh X

For many years I have been intrigued with this prayerful cry of Augustine in the opening part of his Confessions, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, Oh God." Again, we must know what we mean by "God," by "X," before this intriguing sentence becomes intelligible and truthful about our own lives. Augustine's sentence has many words that need illumination. What does Augustine mean by "heart," by "restless," by "rest," and what does it mean for our "hearts" to "rest in X"? What does it mean for us to be "restless"? How is it true that we are restless in our hearts until we find "rest in X"? This sentence has many unknowns.

Our H are -R until our H are +R in X

### Hearts

Let us begin with "hearts." Luther, the ex-Augustinian monk, provides us a clue to the meaning of "heart," as this term is commonly used in a Christian theological statement. Here is a quote from Luther that I have found illuminating: "Trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol . . . for the two, faith and God, hold close together. Whatever then thy heart clings to . . . and relies upon, that is properly thy God." (H. Richard Niebuhr expands on this in his essay "Faith in Gods and in God." page 119 in *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*.)

"Heart," in both Luther and Augustine, apparently means the seat of our basic devotion, our primal passion. It is to the heart, not the mind, that we must look for the personal meaning of both God and idol. To what are we devoted? To what does our heart cling? What is the worship of our heart? The prayerful cry of Augustine says that our worship of any "god" different than X (the Biblical God) renders our hearts restless. To find Rest in our hearts we must cling in passionate worship to X. We must be devoted to X to find "Rest." Let us assume that the X Augustine has in view is the same X we examined in Isaiah's foundation-shaking temple vision, in the writer of Psalm 90's Almighty Limiter of our finite lives, and in Paul's eternal power and divinity that are plainly discernible through things which X has made and which are commonly seen and known. So, if we know what we mean by X (the Biblical God), and what we mean by "hearts," we have solved for everything in the above "theological equation" except "Restlessness" and "Rest."

### Restlessness

The restlessness that Augustine has in mind is a restlessness that characterizes our heart's devotion to some finite object of life meaning. In Augustine's early life some sort of sex addiction apparently drove him to restlessness. I imagine this sort of restlessness meant constantly seeking for that next time of sexual experience, disturbing the restfulness of the present moment. Sex additions and drug addictions teach us something about restlessness. But the restlessness to which Augustine is pointing is more far-reaching than the much-discussed topics of sex and drug addiction. Anytime we reject the fullness of Reality as it is manifest in this moment and hope for something else, we are thereby trapped in a desire that cannot be satisfied. We are restless, seeking what can never be.

And we are all addicted (or have been addicted) to some sort of "someday." Someday I will have enough money to be happy. Someday I will find the right partner to make me happy. Someday my current partner will die so I can find another. Someday I will have children. Someday these children will finally leave home.

Someday I will find the work I like. Someday I will finish my education so I can begin my life. Someday my health will improve. Someday I will be less busy. Someday I will get around to tending to my deeper life and become restful and happy.

Someday never comes. It is always and only today. It is always Now. Yes, things change – sometimes for more pleasant days, sometimes for less pleasant days. But the many changes we will experience are not in themselves the advent of that Rest that overcomes all restlessness. If we get what we want, we become restless that we will lose it. If we do not get what we want, we remain restless to get it. If we give up getting what we want, but still want it, we are restless as well. Restlessness is the action of our consciousness toward some other moment than this moment.

This lesson on restlessness is an especially hard lesson for those of us who have experienced or do experience serious oppression. Of course we want to be liberated from that oppression. We may be hard at work to bring about a social someday in which oppression is no more. “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty we are free at last.” If some of us are members of a racial minority in a bigoted culture, of course we want to live in a culture that treats us with the respect that our humanity deserves. If some of us are women in a patriarchal culture, of course we want to live in a culture that treats women with the respect that our humanity deserves. If we are gay or lesbian in a culture that misunderstands, mistreats, and despises such persons, of course we want to live in a culture that treats us with the respect that our humanity deserves. We may be hard at work to bring about that cultural someday, that promised land of freedom. And that work is noble compassion for ourselves and others.

But even with regard to these deep and valid longings for a non-oppressive someday, we can notice that someday is not today. The issue of Rest or restlessness is about today. Whatever be the set of cultural oppressions that oppress us, we can find Rest today in the Rest of which Augustine speaks. We do not need to wait until that someday when our oppressive culture is healed. Even if or when such a someday comes, we will find other oppressions about which to be restless for some other someday. There is always someone oppressing someone, perhaps oppressing us. Even if we are the oppressor, we are oppressed by our participation in that oppression. Our social class is probably oppressed by some other social class, and our social class probably oppresses other social classes. If we are some sort of religious person, we are surely aware of the oppression from our religion-ignoring culture – yes, from even a religion-hating culture. Perhaps the most hated person of all is the one that has realized human authenticity to such an extent that he or she does not fit into the existing culture. Let Jesus be our illustration. Yet in spite of his ongoing oppression, Jesus surely experienced the Rest of which Augustine spoke.

## **Rest**

So what is this Rest that overcomes all our restlessness, or at least exists in our lives alongside the many forms of restlessness that threaten to swamp us? It is rest in X (God), so we are back to solving for X and for “rest in X.”

The God of the Bible does not exist in terms of what we normally mean by “existence.” Biblical words like God, Yahweh, Lord, Father, Mother, Friend of Abraham, Rock, Shepherd, Foundation point to the Ground of all that exists. This Ground does not exist in the common sense of the word “exist”: that is, this Ground does not come into being or go out of being. It is the Ground of all “coming into being.” It is also the Grave of all “going out of being.” This X is like the Earth in being both Ground and Grave, but X is not the Earth: X is the Ground and Grave of the Earth as well as everything of which the Earth is also Ground and Grave.

This everlasting Ground and Grave is the God worshiped by Jesus, Paul, Augustine, Luther, and millions of others. This Ground and Grave is the “abba” or “papa” of

whom Jesus spoke. And this Ground and Grave of all existing beings is experienced by these exemplars as benevolent toward us, as the bestower of Rest in our hearts.

The papa-mama-friend benevolence of X is only experienced by those who are willing to be content with being Grounded into being and Graved out of being – that is, being content with the present moment of limits and possibilities, living and dying, coming into being and going out of being. We lack the stillness of Jesus, of Paul, of Augustine, of Luther until we Rest in our present moment, renouncing all rejection of that moment, renouncing all hope for a different moment, and thus having no desire to have the unhaveable – that is, some other moment than the moment we have.

This moment and no other moment is the moment of Rest, of stillness, of life before God, the God of the Bible. There is no moment coming sometime that will be the moment before God. This moment is the moment before God. “Now” is the only time for Rest. Rest takes place Now, not someday. This moment is the moment we have been waiting for, the final arrival, the heaven promised to us by Jesus and his many witnesses.

Yes, Jesus is our Messiah, but a strange Messiah he is. He did not bring us what we wanted – the end of ruthless rulers, the reward for our religious excellence, the prosperity we think we have to have, the knowledge that ends all need for learning, and so on and so on and so on. He brought us back to something far more important – he brought us to ourselves, to our true lives, to our Rest in being who and what we are – not yesterday, not someday, but Now.

In this Now, whatever it is in temporal, historical terms, we have the capacity to inwardly inquire into the meaning of Augustine’s Rest. We can look and see for ourselves. We can notice for ourselves those things that we have been unwilling to notice. We can notice how committed we are to those somedays that make us restless. We can notice how resistant we are to being who we are in the current circumstances of our lives. We can notice that this “me” who resists today and longs for some other day is just a figment of our own invention. My “restless me” lives only by my own insistence. We can notice that it is within our capability to give up being the “restless me;” for this “me” who is restless is not the true me. If we give up the false me, we will notice that we are already an “I Am” that is not restless. We are forgiven for all our departures and delays in finding this Rest. We are welcome home to the “I Am” that we are. This “I Am” is enchanted with Being, singularly compassionate, fearlessly confident, meditatively brilliant, prayerfully initiative, detached, engaged, audacious, and at peace – yes, at Rest. Such Spirit gifts may not all be manifest in each and every moment, but they are all there ready to come forward as needed. Welcome Home! Take your Rest!