EXCERPTS FROM THE WRITINGS OF AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

From: *The Confessions*--Book Two, Chapter One

I will now call to mind my past foulness, and the carnal corruptions of my soul, not because I love them, but that I may love you, O my God: For love of your love I do it, recalling, in the very bitterness of my remembrance, my most vicious ways, that you may grow sweet to me—You sweetness without deception! You sweetness happy and assured!--and, re-collecting myself out of my dissipation, in which I was torn to pieces, while, turned away from you the One, I lost myself among many vanities. For I even longed in my youth formerly to be satisfied with worldly things and I dared to grow wild again with various and shadowy loves; my form consumed away, and I became corrupt in your eyes, pleasing myself, and eager to please in the eyes of men.

From: *The Confessions*--Book Ten, Chapter Six

It is with no doubtful knowledge, Lord, but with utter certainty that I love You….But what is it that I love when I love You? Not the beauty of any bodily thing, nor the order of seasons, not the brightness of light that rejoices the eye, nor the sweet melodies of all songs, nor the sweet fragrance of flowers and ointments and spices: not manna nor honey, not the limbs that carnal love embraces. None of these things do I love in loving my God….

And what is this God? I asked the earth and it answered: "I am not He"; and all things that are in the earth made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps and the creeping things, and they answered: "We are not your God; seek higher." I asked the winds that blow, and the whole air with all that is in it answered: "Anaximenes was wrong; I am not God." I asked the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, and they answered: "Neither are we God whom you seek." And I said to all the things that throng about the gateways of the senses: "Tell me of my God, since you are not He. Tell me something of Him." And they cried out in a great voice: "He made us." My question was my gazing upon them, and their answer was their beauty. And I turned to myself and said: "And you, who are you?" And I answered: "A man." Now clearly there is a body and a soul in me, one exterior, one interior. From which of these two should I have enquired of my God? I had already sought Him by my body, from earth to heaven, as far as my eye could send its beams on the quest. But the interior part is the better, seeing that all my body's messengers delivered to it, as ruler and judge, the answers that heaven and earth and all things in them made when they said: "We are not God," and, "He made us." The inner man knows these things through the ministry of the outer man: I the inner man knew them, I, I the soul, through the senses of the body. I asked the whole frame of the universe about my God and it answered me: "I am not He, but He made me."

Is not the face of the earth clearly seen by all whose senses function properly? Then why does it not give the same answer to all? Animals great and small see it, but cannot interrogate it. For reason does not preside in them to judge upon the evidence their senses bring. But man can interrogate it, and so should be able clearly to see the invisible things of God understood by things which are made; but they love these last too much and become subject to them, and
subjects cannot judge. All these things refuse to answer those who ask, unless they ask with power to judge. If one man merely sees the world, while another not only sees but interrogates it, the world does not change its speech—that is, its outward appearance which speaks—in such a way as to appear differently to the two men; but presenting exactly the same face to each, it says nothing to the one, but gives answer to the other: or rather it gives its answer to all, but only those understand who compare its voice as it comes through their senses, with the truth that is within them….

From: The Confessions--Book Ten, Chapter Thirty-Four

There remains the pleasure of the eyes of my flesh, of which I now make confession…. My eyes love the diverse forms of beauty, brilliant and pleasing colors. Let these things not take possession of my soul; let God possess it, who made these things and made them exceedingly good: yet He is my good, not they. For they affect me in all the waking hours of every day, nor do I find any respite from them such as I do sometimes find in silence from all the voices of song. For light, the queen of colors, suffusing all the things I see whenever I am abroad in daylight, entices me as it flows before my sight in all its variousness, even though I am busy upon something else and not observing it. For it works its way into me with such power that if it is suddenly withdrawn, I desire it with great longing; and if it is absent too long, it saddens my mind.

But that corporeal light of which I have spoken seasons the life of this world for its blind lovers with a dangerous enticingness. Yet those who have the knowledge to praise You for that light take up its praise in Your hymn, "O God, Creator of all," and are not carried away by it in sleep [of soul]. Of such I desire to be. I resist the enticements of the eye lest the feet with which I walk Your road should be tangled in their snare, and I raise the eyes of my soul to You that You may pluck my feet from that snare….

How innumerable are the things made by every kind of art and workmanship in clothes, shoes, vessels and such like, in pictures also and every kind of statue--far beyond necessary and moderate use and any meaning of devotion--that men have added for the delight of their eyes, going abroad from themselves after the things they have themselves made, interiorly abandoning Him by whom they were made and destroying what He made in them. But I, O my God and my Glory, I too utter a hymn to Thee and offer my praise as sacrifice to Him who sanctifies me: for all that loveliness which passes through men's minds into their skillful hands comes from that supreme Loveliness which is above our souls, which my soul sighs for day and night. From the Supreme Beauty those who make and seek after exterior beauty derive the measure by which they judge of it, but not the measure by which it should be used. Yet this measure too is there, and they do not see it: for if they did they would not wander far from it, but would preserve their strength only for Thee and would not dissipate it upon delights that grow wearisome.

From: The Morals of the Catholic Church—Chapter Twenty

Bodily delights have their source in all those things with which the bodily sense comes in contact, and which are by some called the objects of sense; and among these the noblest is light,
in the common meaning of the word, because among our senses also, which the mind uses in acting through the body, there is nothing more valuable than the eyes, and so in the Holy Scriptures all the objects of sense are spoken of as visible things. Thus in the New Testament we are warned against the love of these things in the following words: "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"….But we are forbidden to regard things which are seen. The man, therefore, who wishes to offer that incorrupt love to God must not love these things too. This subject I will inquire into more particularly elsewhere. Here my plan is to write not of faith, but of the life by which we become worthy of knowing what we believe. God then alone is to be loved; and all this world, that is, all sensible things, are to be despised--while, however, they are to be used as this life requires.

From The Enchiridion—Chapter Nine

When, then, the question is asked what we are to believe in regard to religion, it is not necessary to probe into the nature of things, as was done by those whom the Greeks call physici; nor need we be in alarm lest the Christian should be ignorant of the force and number of the elements--the motion, and order, and eclipses of the heavenly bodies; the form of the heavens; the species and the natures of animals, plants, stones, fountains, rivers, mountains; about chronology and distances; the signs of coming storms; and a thousand other things which those philosophers either have found out, or think they have found out. For even these men themselves, endowed though they are with so much genius, burning with zeal, abounding in leisure, tracking some things by the aid of human conjecture, searching into others with the aids of history and experience, have not found out all things; and even their boasted discoveries are oftener mere guesses than certain knowledge. It is enough for the Christian to believe that the only cause of all created things, whether heavenly or earthly, whether visible or invisible, is the goodness of the Creator, the one true God; and that nothing exists but Himself that does not derive its existence from Him; and that He is the Trinity--to wit, the Father, and the Son begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the same Father, but one and the same Spirit of Father and Son.