2. St. Augustine’s Concept of God as the All-Present Being for the Present Generation

1. PREFACE

Living through the unfolding of the twenty-first century today, many in their spiritual hunger are experiencing a real difficulty or crisis in the conception of God in the present rationalistic, materialistic, and hedonistic post-Christian world.¹ There are postmodern atheists still proclaiming God’s death, still disclaiming God as an empty or even destructive concept nowhere to be found; and there are New Agers tending to identify themselves (individually) or the planet earth as a god (or goddess). At the same time, some even view God as “Hitler’s accomplice”², while others are inclined toward a do-it-yourself concept of God. The latter would say: “All religions are being made up. What does it matter? I don’t care if you’re worshipping this god or that goddess.” “We have to decide whether the word ‘God’ has any meaning for us today”.³

It is of paramount importance, therefore, that an exalted and vitalized notion of God be formed above all in our mind.⁴ Stanislaus J. Grabowski elaborates: “The vitality, earnestness and depth of one’s religion follow the type of image of God that is conceived and entertained in the soul. If the concept of God is beclouded one-sided or even distorted it will have as its counterpart a more or less uncertain one-sided and distorted kind of religion”.⁵ An unambiguous direction, or source of inspiration, for the search of a sound understanding and relevant concept of God is thus in order. Where, then, should that come from? Insofar as the present confusion is concerned, it appears that such a source of inspiration should come from its past wisdom, instead of from its present perplexity. Did Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) not similarly remind us that life must be lived forward, yet it can only be properly understood backwards?⁶

¹ Cf. Ly Chen Ying (李震), Ren yu Shangdi 人與上帝 (Man and God), Vol. 6 (Taipei: Sinjhuang, Fu Jen University, 1997), pp. 173-270.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Cf. H. V. Hong; and E. H. Hong, Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers, vol. A-E (Bloomington and
Naturally, not a few of us would be thinking of the metaphysical legacy of Plato and Aristotle,\(^7\) the two most outstanding philosophical giants of the West. Philosophically, their historical influence appears to have first permeated Western civilization, and subsequently, to a subtle but significant extent, the Far East and the rest of the world in their Westernization. To understand the present generation, Western or Eastern, it is thus essential to know something about the West and its past. For this reason, this legacy is something which countless of us in the past two millennia have sought to transform, criticize, amplify, disregard, reintegrate, negate . . . yet never, in the end, truly abandon.\(^8\)

From time to time, the Platonic-Aristotelian heritage becomes something which many in both the West and the East had to learn to re-visit, re-think, re-consider, re-explore, or re-interpret for the sake of our own intellectual sanity, whether or not they are professed Christians and Westerners. Indeed, as we journey back to the past, we discover that many great thinkers born after Plato and Aristotle tended to conceptualize or follow a certain Platonic-Aristotelian synthesis in their thoughts, instead of siding exclusively with one to the complete isolation of the other. St. Augustine (354-430) of Hippo, despite being frequently called a pure Platonist, is no exception.

It is important to note that Augustine’s intellectual concept of God as the all-present Being Itself, i.e., *Ipsum Esse* or *Idipsum Esse*,\(^9\) is derived generally from three sources: (a) the Neoplatonic literature which led to his conversion of God as a spiritual being; (b) the Sacred Scriptures; and (c) the teaching of the Patristic Fathers. As he engaged himself in writing sermons and fighting battles against various heresies, this conception of God would only mature.\(^10\) Analytically, Neoplatonism is a philosophical synthesis of Platonism and Aristotelianism, although the former plays a much greater role than the latter in constitution.\(^11\) As we explore further, it is hoped that the present generation may have something to learn from the life and thought of St. Augustine.

### 2. INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ST. AUGUSTINE

\(^7\) Cf. Ly Chen Ying (李震), *Ren yu Shangdi 人與上帝* (Man and God), Vol. 7 (Taipei: Sinjhuang, Fu Jen University, 1997), pp. 450.


2.1 *Introducing the Life of St. Augustine*

Aurelius Augustine was born in Tagaste, Numidia, Africa, 354 A.D., of a Christian mother, St. Monica, and a pagan father, Patricius. He attended the local school and went to nearby Madura for further education. But at 16 he was forced out of school for lack of money. It was in that turbulent year of adolescence that he acquired a life of sensual pleasure. At 17, thanks to a certain Romanianus, he resumed his education at Carthage but continued his permissive life. Despite his being a serious student, he had a relationship with a concubine who bore him a son, Adeodatus.12

However, on reading Cicero’s *Hortensius*, he was moved by the ideal of wisdom, “which led him on a long and tortuous search for truth”.13 He first attempted to read the Bible. Yet he quickly abandoned it due to its anthropomorphism and inelegant literary style. At this point he was attracted by Manichees who promised to provide him with a comprehension of all that exists. He remained in that sect for 9 years during his career as a teacher at Tagaste and Carthage. Simultaneously, Augustine also read Aristotle’s *Categories*. Afterwards, he abandoned Manichaeism which could not satisfy his searching queries. By this time he already worked out a personal philosophy, composed largely of Stoicism, Pythagoreanism, and Ciceronian skepticism. It is important to note that gradually “the dualistic explanation of the universe that had initially captured his interest gave way before a conception, with a Stoic tinge, of an infinite God disseminated everywhere in space (*Conf.* 7.1.1-2)”.14

In 383, Augustine left Carthage for Rome and became a professor at Milan. “It was there that he encountered the three principal factors that led to his conversion: his meeting with Bishop Ambrose of Milan, his introduction to Neoplatonism, and his reading of St. Paul”.15 It was Ambrose who introduced to him Christian Neoplatonism, the spiritual interpretation of the Bible, and the spiritual concept of God and man. It is important to know that Augustine did hesitate to join the Church until he was first deceived by the “mystical experience occasioned by his Platonist readings”.16 Then, he

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
“gradually came to see the part that authority could play in coming to the aid of human reason”.\textsuperscript{17}

Later, he began to read the Epistles of St. Paul which little by little helped him to find Christ, understand the salvific role of the Incarnation, and experience grace through the Church while he was “more than ever torn and oppressed by the weight of his sensual habits”.\textsuperscript{18} Finally, he was given a true interior breakthrough at the moment of crisis in terms of a genuine mystical experience, i.e., he was filled “with a light of certainty, and all shadow of doubt disappeared”.\textsuperscript{19} In 387, Augustine was baptized in the Paschal Vigil. Soon afterwards, he became a priest (c. 391) and a bishop (c. 395). St. Augustine served the Church for almost 35 years as bishop of Hippo until his death in 430, in complete dedication to the love and service of God.\textsuperscript{20}

2.2 \textit{Introducing the Works of Augustine}

“Augustine’s writings, with few exceptions, have been preserved in their entirety. They include more than 100 books, in addition to some 240 letters and more than 500 sermons”\textsuperscript{21}. His importance may be summed up as follows: “By the greatness of his achievement as thinker and theologian, Augustine dominated the Christian tradition of the West of which he may be considered the founder”.\textsuperscript{22} Three of his well-known masterpieces are the \textit{Confessions}, \textit{The Trinity}, and \textit{The City of God}. One may find a complete list of his works in (a) \textit{New Catholic Encyclopedia}, Vol. 1, pp. 1049-1051, or (b) \textit{Augustine through the Ages: An encyclopedia}, pp. xxxv-il, edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald. R. P. Russell here proffers us with an excellent short summary on his works:

His books … cover a wide range of topics, philosophic, apologetic, moral, and exegetical. His dogmatic works comprise in large part the numerous polemical treatises directed against Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism. The doctrinal synthesis achieved by A. is neither a theological nor philosophical system, strictly speaking. It is more properly described as a Christian wisdom whose content and spirit have variously exercised a profound influence upon the intellectual history of the West for more than 1,500 years. In its

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 1043.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 312.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Du Roy, O. J.-B.. Augustine, St., in: \textit{New Catholic Encyclopedia}, vol. 1, p. 1041.
\end{itemize}
essence authentic Augustinianism aims at progressive comprehension of revealed truth by reason illuminated by faith and with the resources of philosophic principles and method at its disposal (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Faith and reason thus cooperate as two distinct but inseparable sources of knowledge.23

As we move on, we will also quote some of his other significant works. It suffices to take note here that as Augustine matured in his thoughts, he became increasingly theocentric, i.e., he attempted to view and define various things from the divine perspective of God.

3. AUGUSTINE’S CONCEPT OF GOD AS THE ALL-PRESENT BEING ITSELF

3.1 *St. Augustine’s Concept of God as the All-present Being Itself*

On the doctrine of God’s divine omnipresence, Grabowski informs us that no Father of the Church “alludes to it more frequently, or expatiates upon it more comprehensively, or inculcates it more zealously, or feels it importance in religious life more earnestly than does St. Augustine”.24 It was Augustine “who realized the many potentialities and implications of this doctrine in relation to other doctrines concerning God and the universe”.25 Without surprise, it fell to his lot to give a solid and ample philosophical foundation on the manner of God’s ubiquitous presence26 in terms of the metaphysics of God as Being Itself. Like St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine himself did not write any *Summa Metaphysicae*. His metaphysical concept of God as the all-present Being Itself is, therefore, gleaned and pieced together from his various writings.27

Metaphysics or ontology28 is “the study of being, its principles and causes”29 with regards to what really exists in the totality of reality, i.e., the world as a whole30. Known essentially as “an ontology of spiritual life”31 or

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid, p. 249.
“a soteriological ontology”\textsuperscript{32}, the metaphysical scope of St. Augustine consists simply of three main components: (a) the Uncreated Ipsum Esse, i.e., the existence of the Uncreated God-Being or Being Itself, (b) the created esse, i.e., the existence of creatures or created beings expressed in terms of being, and (c) their very relationship. This Being-and-being relationship may be summed up as follows, i.e., all created beings proceed from the supreme Uncreated Being by creation on account of Its goodness, but they all also return to this Being and Its goodness as their ultimate end on account of Its perfection.\textsuperscript{33}

As Augustine sees it, “being can only come from Being, even as good can only come from Good”\textsuperscript{34}. “For God is the absolute fullness of being and thus the sole primeval source of all being”.\textsuperscript{35} God must be the immutable and Uncreated Esse or Being because His causality alone can account for the existence of the created esse or being, limited in mutable forms outside Esse.\textsuperscript{36} Since God is the highest existing being, that is, He supremely is, He bestowed existence (esse) upon the things that He created from nothing.\textsuperscript{37} God, therefore, is “the source of all that we call being, and thus the only thing which may be called Being truly”\textsuperscript{38}. It is of great import to realize that Augustine discovered this concept and intuition of Being in the very year of his conversion in 386.\textsuperscript{39} Consequently, he began to make his spiritual journey as a being returning to Being in love and service, making this concept of God “a central role at the heart of his firmly Christian theology”\textsuperscript{40}.

Repeatedly, St. Augustine declared that God Himself is Being Itself, i.e., Ipsum Esse.\textsuperscript{41} This metaphysical identity of God, in fact, is a self-given name of God.\textsuperscript{42} Historically, St. Augustine’s metaphysics of God as Being

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 116.
\textsuperscript{33} Stanislaus J. Grabowski, The All-Present God: A study in St. Augustine, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{35} St. Augustine, De Gen. Ad lit., V, 16 34, in: Stanislaus J. Grabowski, The All-Present God: A study in St. Augustine, p. 189
\textsuperscript{36} Cf. James F. Anderson, St. Augustine and Being: A metaphysical essay, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{38} Ayres, Lewis. Being, in: Augustine through the Ages: An encyclopedia, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} St. Augustine, Sermon VI, 3-4; VII, 7; The City of God, XII, 2; The Trinity, V, 2,3, in: James F. Anderson. St. Augustine and Being: A metaphysical essay, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 74.
has profoundly influenced many, in particular St. Thomas Aquinas, and hence the whole Latin West up to this very day. One may, therefore, wonder about the very source from which this metaphysical concept of God is derived. Apparently, the origin is Exodus 3:14 which reads, according to the English translation of the Septuagint: “And God spoke to Moses, saying I am THE BEING”\(^{44}\). As we know, being simply means that which is, i.e., “that which remains, lasts and always stays the same”.\(^{45}\) The God of St. Augustine is thus “He who truly is”\(^{46}\) or “He who is”\(^{47}\) as translated from the Latin “Qui est” in accordance to the Septuagint-based Latin Bible he used.\(^{48}\) This very metaphysical notion of God is obviously different from the usual English translation of the Hebrew Bible, as we read: “God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am’”\(^{49}\). James F. Anderson remarkably observes:

While this reading, based on the Septuagint (a Greek version of the O.T. made between 280 and 130 B.C.), is not a perfectly literal rendering of the Hebrew original, that problem is here metaphysically irrelevant; for Augustine’s understanding of its ontological import agrees precisely with the Christian idea of God as the single Supreme Being and is therefore incompatible with any opposing metaphysical interpretation. It is pertinent to note that Augustine ascribes pre-eminent authority to the Septuagint because he firmly believed that God had provided that version for the instruction of the Gentiles even as He had provided the Hebrew text for the instruction of the Hebrews. That is why (according to Augustine) the Holy Spirit had inspired the Septuagint translators to deviate at times from the Hebrew text: only by doing so could they express the truth in the manner in which God willed it to be expressed to the Gentiles.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{44}\) Sir Lanclot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1851), p. 73.


\(^{46}\) “Qui vere est”, St. Augustine, *De ord. 2,2,6 BA*, 4, p. 368, in: Emile Zum Brunn, *St. Augustine: Being and nothingness*, p. 27.


\(^{48}\) Cf. Ibid., p. 74.

\(^{49}\) Exo 3:14 (New RSV).

\(^{50}\) James F. Anderson, *St, Augustine and Being: A metaphysical essay*, pp. 4-5, n. 4.
To Augustine, God is clearly “Being unqualified: He simply is”\(^{51}\), in a category of existence all by Himself\(^2\). St. Augustine says in fact that God “is is, even as the good of goods is good: *Est enim est, sicut honorum bonum, bonum est*”\(^{53}\). The succinct expression that “God is is” is, as such, quite remarkable in speaking of God’s all-presence. First, it signifies to us God’s eternal immutable existence or presence, which is completely independent of our chronological framework of time regarding the past, present, and future.

Secondly, it directly implies God’s omnipresence that God is or exists everywhere in the totality of reality or immensity of space. Grabowski sums it up beautifully: “Just as eternity is an exclusive characteristic of the true divinity in relation to man’s conception of time, so omnipresence is proper to God alone in relation to place. Eternity and omnipresence are attributes that deny limitations of time and space”\(^{54}\). Being “is” or “Being Itself”, God is eternally *existence itself* in time, space, and in any other dimension(s), created and Uncreated.

Further, identifying God also as the Most Holy Trinity, St. Augustine is the first among the Latin Fathers to have explicitly related Exo 3:14 (that God is THE BEING) to Jn 8:24 (“If you do not believe that ‘I am’, you will die in your sins”), Jn 8:28 (“When you will lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that ‘I am’”), and Jn 8:58 (“Before Abraham was, ‘I am’”)\(^{55}\). While Jn 8:24 is more related to the present, Jn 8:28 talks about the future, and Jn 8:58 is referred to the past.

To St. Augustine, the all-present Being Itself, therefore, is completely beyond our human sense of place. Apparently, the all-present *Ipsum Esse* is also beyond our modern concept of space, as the Bishop of Hippo warns us: “Only let us not try to bring God to place, let us not try to include God in place, let us not try to diffuse God through spaces, as it were, by some mass”\(^{56}\), for “if He were in place, He would not be God”\(^{57}\). In a manner seemingly beyond our human rationale, “God is present in, and to the whole

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52 Cf. Ibid.
54 Stanislaus J. Grabowski, *The All-Present God: A study in St. Augustine*, p. 108.
universe in such a manner as to be whole in the whole universe and whole in every part of creation, including the minutest and most insignificant part”\(^{58}\).

At the same time, since \textit{essentia} stems from \textit{esse}, God to Augustine can be described also as the \textit{summa essentia} or \textit{prima essentia}, i.e., the highest essence, as He is supremely and fully is among all beings\(^{59}\). In other words, God is the infinite realization, completion, fullness or fulfillment of the essence of whatever is one, true, good, and beautiful, according to such divine attributes everything in \textit{esse} is created and called to emulate.

In this way, every being created in the image of the First Cause is created also to be in union with the Final Cause of all beings or things everywhere. “Thus, Augustine’s discovery of Being also included the discovery of the drawing of beings toward Being that they have forgotten.”\(^{60}\) This spiritual ontology is, therefore, also an ontology of return or union insofar as the ultimate relationship between created beings and the Uncreated Being is concerned.

### 3.2 Plato’s Influence over Augustine’s Conception of God

Augustine is known to have favoured Platonism more than any other philosophy. In fact, “[t]here is no question that Augustine owed much to Platonism and to Neoplatonism in almost every area of his thought”\(^{61}\). However, “Augustine had little firsthand knowledge of Plato. What knowledge he does have is mostly filtered through secondary knowledge”.\(^{62}\) Apparently, such knowledge of Plato, Neoplatonism or Middle Platonism has permeated his works throughout.\(^{63}\)

As Augustine gained this knowledge in particular through reading the \textit{Enneads}, the works of Plotinus edited by Porphry, it is important to note that Plotinus was born in Lycopolis, Egypt about 204 A.D. and “attended school in Alexandria, studying Plato, Aristotle, the Pythagoreans, and the Stoics”\(^{64}\). “Preceded by three centuries of revived Platonist speculation (sometimes called ‘Middle Platonism’), Plotinus effectively combined Platonic with

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\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 96.
\(^{62}\) Ferdrick Van Fleteren, Plato, Platonism, in: \textit{Augustine through the Ages: An encyclopedia}, p. 653.
\(^{63}\) Cf. Ibid., p. 652; Anne-Marie Bowery, Plotinus, The Enneads, in: \textit{Augustine through the Ages: An encyclopedia}, p. 655.
\(^{64}\) Ibid., p. 654.
Pythagorean, Aristotelian, and Stoic doctrines to form a philosophical system in line with the religious preoccupation of his time."\(^{65}\). Apparently, both Plato and Aristotle, together with other Greek philosophers, have influenced the philosophical thinking of Augustine. Here we briefly highlight some Platonic or Neoplatonic influences over Augustine’s concept of God as the all-present Being.

Augustine’s original concept of God’s nature was along pagan lines, i.e., materialistic\(^{66}\). It was certain Platonic texts which enabled Augustine to understand the possibility of God as a spiritual, immaterial Being. “Augustine tells us that until he read the Platonic texts discussed in *Confessions*\(^ {7}\) he had been able to conceive of Being only as material, however extended in space”\(^ {67}\). Coinciding with the teaching of Augustine were thus various “points of doctrine on the nature, knowability and attributes of God offered by the Neoplatonists …. not only in matter but also in phraseology”\(^ {68}\). For example, “The God of Plotinus whom he calls ‘The One’ is sheer spirituality and should therefore in no way be conceived as corporeal. God is absolutely simple, that is, He is devoid of any composition. He is the measure and the limit of all things. He is ineffably different from all we know. Hence we are not allowed to attribute to ‘the One’ thinking, willing, or even existence as we do to the creatures we know”\(^ {69}\).

However, this outstanding Neoplatonic idea of God did not lead Augustine to cast God outside of all beings in creation as “a purely abstract apprehension of another ontological possibility”\(^ {70}\). Rather, this “notion of God as a purely spiritual being”\(^ {71}\) became a turning point and helped Augustine discover God positively as a supreme Being Itself (*Ipsum Esse*) of all beings, the supreme Spirit “who is ever present and most intensely present in a manner which is proper only to Himself”\(^ {72}\). “God has a spirituality all of His own”.\(^ {73}\) In this way, Augustine was led also to


\(^{68}\) Stanislaus J. Grabowski, *The All-Present God: A study in St. Augustine*, p. 262.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., n. 123.


\(^{72}\) Ibid., p. 73.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., p. 126.
understand that God’s spiritual presence is not confined to place but present everywhere in His totality.74

3.3 Aristotle’s Influence over St. Augustine’s Conception of God

History informs us that not every Latin Christian writer in the early Christian Church was equally anti-Aristotelian. Some, such as St. Augustine, viewed Aristotle more favorably as a portion of “the general pagan philosophical heritage available to Christian intellectuals”75. “Accepting the Neoplatonic synthesis of Platonism and Aristotelianism into a single philosophy, Augustine understood the Peripatetic tradition as part of a Platonically oriented philosophy which can be put into service articulating the Christian faith”.76

In his *Confessions*, book 4, chapter 16, St. Augustine confessed of reading the ten *Categories* of Aristotle,77 “the only work of Aristotle which he is known with certainty to have read”78. Later, in “book 5 of his *De Trinitate* he provides a typically Neoplatonic discussion of the inapplicability of all the categories except *ousia* [substance] to God”79. It is possible that this knowledge on substance80, together with inspirations acquired from various writers, helped Augustine gradually develop his concepts of measure (*modus*), form (*species*), and order (*ordo*) as three universal attributes as regards the substance of created beings.81

“All creatures, spiritual or corporeal, are good since God has conferred upon them “measure” (*modus*) or grade of being, “form” (*species*) or kind of being, and order (*ordo*) or finality of being”82. In his theocentric thinking, this knowledge of created being leads only to that of the Uncreated Being. Expressed in the Aristotelian-Thomistic language, these three universal attributes of all created beings manifest substantially the Uncreated Being

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74 Cf. Ibid., p. 72
76 Ibid.
78 Michael W. Tkacz, Aristotle, Augustine’s Knowledge of, in: *Augustine through the Ages: An encyclopedia*, p. 58
79 Ibid.
81 Cf. Ibid., pp. 141-142.
Itself respectively as the Efficient, Exemplary, and Final Cause of all beings.\textsuperscript{83}

Ontologically, substance is a primary notion to Aristotle: “Substances underlie and are the subjects of everything else. If substances did not exist, nothing would exist”\textsuperscript{84}. This Aristotelian notion of substance appears to have in addition helped St. Augustine bring the eternally transcendent God of Neoplatonism, known as the ineffable One, to immanence, permeating in some manner the whole universe as the self-subsisting Being or Being existing by Itself.\textsuperscript{85}

As the Stoic philosophers have also contributed notably to the Patristic and Augustinian doctrine of God, especially in His pervading presence in the universe,\textsuperscript{86} we should give some more credit to Aristotle. Along with the teaching of Heraclitus, Democritus, Anaxagoras, and Plato, the Aristotelian doctrine on the immanence of God the absolute Being or the supreme form in matter\textsuperscript{87} is an indispensable component of Stoicism\textsuperscript{88}. We can, hence, state that St. Augustine’s concept of the Christian God as Being Itself is not exclusively Platonic, but Aristotelian to a significant extent as well. In N. Kaufmann’s germane expression: “Saint Augustine était principalement, mais non exclusivement platonicien, et son système accuse des influences d’Aristote”\textsuperscript{89}.

4. ST. AUGUSTINE’S METAPHYSICS OF BEING: DIVERSITY OF BEINGS

In his theocentric or God-centered metaphysics, St. Augustine tends to define every being (esse) in terms of God Who is Being Itself (Ipsum Esse): “since God is the highest existing being, that is, He supremely is, He bestowed existence (esse) upon the things that He created from nothing”\textsuperscript{90}. In his ontological expression as regards the diversity of beings, we discover that there are at least eight largely distinct levels of being.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Richard Tarnas, The Passion of the Western Mind, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{85} Cf. N. Kaufmann, Éléments aristotéliciens dans la Cosmologie et la Psychologie de St. Augustin, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{86} Cf. Stanislaus J. Grabowski, The All-Present God: A study in St. Augustine, p. 241.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 95.
\textsuperscript{89} N. Kaufmann, Éléments aristotéliciens dans la Cosmologie et la Psychologie de St. Augustin, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{90} St. Augustine, The City of God, XII, 2, in: James F. Anderson, St. Augustine and Being: A metaphysical essay, p. 6.
4.1 God the Uncreated Immutable Being of all Created Mutable Beings

As noted, God is the immutable foundation, the Alpha, the Omega, as well as the continuation in St. Augustine’s ontological expression of all created beings. “Omni derivantur a Deo, qui vere est, quia incommutabiliter est”\(^91\). There is, indeed, a substantial difference between created being and the Uncreated Being.

As mutable being, “created being is by its very nature dependent: it has being and existence from another being. The uncreated Being is His own being, His own life, His own existence, His own intellect, and His own will. He does not have participated being and participated life; His existence is not borrowed from another superior being and from a cause. This kind of being in God postulates the immutability of God”\(^92\). “For indeed being can only come from Being, even as good can only come from Good: ‘Est enim est, sicut bonorum bonum, bonum est’”\(^93\).

4.2 The Analogical Non-Being or Nothingness

Analogically, when St. Augustine contemplated God and compared the eternally immutable Uncreated Being (as the infinite fullness of being) with all created beings, he saw them as existing in varying degrees of being (esse) or non-being (non-esse). “Then I contemplated all the other things below Thee, and I saw that they neither absolutely are nor totally are not: they are, for they exist from Thee; they are not since they are not what Thou art. For that truly is which abides unchangeably”\(^94\).

“For He [God] exists in such fashion that, compared to Him the things that are made are not. Yet, seen not in comparison to Him, they are, since they are from Him. Compared to Him, however, they are not, for true existence is immutable existence, which He alone is”\(^95\). The term non-being or nothingness (non-esse) exists in the metaphysics of St. Augustine, therefore, only as an analogical construct at the extreme opposite end of being (esse).

4.3 Non-Spiritual Created Beings without a Free Will

\(^92\) Stanislaus J. Grabowski, *The All-Present God: A study in St. Augustine*, p. 119.
This level of being consists, directly or indirectly, of all the created beings, such as a particle, a stone, a star, a tree, a fish, a horse, a building, a car, a computer, etc. They do not have the given free will for happiness, beatitudinis voluntas, or, in due course, for a blessed life in God and with God. According to St. Augustine, “if the created beings belonging to this lowest level do not persevere in being, it is without any fault of their own, for, unlike the spiritual created beings, the former did not get the possibility to be more [in God who Being and happiness]”.97

Ultimately, the Uncreated Being Itself is “the sole uncaused reality and every other caused reality must lean on His power”98. “Universal creation, therefore, is not in God as a part of His substance, but as a dependent being which must be supported by Him in order to exist and must be directed in its existence to fulfill its purpose within the designs of God”.99 Hence, all created beings take the Uncreated Being as the Alpha, Omega, as well as continuous Support or Sustenance.

4.4 Spiritual Created Beings with a Free Will partaking in Simple Existence

Spiritual created beings participating in simple existence are characterized by their simple “‘wanting-to-be’ (quia esse vis) which is nothing other than the will for happiness (beatitudinis voluntas), or just the natural desire for peace (naturale desiderium quietis)”100. Apparently, such an “ontological finality inscribed in us”101 is given to human beings by birth “of the fact of being (quia es)”102.

It is from this simple platform that we begin our life journey to choose “to be or not to be”103, i.e., “to choose between the misfortune that consists in refusing the ontological finality inscribed in us and the blissful life that consists in accepting it, in order to be incorporated into what is in a supreme way”.104 Inescapably, this is “the choice for which life destines us”105, to choose to become magis esse or minus esse with regards our participation in the being of God who is the all-present Being Itself. Thus, we may regard
babies, children, and the handicapped unable to consciously choose their way of living as belonging to this level.

4.5 *Spiritual Beings Choosing to Partake in Minus Esse*
There is another group of spiritual beings who participate in simple existence, i.e., those who consciously reject or ignore the ontological finality inscribed in them. In other words, they choose consciously to live without participating in the being of God. St. Augustine sees them as living on the level of “non esse sine deo”.

Emilie Zum Brunn explains the meaning of living on the level of minus esse: “But, since we are made up of this finality, which makes us participate in the everlastingness of absolute being even before any possibility of a voluntary act on our part, refusal necessarily consists in choosing, not total annihilation, but the reduction of our being”. As a matter of fact you will not be nothing, but you will be unhappy. This aversion of volition is also the very cause of evil, sin, and the punishment immanent in it, i.e., it is “the movement by which the mind on its own turns away from the Creator and toward the created being”. In this way, evil consists in failing one’s true nature or essence, accompanied by one’s ontological lessening (minus esse) and the corrosion of the soul’s being.

4.6 *Spiritual Beings Choosing to Partake in Magis Esse*
As conscious beings, we constantly have to choose between a life of minus esse or that of magis esse. The latter, according to St. Augustine, is a life of “esse cum deo or the participation of wisdom”. It is a life of continuous “Banquet” in the sense that “the participation of the soul in God is beatifying participation because it is satiating, fruitive”.

The truly wise who chooses to partake in such a blessed life (beata vita) is “thus put in close connection with the problem of evil, esse cum deo being

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106 Ibid.
108 Ibid., p. 38.
110 St. Augustine, *De lib. arb. 1,2*, BA, 6, p. 326, in: Emile Zum Brunn, *St. Augustine: Being and nothingness*, p. 35.
111 Cf. Ibid., p. 51.
114 Ibid., p. 12.
defined in contrast with the existence of men who turn away from God, or vice versa”\textsuperscript{115}. In fact, no being can avoid participating in Being. It is constantly a matter of partaking in a certain degree of \textit{magis esse} or \textit{minus esse}. “This is why \textit{magis esse} is basic to Augustinian wisdom: it defines metaphysically its objective, the \textit{beata uita}, as an ‘ascending participation’ towards ‘what truly is’”.\textsuperscript{116}

4.7 Ultimate Destination of Magis Esse
Indeed, St. Augustine’s felicity consists in a personal, experiential union with God wherein alone lies true happiness.\textsuperscript{117} It is without question “a privileged form of participating in Being”\textsuperscript{118}. While “[h]e who goes away from Being goes towards nonbeing”\textsuperscript{119}, he or she who goes toward Being participates more and more in the blessed union with Being, as well as in the infinite fullness of the very being of Being Itself.

This journey of \textit{magis esse} continues to be so until one lives without end in the level of perfect \textit{esse}, participating in the resurrection of the body, in the immense plenitude of the eschatological \textit{beata uita (vita)} in Heaven, i.e., in “this blessed region, this blessed homeland, this blessed abode where the saints participate in eternal life and immutable truth where supreme Being is”\textsuperscript{120}. “It is thus that we achieve our true end: going from \textit{non esse} or \textit{nondum esse} to \textit{perfecte esse} thanks to the conversion of wisdom”.\textsuperscript{121}

4.8 Ultimate Fate of Minus Esse
Following the Scriptures, St. Augustine had no problem with the eternal existence and punishments of Hell for the devil and those who are damned because of their serious sins not yet forgiven by God. In fact, Augustine “did not forego translating the mystery of spiritual death by a lessening of being”\textsuperscript{122} and identified Hell as the ultimate \textit{endless fate} of our rampant, unchecked ontological reduction of being on earth.

In fact, the very “ordination to being, inscribed in us, merely tortures the soul with its uncomprehended and unachieved finality, if it clings to passing possessions that carry it along towards a nothingness in which it can never

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 71.
\textsuperscript{117} Cf. James F. Anderson, \textit{St. Augustine and Being: A metaphysical essay}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{118} Emile Zum Brunn, \textit{St. Augustine: Being and nothingness}, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p. 101.
\textsuperscript{122} Emile Zum Brunn, \textit{St. Augustine: Being and nothingness}, p. 55.
be completely annihilated”. He quoted Psalm 38:14: “Forgive me before I depart, and I will be no more”. To St. Augustine, to “be no more’, far from expressing total annihilation, means the suffering inflicted on the soul made for being, when it turns away from it, this finitude which does not finish this perpetual alteration, of which the very punishment of damnation consists”.

5. ST. AUGUSTINE’S METAPHYSICS OF GOD FOR THE PRESENT GENERATION
In this section, we would like to find out if the metaphysics of St. Augustine, in particular his concept of God as the all-present Being Itself as outlined, does have any implication or ultimate reality and meaning for the modern or postmodern generation today. First, we would analyze generally the state of the West today in terms of (a) St. Augustine’s metaphysics of Being and being aforementioned; and (b) the modern history of metaphysics of God. Then, based on that analysis, we would attempt to offer a solution, or a part of a solution, in terms of God as the all-present Being Itself.

5.1 The Ontological State of Being regarding the Modern or Postmodern West Today
The history of the West, according to many historians, can be largely divided into three main parts: (a) the ancient Greek period; (b) the Patristic-Medieval Christian period; and (c) the Modern Scientific period. Similarly, we may identify the cultural sources of the present modern or postmodern West as consisting of these three principal components. Deprived of any one of these three constituents, the West would inevitably experience untold cultural chaos. In jettisoning its Christian tradition, this is apparently what happens to the modern or postmodern West today, as it has become substantially “post-Christian”, i.e., “subsequent to the decline or rejection of Christianity”.

123 Ibid., p. 101.
124 Ibid., p. 54.
125 Cf. En. in Ps. 38, 22, CC, 38, pp. 421ff., in: Emile Zum Brunn, St. Augustine: Being and nothingness, p. 54.
One may say that our rejection of Christianity can be boiled down to our rejection of the Christian concept of God, whether it is the way we experience this God, or the manner in which He is introduced to us by the Christian Church, etc. Comparing this age to the Patristic-Medieval period, Gabriel Vahanian cogently observes that the idea of the death of God “more and more evidently constitutes the foundation of our civilization, just as previously the idea of a Christian culture was founded on the presentness of God’s reality”.129

It appears that, ever since the time of St. Augustine, the only God whom the West has largely followed is the Christian God. By extracting for whatever reasons in whatever manner this God out of our present midst, we have in effect betrayed, killed or murdered Him in cultural and spiritual Deicide. As the result, “[t]he ultimate absurdity of man’s condition is in view”.130 Albert Camus adds: “To kill God is to become god oneself”131. “Once God is dead and man is deified, man is even more alone and estranged from himself he ever was before”.132 Worse, “[h]e who goes away from Being goes towards nonbeing”133. The atheist would argue: “If God does not exist, everything is permissible”134. But the tragedy is that in the rejection of Being Itself, we will only abuse our freedom of being, driving ourselves progressively more in minus esse towards ontological suicide or metaphysical despair.

Turning away from Being Itself, as St. Augustine would say, there is only ontological reduction, fall, and purposelessness with us spiritual beings inscribed with ontological finality toward Ipsum Esse, living restlessly from crisis to crisis on the existential level of minus esse or “non esse sine deo”135. In fact, we will not be nothing, but we will be unhappy, unfulfilled, afflicted, lost, disintegrated, going nowhere, and finding the existence of one’s being and that of other beings intolerably empty and absurd. Richard Tarnas seems to express our present ontological condition extraordinarily well in terms of his understanding of modern existentialism:136

130 Ibid.
131 Ibid., p. ix.
132 Ibid., p. 230.
133 St. Augustine, En. in Ps. 38, 22, in: Emile Zum Brunn, St. Augustine: Being and nothingness, p.108.
134 Ibid., p. 106.
135 St. Augustine, De ord. 2, 7 20, BA, 4, p. 396, in: Emile Zum Brunn, St. Augustine: Being and nothingness, p. 27.
Nowhere was the problematic modern condition more precisely embodied than in the phenomenon of existentialism, a mood and philosophy expressed in the writings of Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus, among others, but ultimately reflecting a pervasive spiritual crisis in modern culture. The anguish and alienation of twentieth-century life were brought to full articulation as the existentialist addressed the most fundamental, naked concerns of human existence --- suffering and death, loneliness and dread, guilt, conflict, spiritual emptiness and ontological insecurity, the void of absolute values or universal contexts, the sense of cosmic absurdity, the frailty of human reason, the tragic impasse of the human condition. Man was condemned to be free. He faced the necessity of choice and thus knew the continual burden of error. He lived in constant ignorance of his future, thrown into a finite existence bounded at each end by nothingness. The infinity of human aspiration was defeated before the finitude of human possibility. Man possessed no determining essence: only his existence was given, an existence engulfed by mortality, risk, fear, ennui, contradiction, uncertainty. No transcendent Absolute guaranteed the fulfillment of human life or history. There was no eternal design or providential purpose. Things existed simply because they existed, and not from some “higher” or “deeper” reason. God was dead, and the universe was blind to human concerns, devoid of meaning or purpose. Man was abandoned, on his own. All was contingent. To be authentic one had to admit, and choose freely to encounter, the stark reality of life’s meaninglessness.

Obviously, the modern and postmodern world in general has forgotten that as mutable created spiritual beings, we are by nature dependent on the Uncreated Being Itself. Each one of us, without exception, has our being and existence only from Being. As the ontological finality toward Being is inscribed in us immutably, being only means partaking in God. 137 Amid its ontological Deicide, i.e., the metaphysical murder of Deus the eternal Being Itself, the post-Christian West has been wasting itself away, in horrendous defiance against her very ontological being as such.

5.2 Ontological Deicide in the Modern History of Metaphysics of Being

Ever since the inception of the modern scientific period some 500 years ago, what was perhaps the most celebrated issue in classical metaphysics regarding the existence of God as Being Itself or the most real of all

137 Cf. Emile Zum Brunn, St. Augustine: Being and nothingness, p. 100.
beings\textsuperscript{138} has been increasingly disfavoured, abandoned or explained away by various philosophers. Historically, St. Augustine’s more-Platonic metaphysics was promulgated through his school by, for example, “St. Bonaventure (1231-74), and then with an increasing addition of the Aristotelian systemization and realism by way of Arabian philosophy, culminating in the major syntheses of St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-74), John Duns Scotus (c. 1274-1308), and others”\textsuperscript{139}.

However, soon after its peak development, the classical metaphysics substantially based on St. Augustine’s concept of God as Being came upon its first major skeptic or opponent, i.e., the conceptualist nominalism of William of Ockham (c. 1285-1349) and his followers. In retrospect, this first negative encounter by classical metaphysics near the end of the Patristic-Medieval Christian period became the beginning of its largely troublesome journey throughout the modern scientific period. “Beings are not to be multiplied without necessity”.\textsuperscript{140} Known as Ockham’s razor, this famous principle was formulated by Ockham. It was not so much in rebellion against classical metaphysics of God-Being as directly aimed against the increasingly petty metaphysical distinction of great complexities introduced by John Duns Scotus, the Subtle Doctor.\textsuperscript{141}

Soon after, there emerged “the Age of Science and Age of Reason”\textsuperscript{142}, initiated by scientists like Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), Johann Kepler (1571-1630), Francis Bacon (1561-1626), and Issac Newton (1642-1727).\textsuperscript{143} As the natural empirical sciences have reigned supreme to this very day, our sensory-empirical scientific experience has become the ultimate measure of every being or thing in both the sensible and suprasensible realms. While scientifically verifiable sense-data have become the only credible information, suprasensible beings, like God-Being, have lost their realism and appeal to us. Increasingly, “being” is no longer accepted as the universal unifying paradigm.\textsuperscript{144}

At the same time, the concept of God as Being Itself is also considered too abstract and transcendent. Since classical metaphysics “can no longer give


\textsuperscript{141} Cf. Ibid.


\textsuperscript{143} Cf. Bertrand Russell, \textit{History of Western Philosophy}, pp. 512-530.

\textsuperscript{144} Cf. Thomas Kuhn, \textit{The Structure of Scientific Revolutions}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970).
us demonstrable truths about the world”, many have taken refuge in the incredible achievements of modern or postmodern science. Significantly, natural science has thus replaced traditional philosophy and religion as the essential guide to our metaphysical worldview. Consequently, as Carl Sagan (1934-1996) has said it so well: “[t]he Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be”. God, therefore, is no more in the totality of reality or within the immensity of space, let alone Ipsum Esse as an ontological concept of God. The history of modern philosophy, therefore, cannot be well grasped without examining its relationship with the spectacular rise and our worship of the natural sciences. Here below is another instance.

Having derived his concept of metaphysics from Leibniz’s inferior successors as the science of things unseen and the knowledge of the suprasensible, Kant (1724-1804) dismissed metaphysics as unscientific and unverifiable in the Critique of Pure Reason, the most thorough and devastating of all anti-classical metaphysical works. Accepting no knowledge except through proper scientific and empirical sense-experience, the founder of German idealism and probably the greatest of modern philosophers thought that Plato and his followers were misled in believing in the philosophy of suprasensible reality.

In varying degrees, the anti-metaphysics of Kant seems to have prevailed over the West in every corner for the last two centuries. In Kant’s theory of knowledge, we may only think about but never know the noumenal world an sich (i.e., the world-in-itself); “the only world that we know is the empirical world of phenomenon, of ‘appearance,’ and that world exists only to the extent that man participates in its construction”.

“This century has borne the effects of ‘the death of God,’ pronounced by Nietzsche, but expressed in the works of Marx, Freud, Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida, among others”. Perhaps the thinker most identified with the Godless (or godless), man-centered ontology in the 20th century is Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). He claimed that “phenomenology, taken in terms of

152 Richard Tarnas, The Passion of the Western Mind, p. 345.
its content, is the science of the being of the particular being (Sein des Seienden) --- ontology” and that “ontology is only possible as phenomenology”\(^{154}\). It is true that Heidegger in his existential realism intended to meet the contemporary “individual persons in their freedom and search for authentic existence”\(^{155}\) on their own grounds\(^{156}\). However, unlike the traditional Christian ontology, Heidegger’s post-Kantian-Hegelian-Nietzschean ontology is one “from which God is absent”\(^{157}\). “No longer an aetiological search for grounds, Heidegger’s ontology makes it possible to describe coherently and consistently what it is to be, and to be human, without reference to God, or to a god”\(^{158}\).

In contrast with St. Augustine’s God-oriented ontology which is fundamentally “crede-ut-intelligas”\(^{159}\), i.e., believe-in-God-and-His-Word-so-that-you-may-really-understand, the approach of the post-Christian man-oriented philosophy is basically believe-in-man-and-his-mind-so-that-you-may-really-understand\(^{160}\). In abandoning God as the Absolute Being, the “postmodern human exists in a universe whose significance is at once utterly open and without warrantable foundation”\(^{161}\). Amid such rampant relativism, it is no longer possible for the modern or postmodern generation in general to apprehend an objective cosmic order\(^{162}\). Purportedly, “[t]o the barely whispered admission, ‘I hardly know anymore who and where I am’, Heidegger answers: ‘None of us knows that, as soon as we stop fooling ourselves’”\(^{163}\). Without surprise, toward the end of his life Heidegger finally had to admit: “Only a god can save us”\(^{164}\).

5.4 **Augustinian Solution: Return to the all-Present God as Being Itself**

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\(^{157}\) Catriona Hanley, *Being and God in Aristotle and Heidegger*, p. xvii.


\(^{162}\) Cf. Ibid., p. 353.


\(^{164}\) Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, p. 412.
Stating in terms of St. Augustine’s metaphysics of Being and being, the modern-postmodern West needs to be reminded that its anti-metaphysical project of science and reason has been dealing with being without Being. Ontologically, it has gone from innocence to decadence, acutely out of control. In spite of all the external achievements in science and literature, this Beingless experiment has slowly eroded and demolished our very inner being. Externally speaking, this age may be an age of science, space travel, globalism, wealth, health, design, communication, cinema, democracy, and the common man, etc. But internally, its mind is largely filled with materialism, uncertainty, individualism, confusion, absurdity, nihilism, anxiety, and inner emptiness, etc.

In fact, in the present ontological Deicide and fall towards minus esse and nothingness, the West is wasting its external state away, even without another terrorist attack or natural disaster. “He who goes away from Being goes towards nonbeing”. In ignoring the ontological finality for Being as inscribed in us, we cling to created, fleeting beings. Such inordinate behaviour can only torture our inner being further, leading us more and more towards nonbeing while increasing our ontological reduction and disorientation. The tragedy is that while all this is going on, Being Itself is intimately all-present to us throughout.

In the final analysis, the modern or postmodern stress on being without Being is a movement by which the mind on its own turns away from the Creator and toward the creatures. “Leaving reality for its shadow, the soul no longer sees what is in a supreme way. Such is the reason for its blindness and suffering”, needlessly so. For whatever reasons, it is time for many in the West and perhaps also in the East to wake up and return to Being. Regardless of the past, we have to “recognize that the foolish soul suffers a reduction whereas the wise soul has more stability and a greater plenitude of being”. “I am Being itself so as not to want to be absent from men”. Addressing Being Itself, St. Augustine asserted: “You have made us for you, and our heart is without peace until it rests in you”.

166 Ibid., p. 799.
167 St. Augustine, En. in Ps. 38, 22, in: Emile Zum Brunn, St. Augustine: Being and nothingness, p. 108.
168 Emile Zum Brunn, St. Augustine: Being and nothingness, p. 35.
170 St. Augustine, Sermon 7, in: Emile Zum Brunn, St. Augustine: Being and nothingness, p.viii.
171 St. Augustine, Conf. 1, 1, 1, BA, 13, p. 272, in: Emile Zum Brunn, St. Augustine: Being and nothingness, p. 73.
All in all, we have to understand that only God is *is* as the all-present immutable Being Itself. “Everything else, however exalted, is mutable; suffering some measure of not-being, it exists, to be sure, yet not fully. God alone can say simply: “I am Who am””\(^{172}\). Before reaching a point of *minus esse* beyond return, it is really time for many to discover or re-discover Being. Indeed, the future and happiness of a created spiritual being consists in his or her openness and union with Being. Analogically, the spiritual state of the present modern or postmodern generation may be compared to that of St. Augustine before his effective conversion in 389 when he was filled with ungodly skepticism and lust after created beings.

Apparently, the contemporary West and the countries being Westernized have been so skillful in “the split-up of problems into their smallest possible components. We are good at it. So good, we often forget to put the pieces back together again”\(^{173}\). What we need, therefore, is some unifying knowledge regarding the totality of reality. This is where St. Augustine can sure come in. His comprehensive metaphysics of Being and being can help us not only to see “the whole forest”. It also can also bring back to us, in concept and experience, the proper relationship between being and Being, so that this essence may appear or re-appear to many, as it should, even for the first time\(^{174}\).

Without question, in our return journey to God, a good concept of God as Being Itself is insufficient. Like St. Augustine, we also need an interior experience or mysticism of God in our transforming union with Him\(^{175}\) who is, after all, the living God of Abraham, Jacob and Issac. In other words, Exodus 3:14 alone which reveals to us that God is THE BEING is not enough. It must be accompanied or complemented by the next verse, i.e., Exodus 3:15: “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, and the God of Jacob”\(^{176}\). As Karl Rahner (1904-1984) cogently observed a while ago, the future Christian would have to become either a mystic or he (or she) is not.\(^{177}\) Similar to that of St. Augustine, it is this final conversion, i.e., this ontological union in concept and mystical experience with God as the all-

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\(^{172}\) James F. Anderson, *St. Augustine and Being: A metaphysical essay*, p. 76.


\(^{175}\) Cf. Alex Kurian, *Ascent to Nothingness: The ascent to God according to John of the Cross* (London, UK: St Paul’s, 2000).


present Being Itself, which will truly “consecrate the victory of Being over nothingness”\( ^{178} \).

6. CONCLUSION

Metaphysically, we are living in quite a Beingless, uncertain and insecure age in which everything is split-up in pieces\( ^{179} \) and that “everything could change tomorrow”\( ^{180} \) in blind fluctuations. A healthy balance for the cultural and spiritual constitution of the West, and perhaps also of Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and many other countries in the Far East, in which some reliable order could come out of such bottomless chaos, is, therefore, truly needed. What is required at the least for such an equilibrium is, on the one hand, (a) an immutable eternal all-present being or reliable foundation upon which everything can surely rest, and on the other (b) a trustworthy time-tested metaphysics which gives us a whole picture of everything existing in the totality of reality. It appears that St. Augustine has soundly given us both in terms of (a) the concept of God as the all-present Being Itself, and (b) the metaphysical conception of the various levels of being and essence. His ontological comprehensiveness and ingenuity, as well as his personal spiritual life struggling in sin, doubt and conversion, provide us with much inspiration and encouragement in our current spiritual and metaphysical chaos. In addition, his immeasurable contributions and enduring influences on the Western world\( ^{181} \) may need to be rediscovered by many in the present generation for the sake of their sanity.

Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) recently reaffirmed that St. Augustine of Hippo is a singular teacher of the modern man in his search for God, and that the saint’s experience is similar to that of many contemporary people.\( ^{182} \) Reflecting on our current decadence and ontological fall in egotism, hedonism, materialism, skepticism, and disorientation, etc., many in both the West and the East today seem to be living a life similar to that of St. Augustine before his conversion. Indeed, St. Augustine’s concept of God as all-present Being Itself has been a central concept of God in both his theocentric philosophy and the history of Western Christianity. As a

\[ ^{178} \text{Cf. St. Augustine, } De vera rel. 12, 25, \text{ in: Emile Zum Brunn, St. Augustine: Being and nothingness, p. 114.} \]

\[ ^{179} \text{Cf. Alvin Toffler, The Challenge to Science, p. xi.} \]

\[ ^{180} \text{Richard Tarnas, The Passion of the Western Mind, p. 402.} \]

\[ ^{181} \text{O. J.-B. Du Roy, August, St., in: New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 1, p. 1041.} \]

\[ ^{182} \text{Cf. Zenit News, ZE010910: http://www.zenit.org/, September 10, 2001.} \]
Platonic-Aristotelian notion, this concept of God represents also the wisdom of the ancient Greek philosophical and theological idea of God.

In the midst of our current spiritual confusion and metaphysical stalemate with respect to God, it may time for us to humbly let the exemplary life and metaphysics of St. Augustine once again be an inspiration and guide, so that we may become truly wise toward the eternal all-present Being Itself. We would, then, not be participating merely in simple existence or falling *minus esse* towards non-being, but would be living in *magis esse* toward the fullest plenitude of our being and Being Itself.

Finally, more research works are needed to better explain and introduce God as the all-present Being to the present generation. Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), for instance, remarkably suggests: “The God for whom our century is waiting must be: 1. As vast and mysterious as the Cosmos. 2. As immediate and all-embracing as Life. 3. As linked (in some way) to our effort as Mankind. A God who made the World less mysterious, or smaller, or less important than the God we await --- will never more be He to whom the Earth kneels”¹⁸³. Hopefully, this vast and mysterious model of God, among many, would be used to make St. Augustine’s metaphysical concept of God as the all-present *Ipsum Esse* more relevant and exciting to many who are living today.

REFERENCES


St. Augustine’s Concept of God as the All-Present Being for the Present Generation


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