

SAINT AUGUSTINE

(354–430) BISHOP AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

I HAVE LEARNT TO LOVE YOU LATE

I HAVE learnt to love you late, Beauty at once so ancient and so new!
I have learnt to love you late!

You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself.
I searched for you outside myself and,
disfigured as I was,
I fell upon the lovely things of your creation.

You were with me, but I was not with you.
The beautiful things of this world kept me far from you and yet,
if they had not been in you,
they would have had no being at all.

You called me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of deafness.
You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my
blindness to flight.

You shed your fragrance about me;
I drew breath and now I gasp for your sweet odour.

I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you.
You touched me, and I am inflamed with love of your peace.

—The Bishop of Hippo, 'I Have Learnt to Love You Late,'
bk. 10, chap. 27 in *Confessions* [written 397–98], trans. R.
S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 231–32.

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