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„NISI CREDIDERITIS, NON INTELLIGETIS” – BELIEF AS NATURAL COGNITION IN THE WRITINGS OF ST AUGUSTINE

The well-known sentence *credo ut intelligam* which has its roots in the writings of St Augustine is often evoked as a model of the relation between faith and reason. During the Middle Ages it was transformed into different formulations, the most famous being *fides quaerens intellectum* of St Anselm, but the main significance seems to have stayed the same. *Credo ut intelligam* means that faith is prior to rational cognition and thus Christian Revelation can be treated as an indispensable basis for any reasoning. However, we can observe that scholars still have some problems with explaining what this sentence really means, although they all agree that the relation between faith and reason is fundamental to understanding of the whole philosophy of St Augustine.

The classical explanation was given by Etienne Gilson, who seems to take this sentence literally and wants to explain why putting faith before reason is necessary for the Bishop of Hippo. He has no doubt that the relation between faith and reason has to be treated first before any other problem of the philosophy of St Augustine. Therefore, he starts the first chapter of the already classical book *The Christian Philosophy of St Augustine* with the sentence: “The first step along the path leading the mind to God is to accept Revelation by faith”¹. In his demonstration, Etienne Gilson wants to convince us that such order (faith before reason) is better, and that St Augustine himself treated it so because of his complicated intellectual life, especially because of the struggle against skepticism. Although he wants to show that such claims were natural for the Bishop of Hippo, but still, as a philosopher, he seems to be a little disappointed when he says: “If we are philosophers, we may regret that Augustine did not pose his problem in some other way; but he did pose it in the way we have described. A philosophy which aims to be a true love of

¹ E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St Augustine*, tr. L.E.M. Lynch, New York 1960, p. 27.

wisdom must begin with faith, and it will become the understanding of that faith”². Gilson’s presentation of this issue gives us an impression that it is the way of Christian philosophy which must always start with the Revelation as its basis.

Another thing which can be found in Gilson’s approach is the conviction that we can draw a clear borderline between faith and reason in the philosophy of St Augustine. In newer studies on the issue, especially in the handbooks on the History of Philosophy, scholars tend to be more careful on the matter. Kirsten Friis Johansen points out that: “It is not possible to distinguish between philosophy and theology in Augustine; philosophy is an attitude to life, and faith is the proper philosophy”³. But still we may find many contemporary opinions claiming that religious faith is prior to reason⁴. The problem here does not lie in the absence of such claims in Augustine’s writings. He claims in many places that the knowledge of God can be achieved only by accepting the truth contained in the Revelation of the Bible, and only then we can proceed in understanding and gaining knowledge on the Truth of the Faith. The problem seems to be a proper understanding of the priority of belief. Contemporary scholars tend to agree that there is no easy way to distinguish faith from reason in the writings of St Augustine. In my opinion, the transition from faith to understanding should be treated more broadly, without limiting it to the relations between Revelation and Philosophy. I would like to show that the path from belief to understanding is a universal description of acquiring any knowledge. This universal model was applied by Augustine both in philosophical and theological investigations. Probably the whole issue depends on the understanding of the Latin term *credo*; whether it is treated only as religious faith, or in a wider meaning, as belief, which is also a kind of natural cognition. I would like to argue that for St Augustine *credo* had a broader meaning, and he used it to express both religious and natural belief.

THE UNIVERSAL MODEL – PISTIS IN PLATO’S CAVE

The universal model of transition from belief to understanding should be obvious to any philosopher since it was presented by Plato in the famous allegory

² Ibidem, p. 36-37.

³ K. F. Johansen, *A History of Ancient Philosophy*, tr. H. Rosenmeier, London and New York 1998, p. 610. We can find also such careful approach to the matter in G.B. Matthews, *Augustine*, in: *Ancient Philosophy of Religion*, ed. G. Oppy and N.N. Trakakis, London and New York 2009, p. 247-248.

⁴ See for e.g., J.B. Stump, *Natural Theology after Modernism*, in: *Blackwell companion to Science and Christianity*, ed. J.B. Stump and Alan G. Padgett, Blackwell Publishing 2012, p. 146; S. MacDonald, *Augustine*, in: *Blackwell Companion to Philosophy in Middle Ages*, ed. J.J.E. Garcia and T.B.Noone, Blackwell Publishing 2002, p. 164.

of the cave at the beginning of the seventh book of the *Republic*. The whole allegory is the explanation of how man can achieve the true knowledge of ideas, proceeding through various states of knowing, while going out of the Cave. Earlier, at the end of sixth book, interlocutors discussed about the nature of geometric figures and found out that there are four types of knowledge. Summarizing, Socrates said to the Glaucon: “Join me, then, in taking these four conditions in the soul as corresponding to the four sub-sections of the line: understanding (νόησις) dealing with the highest, thought (διάνοια) dealing with the second; assign belief (πίστις) to the third, and imagination (εἰκασία) to the last. Arrange them in a proportion and consider that each shares in clarity to the degree that the subsection it deals with shares in truth”⁵. *Understanding* is the highest type of cognition, because ideas are its objects. A lower level of intellectual cognition – *thought*, concerns mathematical objects. Two other are the types of sensual cognition, where *belief* is the upper and *imagination* the lower one. Plato says that the effect of the first two types of intellectual cognition is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), but the cognition of sensual objects effects in achieving a common belief or popular opinion (δόξα)⁶. So for Plato belief is the type of sensual cognition which differs from imagination because it has a greater state of certainty. Needless to say this is not a religious belief but rather a description of one of various kinds of natural cognition.

Plato also uses those four types of cognition in the presentation of the allegory of the cave; however, we must be mindful of the context in which the belief shows up as part of the process of going out to the true reality of ideas. People who are chained up and all their lives look at the images on the opposite wall of the cave must be released from their bonds and slowly accommodate to the light which reveals the true nature of things. Thus the allegory shows four types of cognition not only naming them but also showing their roles in the process of acquiring knowledge. The whole allegory is not static but dynamic, and this is the context in which Plato’s understanding of belief can be seen clearly. The most important part is the starting point of the way, the moment “when one was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his neck around, walk, and look up toward the light...”⁷. But it is not enough to turn the head to the light to pass from the stage of *eikasia* to *pistis*. The prisoner is confused, in pain, and he still thinks that images are the real objects of senses. He must be asked by somebody and slowly learn to distinguish between the objects and their images. Gail Fine points out that this is the moment of the first application of elenchus or dialectic, which resembles the situations in other dialogues, where interlocutors “at first believe they know the answers to Socrates’ ‘What is F?’ questions; when cross-examined, they too are

⁵ Plato, *Respublica* 514A-516C (Platon, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t. VII/1, *La République*, red. E. Chambry, Paris 1933, p. 219; Plato, *Republic*, tr. C.D.C. Reeve, Cambridge 2004, p. 207).

⁶ Ibidem, 476E-477B (Platon, *La République*..., p. 93-94; Plato, *Republic*, p. 169-170).

⁷ Ibidem, 515 C (Platon, *La République*..., 146; Plato, *Republic*, p. 209).

quickly at a loss”⁸. The result of the questioning in other dialogues is often negative; however, here the prisoner is finally driven to the light and true knowledge. The state of belief does not support the analysis of the nature of the object in itself, but it gives a more certain knowledge about the sensual things. That is why Gail Fine names this stage “confidence” rather than “belief”⁹. There is another aspect here which, as we shall see, will be also present in St Augustine. Although Plato does not mention authority, there is always somebody who tells the confused prisoner about the sensual objects. He is confused and wants to return to the shadows, so he must be put into questioning and detached from his previous convictions. This process requires dialectic and this means “the other” who helps him, so it is very unlikely that he can get to the higher level of knowledge only by himself.

It is worth mentioning that at a higher level this process repeats itself once again. At the level of intellectual cognition, mathematical reasoning resembles imagination. Mathematics or geometry which depend on demonstration cannot result in the true knowledge of ideas. When mathematicians draw geometrical figures they do not think about the figures but rather about eternal ideas which they resemble¹⁰. Figures are once again the visible shadows of what is the thing in itself, of ideas which remain above any sensual apprehension. Therefore, the position of a mathematician is much like that of a slave, who cannot abandon sensual signs to rise to the thing in itself. In mathematical reasoning: “The soul is forced to use hypotheses in the investigation of it, not traveling up to a first principle, since it cannot escape or get above its hypotheses, but using as images those very things of which images were made by the things below them, and which, by comparison to their images, were thought to be clear and to be honored as such”¹¹. To rise above the level of mathematics once again a long and painful process of dialectic is necessary, to learn how to discern between the drawings and the ideas¹². Only then man can gain the knowledge of the first principle and find himself at the level of *noesis*. We must also be aware of the meaning of the term *νόησις*, which means not only having some information about the principle, but understanding the idea, real getting into the content, so this term resembles Latin *intelligere* used so often by St Augustine. Since *imagination* resembles the higher *thought*, the *belief* is like the *knowledge*, because it concerns not the images but

⁸ G. Fine, *Knowledge and Belief in Republic V-VII*, in: *Plato. 1, Metaphysics and Epistemology*, ed. G. Fine, Oxford 1999, p. 234.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 234.

¹⁰ Plato, *Rrepublic* 510 C-D (Platon, *La République...*, 141, Plato, *Republic...*, p. 206).

¹¹ *Ibidem* 511 A (Platon, *La République...*, 141, Plato, *Republic...*, p. 207).

¹² *Ibidem* 511 B (Platon, *La République...*, 141-2, Plato, *Republic...*, p. 207). “Also understand, then, that by the other subsection of the intelligible I mean what reason itself 40 grasps by the power of dialectical discussion, treating its hypotheses, not as first principles, but as genuine hypotheses (that is, stepping stones and links in a chain), in order to arrive at what is unhypothetical and the first principle of everything.”

objects in themselves. Those similarities are important because they show that acquiring knowledge and to know something really always means to find the object as it is in itself.

Finally, we can see a pattern here. Plato provides all his successors with a model of how to get to the ideas. This is the goal of philosophical life – to have an understanding of the principle, and to reach this one must pass the stage of belief which is a turning point and the first step on the road.

PLOTINUS – BELIEF AND COGNITION OF THE ONE

Before analyzing the writings of St Augustine, we must at least briefly look at the *Enneads* of Plotinus. We can assume that the Bishop of Hippo read and knew them since he mentions *Libri platoniorum* in his *Confessions*¹³, and there is no doubt how great was the impact of Neoplatonism on his writings.

In the *Enneads* we can observe how Plotinus deals with the process of acquiring knowledge when he presents the dialectic as the discipline (τέχνη) or method (μέθοδος) of leading a man to the unity with the One¹⁴. We can see, as it was in Plato, a man who must be guided through all the way, so Plotinus writes: “The first degree is the conversion from the lower life; the second – held by those that have already made their way to the sphere of the Intelligible (τῷ νοητῷ), have set as it were a footprint there but must still advance within the realm – lasts until they reach the extreme hold of the place, the Term attained when the topmost peak of the Intellectual realm is won¹⁵. Plotinus speaks here about three types of man, and the way of conducting them depends on their character. They are: a musician, a metaphysician (or philosopher) and a lover. The first one needs to be guided through the harmony of sounds to the intellectual harmony which is the principle of any music. Finally, “the truths of philosophy must be implanted in him to lead him to faith (πίστις) in that which, unknowing it, he possesses within himself¹⁶. It is unclear what exactly he initially possesses in himself, but we can see that belief occurs also at the intellectual level. Faith is necessary as an initial state because man cannot get closer to the object without the conviction that it can be reached and known. Thanks to faith the soul holds its attention on the object while not being fully drawn to it by the very nature of understanding it. Similarly, when considering the nature of contemplation, Plotinus in the third *Ennead* speaks

¹³ Augustinus, *Confessiones* VII, 9, 13; VIII, 2, 3 (Sant’ Agostino, *Le confessioni, Opere di Sant’ Agostino*, vol. 1, red. M. Pellegrino, Roma 1965, 194, 219-220).

¹⁴ Plotinus, *Enneades* I, 3, 1 (*Plotini Opera*, red. P. Henry, H. R. Schwyzer, Oxford 2004, vol. 1, p. 64; Plotinus, *The six Enneads*, tr. S. MacKenna and B.S. Page, Chicago 1952, p. 10).

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ *Enneades* I, 3, 1 (*Plotini Opera*, vol. 1, p. 65; Plotinus, *The six Enneads*, p. 10).

about the rest of the soul which achieved the vision: “This vision achieved, the acting instinct pauses, the mind is satisfied and seeks nothing further; the contemplation in one so conditioned, remains absorbed within as having acquired certainty (πίστις) to rest upon. The brighter the certainty (πίστις), the more tranquil is the contemplation as having acquired the more perfect unity”¹⁷. We can see that *pistis* is described rather as a state of the mind, then a type of knowledge. The soul must somehow be convinced of gaining the final state in which reasoning stops and it simply sees the object. Like in Plato’s cave the soul wants to come back to reasoning because it knows it better, and this makes contemplation disturbed. Nevertheless, a kind of belief is necessary to hold the soul in contemplation of the intellectual object and stay in this perfect vision of the truth. Belief in such meaning pays an even greater role because the same situation occurs when the soul steps above the level of Intellect where it also has a natural tendency to return to. Therefore, belief is indispensable also at the final stage of abandoning self and flying up to the unity with the One. The initiate stepping out, above the reality of Intellect must know “in a deep conviction (μαθόντα κατά πίστιν), whither he is going – into what reality he penetrates...”¹⁸. Above the level of Intellect the understanding cannot convince the soul to stay in the state of final vision, thus belief is necessary to achieve it. The clarity of logical reasoning, or even more perfect contemplation, which was so important at the lower level, is now useless and even is an obstacle to going further because it draws attention back to intellectual objects. Plotinus describes a similar role of belief in the fifth *Ennead*, where he discusses the unity between the intellect (νοῦς), intellectual cognition (νοήσις), and object of intellect (νοητόν)¹⁹. It is the crucial moment because only by gaining the conviction about the unity of those three things the soul can step forward from the realm of intellect to the vision of the One. Similarly, it cannot be done through useless reasoning. The soul must be convinced, must believe that things divided in the intellectual realm are one in the Highest Principle. “But has our discussion issued in an Intellectual-Principle having a persuasive activity [furnishing us with probability] (ἐνεργειαν πιστικὴν ἔχειν) No: it brings compulsion not persuasion; compulsion belongs to Intellectual-Principle, persuasion to the soul or mind (ἀνάγκη ἐν νοῦ, ἢ δὲ πειθῶ ἐν ψυχῇ), and we seem to desire to be persuaded rather than to see the truth in the pure intellect”²⁰. The soul must be persuaded to believe in order to leave the Intellectual reality and win over the compulsion of the intellectual principle. Here, we can see why for Plotinus belief is so important. The goal of a philosophical life is no longer only to see ideas and acquire the knowledge of ideas. There is the One above the intellectual reality, whom man must

¹⁷ *Enneades* III, 8 6 (*Plotini Opera*, vol 1, p. 368; Plotinus, *The six Enneads*, p. 131-132).

¹⁸ *Enneades* V, 8, 11 (*Plotini opera...*, vol. 2, p. 284, Plotinus, *The six Enneads*, p. 245).

¹⁹ *Enneades* V, 3, 5 (*Plotini Opera*, vol. 2, 211-212; Plotinus, *The six Enneads*, p. 217-218).

²⁰ *Enneades* V, 3, 6 (*Plotini Opera*, vol. 2, 211-212; Plotinus, *The six Enneads*, p. 218).

reach to achieve his goal. And the One cannot be the object of *episteme* – there is no understanding of the One. So only belief, a strong conviction can make the soul leave intellectual clarity and make it to go to the unknown which awaits above. Belief is no longer only a type of sensual cognition, it must be within the soul on all levels of reality, especially when it starts “the flight of the alone to the Alone.”

*ST AUGUSTINE – A GREEK MODEL IMPLANTED
IN CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY*

The sentence from the book of Isaiah (7,9) – *Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis* (unless you believe, you shall not understand) is a passage of the Holy Scripture frequently quoted by the Bishop of Hippo²¹. It certainly says that belief is prior to understanding, but how exactly Augustine understood it? We need to consider first the definition of *credere*, which he gives in *On the Predestination of the Saints*: “Yet even to believe is in fact nothing other than to think with assent” (*cum assensione cogitare*), for not everyone who thinks believes, for many think in order that they may not believe, but everyone who believes, thinks, and in believing thinks, and in thinking believes”²². Belief is inseparably combined with thinking, and it must be even preceded by thinking because it is impossible to believe in something unless one knows and thinks of what it is to be believed²³. Hence, there is a content of thought which must be accepted in order to believe in it. On the other hand, not everything in thinking is the object of belief because one can simply think of something without wondering whether it is true or not. I would say that the act of will is necessary to assert the reason that the object of thought is true. Another aspect present in believing is the authority of the other. The context of this text is religious since St Augustine considers the fragment of Psalm 87 which says that even our thinking is impossible without God²⁴, but we can see that he applies the same scheme while considering the nature of geometrical figures in

²¹ Augustine evokes this fragment 38 times. He uses the Old Latin translation, which is closer to the Septuagint – μη πιστεύσητε, οὐδὲ μὴ συνιῆτε (“if ye believe not, neither will ye at all understand” tr. L.C.L. Brenton, London 1851). In the Vulgate this verse is translated as: *nisi credideritis, non permanebitis*.

²² Augustinus, *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, II, 5. (Sant’ Agostino, *La predestinazione dei Santi*, in: *Opere di Sant’ Agostino*, vol. XX, ed. A. Trape, Roma 1987, p. 299; *On the Predestination of the Saints*, in: St Augustine, *Four anti-pelagian writings*, tr. J.A. Mourant and W.J. Collinge, Washington 1992, p. 222). „Quaquam et ipsum credere, nihil aliud est, quam cum assensione cogitare. Non enim omnis qui cogitat, credit; cum ideo cogitent plerique, ne credant: sed cogitat omnis qui credit, et credendo cogitat, et cogitando credit”.

²³ *Ibidem* II, 5 (*La predestinazione dei Santi*, p. 299; *On the Predestination of the Saints*, p. 221).

²⁴ Psalm 87, 7: “Not that we are sufficient to think anything as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God”.

his dialogue with *Evodius*. This fragment is so important that it is worth quoting in full: „To trust the word of another is one thing; to trust our own reason is a different thing (*Aliud est enim cum auctoritati credimus, aliud cum rationi*); to take something on authority is a great timesaver and involves no toil. If this way has any attraction for you, you may read in the extensive writings of great and good men what they thought should be said about these subjects as a safe and easy guide for the unlearned; and these men aimed at securing the confidence of persons whose minds, being either too slow or too occupied, could find no other safe road to truth. Such persons, whose number is very great, if they wish to grasp the truth by reason, are easily taken in by sophisms that land them in the swamp of error from which they never or only with difficulty succeed in emerging and extricating themselves. For these, then, it is a decided advantage to trust a most reliable authority (*excellentissimae auctoritati credere*) and to shape their conduct according to it. If you think that such a way is safer, I shall not only offer no resistance, but shall thoroughly approve. But, if you cannot bridle your eager conviction of coming to the truth by reason (*persuasisti ratione pervenire ad veritatem*), you must be prepared for long, hard, and circuitous riding, pursuing the path where reason beckons – that reason alone which is worthy of the name, that is, right reason (*vera ratio*). Not only is it right, but it is also sure (*certa*) and free from every semblance of falsehood, if man can ever attain to that state where no false argument or specious pretext can make him betray the truth”²⁵. There are two roads to attain the truth. The first one is easy and depends on believing a reliable authority. The second one is more difficult, but since it is based on the authority of reason, it gives the true knowledge, which is free from falsehood. Augustine is then sure that even on the level of natural cognition knowledge can be achieved thanks to the authority of the other and this way suffices for most. Since people are untrained in reasoning and have no proper guidance they can easily fall into false opinions

²⁵ Augustinus, *De quantitate animae*, I,7,12 (Sant' Agostino, *La gradezza dell'anima*, in: *Opere di Sant' Agostino*, t.III/2, ed. A. Trape, Roma 1976, p. 31-32; St Augustine, *The magnitude of the Soul*, tr. J.J. MacMahon, Washington 1947, p. 71-72). “Aliud est enim cum auctoritati credimus, aliud cum rationi. Auctoritati cre/dere magnum compendium est, et nullus labor: quod si te delectat, poteris multa legere, quae magni et divini viri de his rebus necessaria quae videbantur salubriter imperitioribus quasi nutu quodam locuti sunt, credique sibi voluerunt ab iis, quorum animis vel tardioribus vel implicatioribus alia salus esse non posset. Tales enim homines, quorum profecto maxima multitudo est, si ratione velint verum comprehendere, similitudinibus rationum facillime decipiuntur, et in varias noxiasque opiniones ita labuntur, ut emergere inde ac liberari, aut numquam, aut aegerrime queant. His ergo utilissimum est excellentissimae auctoritati credere, et secundum hoc agere vitam. Quod si tutius putas, non solum nihil resisto, sed etiam multum approbo. Si autem cupiditatem istam refrenare non potes, qua tibi persuasisti ratione pervenire ad veritatem, multi et longi circuitus tibi tolerandi sunt, ut non ratio te adducat, nisi ea quae sola ratio dicenda est, id est vera ratio; et non solum vera, sed ita certa, et ab omni similitudine falsitatis aliena, si tomen ullo modo haec ab homine inveniri potest, ut nullae disputationes falsae aut verisimiles ab ea te possint traducere”.

which often resemble the truth, and they can be sucked into “the swamp of error”. This means that the usage of *credere* does not always mean that man must rely on religious faith as a starting point of reasoning. The truth about geometrical figures can be gained by belief in the same way in which man accepts the truths of faith. The only difference is that in the case of natural truth one relies on the authority of a more reliable man, but in the case of revealed truth one relies on the highest authority of God. Needless to say that religious faith does not diminish the authority of reason in any way. Augustine underlines that such authority of the right reason brings the certitude in seeing the truth, the certitude which cannot be undermined by any false opinion. When Evodius agrees to follow the hard path of reason, the interlocutor says that attaining the goal will be granted by God²⁶. But this does not mean that God grants the clarity and certitude of reasoning. The reason itself is the guide and it leads where it wills, while God secures reaching the truth just like his grace helps in reaching any worthy goal.

As we have seen above, the belief is for Augustine strongly connected with authority. He considers this topic more broadly in the last part of another dialogue – *The Teacher*, where he discusses the role of words in the process of learning. Words, in his opinion, do not have designations which are inherently connected to them, they can only point at things, or rather “they merely intimate that we should look for realities (*admonent tantum ut quaeramus res*)²⁷. We must previously know the thing (*res ipsa*) in order to know that the word signifies it. However, this is not enough because there must be somebody who says the word, points out the thing which this word signifies. Only then we can learn the connection between the word and the thing²⁸. The basic limitation of words is that they can only intimate us to look for things, but they cannot “present them to us for our knowledge” (*non exhibent ut noverimus*). Therefore, someone else who “teaches me is one who presents to my eyes or to any bodily sense, or even to the mind itself, something that I wish to know”²⁹. Presenting the thing to the eyes of a student is easy in the case of sensual reality, but becomes much more difficult with intellectuals. But here a teacher is also indispensable to show us objects of intellectual reality. For Plato it was someone (a philosopher?) who led the initiate out of the cave, but St Augustine has an entirely new teacher in mind. This Teacher is Christ himself who lives in the mind of every man, and teaches us how to connect intellectual objects with internal words³⁰. It may seem that we have already crossed the border between

²⁶ Ibidem, I,7,13 (Sant’ Agostino, *La gradezza dell’anima*, p. 32; St Augustine, *The magnitude of the Soul*, p. 72).

²⁷ Augustinus, *De magistro*, XI, 36 (Sant’ Agostino, *Il maestro*, in: *Opere di Sant’ Agostino*, t. III/2, p. 782; St Augustine, *The Teacher*; tr. R.P. Russell, Washington 2004, p. 49).

²⁸ Ibidem X, 34 (Sant’ Agostino, *Il maestro*, p. 780; *The teacher*, p. 47-48).

²⁹ Ibidem XI, 36 (*Il maestro*, p. 782; St Augustine, *The Teacher*, p. 49).

³⁰ *De magistro*, XI, 38 (*Il maestro*, p. 784; St Augustine, *The Teacher*, p. 51).

natural knowledge and the revelation, but St Augustine clearly treats Christ-Logos as the one who teaches all men with no regard whether they are Christians or not. He says that “this is the Wisdom which every rational soul does indeed consult, but it reveals itself to each according to his capacity to grasp it by reason of the good or evil dispositions of his will”³¹. We can surely see here the model of a teacher who is indispensable to gain knowledge presented earlier by Plato and Plotinus. The only change is the person of the teacher. Augustine thinks for sure that Christ is the best of all possible teachers, because he, unlike others, does not speak from the outside. Since he dwells in the mind of man and he is Logos, whose perfect thought are intellectual objects, he can teach with efficiency and certainty which is limited only by the disposition of the weak reason of man³². Such understanding of Christ makes him similar to the Intellect of Plotinus, who also was both the intellectual principle and the world of ideas. Therefore, we cannot treat Augustine as a theologian because if we base such conviction on his claim that Christ is set as the intellectual principle there would be no natural reasoning or knowledge.

Considering the role of the teacher and the relations between things and words, Augustine uses the example of three boys in the burning fiery furnace (Dn 3, 8-97) to show the relations between faith and reason: “But that everything recounted in that story occurred at that time exactly as recorded, that, I admit, is something I ‘believe’ rather than ‘know,’ and those same men, whose word we believe, were themselves not ignorant of this distinction. For the Prophet says: ‘Unless you believe, you shall not understand,’ which he really could not have said if he thought that there was no difference between the two. Hence, what I understand, that I also believe, although I do not also understand everything I believe. Also, everything I understand, I know, though I do not know everything I believe. Nor do I for that reason fail to see how useful it is also to believe many things which I do not know, including also this account of the three boys”³³. In this fragment we can observe how the problem of gaining knowledge is applied to the revelation. Augustine

³¹ Ibidem “...Christus, id est incommutabilis Dei Virtus atque sempiterna Sapientia: quam quidem omnis rationalis anima consulit; sed tantum cuique panditur, quantum capere propter propriam, sive malam sive bonam voluntatem potest”.

³² See the O’Daly’s comment on Augustine following the Platonist tradition G. O’Dealy, *Augustine*, in: *Routledge History of Philosophy II: From Aristotle to Augustine*, ed. D. Furley, London New York 1999, p. 395.

³³ *De magistro*, XI, 37. (*Il maestro*, p. 784; St Augustine, *The Teacher*, p. 50). „Haec autem omnia quae in illa leguntur historia, ita illo tempore facta esse, ut scripta sunt, credere me potius quam scire fateor: neque istam differentiam iidem ipsi quibus credimus nescierunt. Ait enim propheta, Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis: quod non dixisset profecto, si nihil distare iudicasset. Quod ergo intelligo, id etiam credo: at non omne quod credo, etiam intelligo. Omne autem quod intelligo, scio: non omne quod credo, scio. Nec ideo nescio quam sit utile credere etiam multa quae nescio; cui utilitati hanc quoque adjungo de tribus pueris historiam: quare pleraque rerum cum scire non possim, quanta tamen utilitate credantur, scio”.

explains that in such case we must at first accept the authority of the Holy Scripture. We can only believe that an event took place, and this means that we cannot know this. Belief once again means here a kind of acceptance that something is true. Therefore, everything that is understood is also the object of belief (*quod ergo intelligo, id etiam credo*) because if one knows something one is also sure that it is true; one simply sees the truth. On the other hand, it is possible to admit that something is true without understanding it fully (*non omne quod credo, etiam intelligo*). However, there is a difference between understanding (*intelligere*), knowing (*scire*) and believing (*credere*), which are presented as three levels of knowledge with different amounts of certainty. Augustine seems to suggest that in the case of belief without understanding at least some understanding and knowledge is necessary because it is impossible to believe without knowing of what to believe. He says that he cannot understand and know everything (*omnia*) about the object of believe, but he knows that it is useful to believe the Bible.

For Augustine the distinction between belief and understanding is not a simple one, and, what seems to be even more important, those two are often presented in the dynamic context. There must be some understanding in belief, but when understanding is achieved belief does not disappear but rather reaches its fullness (“what I understand, that I also believe”). The will has no obstacles to accept the truth of what has been understood. However, this is not a single process of transition, it happens continuously, over and over again in seeking God – the ultimate truth. In the fifteenth book of *On the Trinity*, Augustine quotes the book of Ecclesiastes where Wisdom says: „They that eat me, shall yet hunger, and they that drink me, shall yet thirst” (Eccles. 24, 21). He explains that those who found understanding will desire more, and the understanding that they have will cause them to seek the deeper one, and then the new belief appears: “Faith seeks; understanding finds; wherefore the Prophet says: ‘Unless you believe, you shall not understand.’ And again the understanding still seeks Him whom it has found, for as it is sung in the holy Psalm: ‘God has looked down upon the children of men, to see if there be one who understands and seeks God.’ For this reason, then, man ought to be understanding in order that he may seek God”³⁴. Seeking God is then continuous and the transition from faith to understanding occurs many times. In this process, however, even when man seeks God a certain type of natural knowledge is possible for Augustine at the very beginning of this final book on the Trinity says that his goal is to show „whether this is the Trinity, not only to belie-

³⁴ Augustinus, *De Trinitate*, XV, 1, 2 (Sant’ Agostino, *La Trinita, Opere di Sant’ Agostino*, ed. A. Trape, M.F. Sciacca, t. IV, p. 618; Augustine, *The Trinity*, tr. S. MacKenna, Washington 1963, p. 452-3). “Fides quaerit, intellectus invenit: propter quod ait propheta: Nisi credideritis, non intellegetis 8. Et rursus intellectus eum quem invenit adhuc quaerit: Deus enim respexit super filios hominum, sicut in Psalmo sacro canitur, ut videret si est intellegens, aut requirens Deum 9. Ad hoc ergo debet homo esse intellegens, ut requirat Deum”.

vers by the authority of the divine Scriptures, but also to those who seek to understand by some kind of reason”³⁵. Hence a clear distinction between belief and understanding is impossible, and even in cognizing the utmost truth the path is open for those who do not accept the authority of the Scripture. It is possible that when writing those words Augustine thought of Plotinus whom he indebted so much during his own path towards Christianity. But he also disagrees with his predecessor because Plotinus was rather reluctant to grant the possibility of understanding the One; thus belief was necessary to hold the soul’s attention to the object above intellect. For Augustine the ultimate end is not faith but understanding. Faith is always imperfect because it only seeks, but does not find. He does not even say that reason finds, but intellect, which is like Greek νοῦς who sees and contemplates its object in a grasp much more perfect than reasoning. Augustine expresses this conviction even more strongly repeating many times that understanding is the reward of faith (*intellectus merces est fidei*)³⁶. Such a reward and full transition to understanding can occur only in the afterlife,³⁷ but on Earth it still remains the goal of man who will always seek the truth.

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³⁵ Ibidem XV, 1, 2 (Sant’Agostino, *La Trinita*, p. 616; Augustine, *The Trinity*, p. 451). “Quae utrum sit Trinitas, non solum credentibus, divinae Scripturae auctoritate; verum etiam intelligentibus, aliqua, si possumus, ratione iam demonstrare debemus”.

³⁶ See eg. Augustinus, *Sermo* 43, I,1 (Sant’Agostino, *Discorsi* I, in: *Opera di Sant’Agostino*, vol. 29, ed. A. Trappe, Roma 1979, p. 750); *Sermo*, 139, 1, 1 (Sant’Agostino, *Discorsi* III/1, *Opera di Sant’Agostino*, vol. 31/1, ed. A. Trappe, Roma 1990, p. 320).

³⁷ G. O’Daly, op. cit., p. 394.

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Streszczenie

Słynne stwierdzenie *fides querens intellectum*, ma niewątpliwie swoje źródło w wersecie księgi Izajasza (7, 9). Werset ten jednak przysparza problemów interpretacyjnych, ponieważ w różnych wersjach językowych brzmi inaczej. W Wulgacie traci on zupełnie odniesienia do ludzkiego poznania (*nisi credideritis, non permanebitis*). Dla św. Augustyna, który dysponował łacińskim tłumaczeniem Septuaginty (*nisi credideritis, non intelligetis*), werset ten narzucał kontekst pewnych typów poznania.

Analiza źródeł stwierdzenia *fides quarens intellectum* pozwala zobaczyć, że w formule tej niekoniecznie musi chodzić o to, że autorzy chrześcijańscy (zwłaszcza starożytni) uważają za nieodzowne poprzedzenie poznania naturalnego nadprzyrodzoną wiarą. Wiara już w dialogach Platona oznaczała pewien typ poznania, które jest ze swej natury niedoskonałe, ale może prowadzić do poznania doskonalszego. Właśnie takie przejście od *pistis* do *noesis* obserwujemy już w słynnym micie jaskini z platońskiego Państwa.

Śledząc wypowiedzi św. Augustyna dotyczące rozumienia wiary, możemy stwierdzić, iż traktuje ją on nie tylko w znaczeniu nadprzyrodzonym, ale także jako pewien typ poznania naturalnego. Widać to w wielu jego tekstach, wśród których szczególnie wyróżnia się fragment *De quantitate anime*, w którym biskup Hippony pokazuje konieczność wiary, jako pierwszego kroku w poznaniu geometrii. Takie rozumienie wiary stawia w innym świetle system św. Augustyna, interpretowanego w literaturze przedmiotu jako autora, który uważał, że wiara w rozumieniu nadprzyrodzonym jest koniecznym warunkiem wszelkiego poznania Boga.

Słowa kluczowe: *wiara, zrozumienie, Platon, Plotyn, św. Augustyn*

Summary

Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis

–Belief as a Form of Natural Cognition in St Augustine’s Writings

To summarise the paper, I would like to underline that placing belief at the beginning of the process of cognition is not a sufficient criterion to classify a thinker as a theologian or a philosopher. St Augustine is a good example of that. Such classification seems to perceive ancient writers from the contemporary point of view and ascribe to them the distinctions which did not exist in their ancient systems. This includes not only faith and reason but also the theoretical knowledge and the practical life which were inseparable in the entire classical tradition. The Bishop of Hippo was well aware of the role of a teacher who is essential on the path to knowledge. Augustine’s view proves how much he had inherited from the philosophers who saw themselves as guides for the beginners. Describing the process of going out of the cave, Plato himself listed belief or conviction as a type of cognition which is prior to knowledge of ideas. Plotinus granted even greater importance to belief because one needs to go above the Intellectual Principle. Greek philosophers did not think of the belief in terms of revelation but for St Augustine it was obvious that to attain any knowledge it is necessary to pass from belief to understanding. For instance, he applied the ancient model to explain the nature of geometrical figures as well as to the understand the content of the Holy Scripture. Just like his predecessors he saw this path of cognition in the context of the spiritual life which leads to the ultimate happiness of contemplating God.

Keywords: *faith, belief, understanding, Plato, Plotinus, St Augustine*