

AUGUSTINE: CONFESSIONS

Newly translated and edited

by

ALBERT C. OUTLER, Ph.D., D.D.

Professor of Theology
Perkins School of Theology
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

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Table of Contents

<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	3
AUGUSTINE’S TESTIMONY ON <i>CONFESSIONS</i>	11
BOOK ONE – PILGRIMAGE OF GRACE	13
BOOK TWO – ADOLESCENT MISCHIEF	27
BOOK THREE – STUDENT DAYS AT CARTHAGE	35
BOOK FOUR – AMONG THE MANICHEANS	46
BOOK FIVE – WITH AMBROSE AT MILAN	59
BOOK SIX – FRUITLESS SEARCH FOR “TRUTH”	71
BOOK SEVEN – CONVERSION TO NEO-PLATONISM	85
BOOK EIGHT – SONG OF TRUE CONVERSION	101
BOOK NINE – BAPTISM AND THE RETURN HOME.....	116
BOOK TEN – MOTIVATIONS AND APPETITES	133
BOOK ELEVEN – CREATOR, CREATION, AND TIME	164
BOOK TWELVE – TRUTH AND INTERPRETATION.....	182
BOOK THIRTEEN – HERMENEUTICS AND CREATION.....	202

Introduction

LIKE A COLOSSUS BESTRIDING TWO WORLDS, Augustine stands as the last patristic and the first medieval father of Western Christianity. He gathered together and conserved all the main motifs of Latin Christianity from Tertullian to Ambrose; he appropriated the heritage of Nicene orthodoxy; he was a Chalcedonian before Chalcedon – and he drew all this into an unsystematic synthesis which is still our best mirror of the heart and mind of the Christian community in the Roman Empire. More than this, he freely received and deliberately reconsecrated the religious philosophy of the Greco-Roman world to a new apologetic use in maintaining the intelligibility of the Christian proclamation. Yet, even in his role as summator of tradition, he was no mere eclectic. The center of his “system” is in the Holy Scriptures, as they ordered and moved his heart and mind. It was in Scripture that, first and last, Augustine found the focus of his religious authority.

At the same time, it was this essentially conservative genius who recast the patristic tradition into the new pattern by which European Christianity would be largely shaped and who, with relatively little interest in historical detail, wrought out the first comprehensive “philosophy of history.” Augustine regarded himself as much less an innovator than a summator. He was less a reformer of the Church than the defender of the Church’s faith. His own self-chosen project was to save Christianity from the disruption of heresy and the calumnies of the pagans, and, above everything else, to renew and exalt the faithful hearing of the gospel of man’s utter need and God’s abundant grace. But the unforeseen result of this enterprise was to furnish the motifs of the Church’s piety and doctrine for the next thousand years and more. Wherever one touches the Middle Ages, he finds the marks of Augustine’s influence, powerful and pervasive – even Aquinas is more of an Augustinian at heart than a “proper” Aristotelian. In the Protestant Reformation, the evangelical elements in Augustine’s thought were appealed to in condemnation of the corruptions of popular Catholicism – yet even those corruptions had a certain right of appeal to some of the non-evangelical aspects of Augustine’s thought and life. And, still today, in the important theological revival of our own time, the influence of Augustine is obviously one of the most potent and productive impulses at work.

A succinct characterization of Augustine is impossible, not only because his thought is so extraordinarily complex and his expository method so incurably digressive, but also because throughout his entire career there were lively tensions and massive prejudices in his heart and head. His doctrine of God holds the Plotinian notions of divine unity and remotion in tension with the Biblical emphasis upon the sovereign God’s active involvement in creation and redemption. For all his devotion to Jesus Christ, this theology was never adequately Christocentric, and this reflects itself in many ways in his practical conception of the Christian life. He did not invent the doctrines of original sin and seminal transmission of guilt but he did set them as cornerstones in his “system,” matching them with a doctrine of infant baptism which cancels, *ex opere operato*, birth sin and hereditary guilt. He never wearied of celebrating God’s abundant mercy and grace – but he was also fully persuaded that the vast majority of mankind are condemned to a wholly just and appalling damnation. He never denied the reality of human freedom and never allowed the excuse of human irresponsibility before God – but against all detractors of the primacy of God’s grace, he vigorously insisted on both double predestination

and irresistible grace.

For all this the Catholic Church was fully justified in giving Augustine his aptest title, *Doctor Gratiae*. The central theme in all Augustine's writings is the sovereign God of grace and the sovereign grace of God. Grace, for Augustine, is God's freedom to act without any external necessity whatsoever – to act in love beyond human understanding or control; to act in creation, judgment, and redemption; to give his Son freely as Mediator and Redeemer; to endue the Church with the indwelling power and guidance of the Holy Spirit; to shape the destinies of all creation and the ends of the two human societies, the “city of earth” and the “city of God.” Grace is God's unmerited love and favor, prevenient and occurrent. It touches man's inmost heart and will. It guides and impels the pilgrimage of those called to be faithful. It draws and raises the soul to repentance, faith, and praise. It transforms the human will so that it is capable of doing good. It relieves man's religious anxiety by forgiveness and the gift of hope. It establishes the ground of Christian humility by abolishing the ground of human pride. God's grace became incarnate in Jesus Christ, and it remains immanent in the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Augustine had no system – but he did have a stable and coherent Christian outlook. Moreover, he had an unwearied, ardent concern: man's salvation from his hopeless plight, through the gracious action of God's redeeming love. To understand and interpret this was his one endeavor, and to this task he devoted his entire genius.

He was, of course, by conscious intent and profession, a Christian theologian, a pastor and teacher in the Christian community. And yet it has come about that his contributions to the larger heritage of Western civilization are hardly less important than his services to the Christian Church. He was far and away the best – if not the very first – psychologist in the ancient world. His observations and descriptions of human motives and emotions, his depth analyses of will and thought in their interaction, and his exploration of the inner nature of the human self – these have established one of the main traditions in European conceptions of human nature, even down to our own time. Augustine is an essential source for both contemporary depth psychology and existentialist philosophy. His view of the shape and process of human history has been more influential than any other single source in the development of the Western tradition which regards political order as inextricably involved in moral order. His conception of a *societas* as a community identified and held together by its loyalties and love has become an integral part of the general tradition of Christian social teaching and the Christian vision of “Christendom.” His metaphysical explorations of the problems of being, the character of evil, the relation of faith and knowledge, of will and reason, of time and eternity, of creation and cosmic order, have not ceased to animate and enrich various philosophic reflections throughout the succeeding centuries. At the same time the hallmark of the Augustinian philosophy is its insistent demand that reflective thought issue in practical consequence; no contemplation of the end of life suffices unless it discovers the means by which men are brought to their proper goals. In sum, Augustine is one of the very few men who simply cannot be ignored or depreciated in any estimate of Western civilization without serious distortion and impoverishment of one's historical and religious understanding.

In the space of some forty-four years, from his conversion in Milan (A.D. 386) to his death in Hippo Regius (A.D. 430), Augustine wrote – mostly at dictation – a vast sprawling library of

books, sermons, and letters, the remains of which (in the Benedictine edition of St. Maur) fill fourteen volumes as they are reprinted in Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus*, Series Latina (Vols. 32-45). In his old age, Augustine reviewed his authorship (in the *Retractations*) and has left us a critical review of ninety-three of his works he judged most important. Even a cursory glance at them shows how enormous was his range of interest. Yet almost everything he wrote was in response to a specific problem or an actual crisis in the immediate situation. One may mark off significant developments in his thought over this twoscore years, but one can hardly miss the fundamental consistency in his entire life's work. He was never interested in writing a systematic *summa theologica*, and would have been incapable of producing a balanced digest of his multifaceted teaching. Thus, if he is to be read wisely, he must be read widely – and always in context, with due attention to the specific aim in view in each particular treatise.

For the general reader who wishes to approach Augustine as directly as possible, however, it is a useful and fortunate thing that at the very beginning of his Christian ministry and then again at the very climax of it, Augustine set himself to focus his experience and thought into what were, for him, summings up. The result of the first effort is the *Confessions*, which is his most familiar and widely read work. The second is in the *Enchiridion*, written more than twenty years later. In the *Confessions*, he stands on the threshold of his career in the Church. In the *Enchiridion*, he stands forth as triumphant champion of orthodox Christianity. In these two works – the nearest equivalent to summation in the whole of the Augustinian corpus – we can find all his essential themes and can sample the characteristic flavor of his thought.

Augustine was baptized by Ambrose at Milan during Eastertide, A.D. 387. A short time later his mother, Monica, died at Ostia on the journey back to Africa. A year later, Augustine was back in Roman Africa living in a monastery at Tagaste, his native town. In 391, he was ordained presbyter in the church of Hippo Regius (a small coastal town nearby). Here in 395 – with grave misgivings on his own part (cf. *Sermon CCCLV*, 2) and in actual violation of the eighth canon of Nicea (cf. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum*, II, 671, and IV, 1167) – he was consecrated assistant bishop to the aged Valerius, whom he succeeded the following year. Shortly after he entered into his episcopal duties he began his *Confessions*, completing them probably in 398 (cf. De Labriolle, I, vi (see Bibliography), and di Capua, *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, II, 678).

Augustine had a complex motive for undertaking such a self-analysis.¹ His pilgrimage of grace had led him to a most unexpected outcome. Now he felt a compelling need to retrace the crucial turnings of the way by which he had come. And since he was sure that it was God's grace that had been his prime mover on that way, it was a spontaneous expression of his heart that cast his self-recollection into the form of a sustained prayer to God.

The *Confessions* are not Augustine's autobiography. They are, instead, a deliberate effort, in the permissive atmosphere of God's felt presence, to recall those crucial episodes and events in which he can now see and celebrate the mysterious actions of God's prevenient and provident grace. Thus he follows the windings of his memory as it re-presents the upheavals of his youth and the stages of his disorderly quest for wisdom. He omits very much indeed. Yet he builds his

¹He had no models before him, for such earlier writings as the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius and the autobiographical sections in Hilary of Poitiers and Cyprian of Carthage have only to be compared with the *Confessions* to see how different they are.

successive climaxes so skillfully that the denouement in Book VIII is a vivid and believable convergence of influences, reconstructed and “placed” with consummate dramatic skill. We see how Cicero’s *Hortensius* first awakened his thirst for wisdom, how the Manicheans deluded him with their promise of true wisdom, and how the Academics upset his confidence in certain knowledge – how they loosed him from the dogmatism of the Manicheans only to confront him with the opposite threat that all knowledge is uncertain. He shows us (Bk. V, Ch. X, 19) that almost the sole cause of his intellectual perplexity in religion was his stubborn, materialistic prejudice that if God existed he had to exist in a body, and thus had to have extension, shape, and finite relation. He remembers how the “Platonists” rescued him from this “materialism” and taught him how to think of spiritual and immaterial reality – and so to become able to conceive of God in non-dualistic categories. We can follow him in his extraordinarily candid and plain report of his Plotinian ecstasy, and his momentary communion with the One (Book VII). The “Platonists” liberated him from error, but they could not loose him from the fetters of incontinence. Thus, with a divided will, he continues to seek a stable peace in the Christian faith while he stubbornly clings to his pride and appetite.

In Book VIII, Augustine piles up a series of remembered incidents that inflamed his desire to imitate those who already seemed to have gained what he had so long been seeking. First of all, there had been Ambrose, who embodied for Augustine the dignity of Christian learning and the majesty of the authority of the Christian Scriptures. Then Simplicianus tells him the moving story of Victorinus (a more famous scholar than Augustine ever hoped to be), who finally came to the baptismal font in Milan as humbly as any other catechumen. Then, from Ponticianus he hears the story of Antony and about the increasing influence of the monastic calling. The story that stirs him most, perhaps, relates the dramatic conversion of the two “special agents of the imperial police” in the garden at Treves – two unlikely prospects snatched abruptly from their worldly ways to the monastic life.

He makes it plain that these examples forced his own feelings to an intolerable tension. His intellectual perplexities had become resolved; the virtue of continence had been consciously preferred; there was a strong desire for the storms of his breast to be calmed; he longed to imitate these men who had done what he could not and who were enjoying the peace he longed for.

But the old habits were still strong and he could not muster a full act of the whole will to strike them down. Then comes the scene in the Milanese garden which is an interesting parallel to Ponticianus’ story about the garden at Treves. The long struggle is recapitulated in a brief moment; his will struggles against and within itself. The trivial distraction of a child’s voice, chanting, “*Tolle, lege,*” precipitates the resolution of the conflict. There is a radical shift in mood and will, he turns eagerly to the chance text in Rom. 13:13 – and a new spirit rises in his heart.

After this radical change, there was only one more past event that had to be relived before his personal history could be seen in its right perspective. This was the death of his mother and the severance of his strongest earthly tie. Book IX tells us this story. The climactic moment in it is, of course, the vision at Ostia where mother and son are uplifted in an ecstasy that parallels – but also differs significantly from – the Plotinian vision of Book VII. After this, the mother dies and the son who had loved her almost too much goes on alone, now upheld and led by a greater and a wiser love.

We can observe two separate stages in Augustine's "conversion." The first was the dramatic striking off of the slavery of incontinence and pride which had so long held him from decisive commitment to the Christian faith. The second was the development of an adequate understanding of the Christian faith itself and his baptismal confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The former was achieved in the Milanese garden. The latter came more slowly and had no "dramatic moment." The dialogues that Augustine wrote at Cassiciacum the year following his conversion show few substantial signs of a theological understanding, decisively or distinctively Christian. But by the time of his ordination to the presbyterate we can see the basic lines of a comprehensive and orthodox theology firmly laid out. Augustine neglects to tell us (in 398) what had happened in his thought between 385 and 391. He had other questions, more interesting to him, with which to wrestle.

One does not read far in the *Confessions* before he recognizes that the term "confess" has a double range of meaning. On the one hand, it obviously refers to the free acknowledgment, before God, of the truth one knows about oneself – and this obviously meant, for Augustine, the "confession of sins." But, at the same time, and more importantly, *confiteri* means to acknowledge, to God, the truth one knows about God. To confess, then, is to praise and glorify God; it is an exercise in self-knowledge and true humility in the atmosphere of grace and reconciliation.

Thus the *Confessions* are by no means complete when the personal history is concluded at the end of Book IX. There are two more closely related problems to be explored: First, how does the finite self find the infinite God (or, how is it found of him)? And, secondly, how may we interpret God's action in producing this created world in which such personal histories and revelations do occur? Book X, therefore, is an exploration of *man's way to God*, a way which begins in sense experience but swiftly passes beyond it, through and beyond the awesome mystery of memory, to the ineffable encounter between God and the soul in man's inmost subject-self. But such a journey is not complete until the process is reversed and man has looked as deeply as may be into the mystery of creation, on which all our history and experience depend. In Book XI, therefore, we discover why *time* is such a problem and how "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" is the basic formula of a massive Christian metaphysical world view. In Books XII and XIII, Augustine elaborates, in loving patience and with considerable allegorical license, the mysteries of creation – exegeting the first chapter of Genesis, verse by verse, until he is able to relate the whole round of creation to the point where we can view the drama of God's enterprise in human history on the vast stage of the cosmos itself. The Creator is the Redeemer! Man's end and the beginning meet at a single point!

The *Enchiridion* is a briefer treatise on the grace of God and represents Augustine's fully matured theological perspective – after the magnificent achievements of the *De Trinitate* and the greater part of the *De civitate Dei*, and after the tremendous turmoil of the Pelagian controversy in which the doctrine of grace was the exact epicenter. Sometime in 421, Augustine received a request from one Laurentius, a Christian layman who was the brother of the tribune Dulcitius (for whom Augustine wrote the *De octo dulciti quaestionibus* in 423-425). This Laurentius wanted a handbook (*enchiridion*) that would sum up the essential Christian teaching in the briefest possible form. Augustine dryly comments that the shortest complete summary of the

Christian faith is that God is to be served by man in faith, hope, and love. Then, acknowledging that this answer might indeed be *too* brief, he proceeds to expand it in an essay in which he tries unsuccessfully to subdue his natural digressive manner by imposing on it a patently artificial schematism. Despite its awkward form, however, the *Enchiridion* is one of the most important of all of Augustine's writings, for it is a conscious effort of the theological magistrate of the Western Church to stand on final ground of testimony to the Christian truth.

For his framework, Augustine chooses the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. The treatise begins, naturally enough, with a discussion of God's work in creation. Augustine makes a firm distinction between the comparatively unimportant knowledge of nature and the supremely important acknowledgment of the Creator of nature. But creation lies under the shadow of sin and evil and Augustine reviews his famous (and borrowed!) doctrine of the privative character of evil. From this he digresses into an extended comment on error and lying as special instances of evil. He then returns to the hopeless case of fallen man, to which God's wholly unmerited grace has responded in the incarnation of the Mediator and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. The questions about the appropriation of God's grace lead naturally to a discussion of baptism and justification, and beyond these, to the Holy Spirit and the Church. Augustine then sets forth the benefits of redeeming grace and weighs the balance between faith and good works in the forgiven sinner. But redemption looks forward toward resurrection, and Augustine feels he must devote a good deal of energy and subtle speculation to the questions about the manner and mode of the life everlasting. From this he moves on to the problem of the destiny of the wicked and the mystery of predestination. Nor does he shrink from these grim topics; indeed, he actually *expands* some of his most rigid ideas of God's ruthless justice toward the damned. Having thus treated the Christian faith and Christian hope, he turns in a too-brief concluding section to the virtue of Christian love as the heart of the Christian life. This, then, is the "handbook" on faith, hope, and love which he hopes Laurence will put to use and not leave as "baggage on his bookshelf."

Taken together, the *Confessions* and the *Enchiridion* give us two very important vantage points from which to view the Augustinian perspective as a whole, since they represent both his early and his mature formulation. From them, we can gain a competent – though by no means complete – introduction to the heart and mind of this great Christian saint and sage. There are important differences between the two works, and these ought to be noted by the careful reader. But all the main themes of Augustinian Christianity appear in them, and through them we can penetrate to its inner dynamic core.

There is no need to justify a new English translation of these books, even though many good ones already exist. Every translation is, at best, only an approximation – and an interpretation too. There is small hope for a translation to end all translations. Augustine's Latin is, for the most part, comparatively easy to read. One feels directly the force of his constant wordplay, the artful balancing of his clauses, his laconic use of parataxis, and his deliberate involutions of thought and word order. He was always a Latin rhetor; artifice of style had come to be second nature with him – even though the Latin scriptures were powerful modifiers of his classical literary patterns. But it is a very tricky business to convey such a Latin style into anything like modern English without considerable violence one way or the other. A literal rendering of the text is simply not readable English. And this falsifies the text in another way, for Augustine's Latin is eminently readable! On the other side, when one resorts to the unavoidable paraphrase there is

always the open question as to the point beyond which the thought itself is being recast. It has been my aim and hope that these translations will give the reader an accurate medium of contact with Augustine's temper and mode of argumentation. There has been no thought of trying to contrive an English equivalent for his style. If Augustine's ideas come through this translation with positive force and clarity, there can be no serious reproach if it is neither as eloquent nor as elegant as Augustine in his own language. In any case, those who will compare this translation with the others will get at least a faint notion of how complex and truly brilliant the original is!

The sensitive reader soon recognizes that Augustine will not willingly be inspected from a distance or by a neutral observer. In all his writings there is a strong concern and moving power to involve his reader in his own process of inquiry and perplexity. There is a manifest eagerness to have him share in his own flashes of insight and his sudden glimpses of God's glory. Augustine's style is deeply personal; it is therefore idiomatic, and often colloquial. Even in his knottiest arguments, or in the labyrinthine mazes of his allegorizing (e.g., *Confessions*, Bk. XIII, or *Enchiridion*, XVIII), he seeks to maintain contact with his reader in genuine respect and openness. He is never content to seek and find the truth in solitude. He must enlist his fellows in seeing and applying the truth as given. He is never the blind fideist; even in the face of mystery, there is a constant reliance on the limited but real powers of human reason, and a constant striving for clarity and intelligibility. In this sense, he was a consistent follower of his own principle of "Christian Socratism," developed in the *De Magistro* and the *De catechezandis rudibus*.

Even the best of Augustine's writing bears the marks of his own time and there is much in these old books that is of little interest to any but the specialist. There are many stones of stumbling in them for the modern secularist – and even for the modern Christian! Despite all this, it is impossible to read him with any attention at all without recognizing how his genius and his piety burst through the limitations of his times and his language – and even his English translations! He grips our hearts and minds and enlists us in the great enterprise to which his whole life was devoted: the search for and the celebration of God's grace and glory by which his faithful children are sustained and guided in their pilgrimage toward the true Light of us all.

The most useful critical text of the *Confessions* is that of Pierre de Labriolle (fifth edition, Paris, 1950). I have collated this with the other major critical editions: Martin Skutella, *S. Aureli Augustini Confessionum Libri Tredecim* (Leipzig, 1934) – itself a recension of the *Corpus Scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum XXXIII* text of Pius Knöll (Vienna, 1896) – and the second edition of John Gibb and William Montgomery (Cambridge, 1927).

There are two good critical texts of the *Enchiridion* and I have collated them: Otto Scheel, *Augustins Enchiridion* (zweite Auflage, Tübingen, 1930), and Jean Rivière, *Enchiridion* in the Bibliothèque Augustinienne, Œuvres de S. Augustin, première série: Opuscules, IX: *Exposés généraux de la foi* (Paris, 1947).

It remains for me to express my appreciation to the General Editors of this Library for their constructive help; to Professor Hollis W. Huston, who read the entire manuscript and made many valuable suggestions; and to Professor William A. Irwin, who greatly aided with parts of the *Enchiridion*. These men share the credit for preventing many flaws, but naturally no

responsibility for those remaining. Professors Raymond P. Morris, of the Yale Divinity School Library; Robert Beach, of the Union Theological Seminary Library; and Decherd Turner, of our Bridwell Library here at Southern Methodist University, were especially generous in their bibliographical assistance. Last, but not least, Mrs. Hollis W. Huston and my wife, between them, managed the difficult task of putting the results of this project into fair copy. To them all I am most grateful.

AUGUSTINE'S TESTIMONY ON *CONFESSIONS*

I. THE *Retractations*, II, 6 (A.D. 427)

1. My *Confessions*, in thirteen books, praise the righteous and good God as they speak either of my evil or good, and they are meant to excite men's minds and affections toward him. At least as far as I am concerned, this is what they did for me when they were being written and they still do this when read. What some people think of them is their own affair [*ipse viderint*]; but I do know that they have given pleasure to many of my brethren and still do so. The first through the tenth books were written about myself; the other three about Holy Scripture, from what is written there, *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*,¹ even as far as the reference to the Sabbath rest.²

2. In Book IV, when I confessed my soul's misery over the death of a friend and said that our soul had somehow been made one out of two souls, "But it may have been that I was afraid to die, lest he should then die wholly whom I had so greatly loved" (Ch. VI, 11) – this now seems to be more a trivial declamation than a serious confession, although this inept expression may be tempered somewhat by the "may have been" [*forte*] which I added. And in Book XIII what I said – "The firmament was made between the higher waters (and superior) and the lower (and inferior) waters" – was said without sufficient thought. In any case, the matter is very obscure. This work begins thus: "Great are you, O Lord."

II. *De Dono Perseverantiae*, XX, 53 (A.D. 428)

Which of my shorter works has been more widely known or given greater pleasure than the [thirteen] books of my *Confessions*? And, although I published them long before the Pelagian heresy had even begun to be, it is plain that in them I said to my God, again and again, "Give what you command and command what you will." When these words of mine were repeated in Pelagius' presence at Rome by a certain brother of mine (an Episcopal colleague), he could not bear them and contradicted him so excitedly that they nearly came to a quarrel. Now what, indeed, does God command, first and foremost, except that we believe in him? This faith, therefore, he himself gives; so that it is well said to him, "Give what you command."

Moreover, in those same books, concerning my account of my conversion when God turned me to that faith which I was laying waste with a very wretched and wild verbal assault,³ do you not remember how the narration shows that I was given as a gift to the faithful and daily tears of my mother, who had been promised that I should not perish? I certainly declared there that God by his grace turns men's wills to the true faith when they are not only averse to it, but actually adverse. As for the other ways in which I sought God's aid in my growth in perseverance, you either know or can review them as you wish (*PL*, 45, c. 1025).

¹Gen. 1:1.

²Gen. 2:2.

³Notice the echo here of Acts 9:1.

III. *Letter to Darius* (A.D. 429)

Thus, my son, take the books of my *Confessions* and use them as a good man should – not superficially, but as a Christian in Christian charity. Here see me as I am and do not praise me for more than I am. Here believe nothing else about me than my own testimony. Here observe what I have been in myself and through myself. And if something in me pleases you, here praise Him with me – him whom I desire to be praised on my account and not myself. “For it is he that has made us and not we ourselves.”⁴ Indeed, we were ourselves quite lost; but he who made us, remade us [*sed qui fecit, refecit*]. As, then, you find me in these pages, pray for me that I shall not fail but that I may go on to be perfected. Pray for me, my son, pray for me! (*Epist. CCXXXI, PL, 33, c. 1025*).

⁴Ps. 100:3.

The Confessions of Saint Augustine

BOOK ONE – Pilgrimage of Grace

In God's searching presence, Augustine undertakes to plumb the depths of his memory to trace the mysterious pilgrimage of grace which his life has been – and to praise God for his constant and omnipotent grace. In a mood of sustained prayer, he recalls what he can of his infancy, his learning to speak, and his childhood experiences in school. He concludes with a paean of grateful praise to God.

CHAPTER I

1. “Great are you, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is your power, and infinite is your wisdom.”¹ And man desires to praise you, for he is a part of your creation; he bears his mortality about with him and carries the evidence of his sin and the proof that you do resist the proud. Still he desires to praise you, this man who is only a small part of your creation. You have prompted him, that he should delight to praise you, for you have made us for yourself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in you. Grant me, O Lord, to know and understand whether first to invoke you or to praise you; whether first to know you or call upon you. But who can invoke you, knowing you not? For he who knows you not may invoke you as another than you art. It may be that we should invoke you in order that we may come to know you. But “how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe without a preacher?”² Now, “they shall praise the Lord who seek him,”³ for “those who seek shall find him,”⁴ and, finding him, shall praise him. I will seek you, O Lord, and call upon you. I call upon you, O Lord, in my faith which you have given me, which you have inspired in me through the humanity of your Son, and through the ministry of your preacher.⁵

CHAPTER II

2. And how shall I call upon my God – my God and my Lord? For when I call on him I ask him to come into me. And what place is there in me into which my God can come? How could God, the God who made both heaven and earth, come into me? Is there anything in me, O Lord my God, that can contain you? Do even the heaven and the earth, which you have made, and in which you did make me, contain you? Is it possible that, since without you nothing would be which does exist, you did make it so that whatever exists has some capacity to receive you? Why, then, do I ask you to come into me, since I also am and could not be if you wert not in me? For I am not, after all, in hell – and yet you are there too, for “if I go down into hell, you are

¹Cf. Ps. 145:3 and Ps. 147:5.

²Rom. 10:14.

³Ps. 22:26.

⁴Matt. 7:7.

⁵A reference to Bishop Ambrose of Milan; see Bk. V, Ch. XIII; Bk. VIII, Ch. 11, 3.

there.”⁶ Therefore I would not exist – I would simply not be at all – unless I exist in you, from whom and by whom and in whom all things are. Even so, Lord; even so. Where do I call you to, when I am already in you? Or from whence would you come into me? Where, beyond heaven and earth, could I go that there my God might come to me – he who has said, “I fill heaven and earth”?⁷

CHAPTER III

3. Since, then, you do fill the heaven and earth, do they contain you? Or, do you fill and overflow them, because they cannot contain you? And where do you pour out what remains of you after heaven and earth are full? Or, indeed, is there no need that you, who do contain all things, should be contained by any, since those things which you do fill you fill by containing them? For the vessels which you do fill do not confine you, since even if they were broken, you would not be poured out. And, when you are poured out on us, you are not thereby brought down; rather, we are uplifted. You are not scattered; rather, you do gather us together. But when you do fill all things, do you fill them with your whole being? Or, since not even all things together could contain you altogether, does any one thing contain a single part, and do all things contain that same part at the same time? Do singulars contain you singly? Do greater things contain more of you, and smaller things less? Or, is it not rather that you are wholly present everywhere, yet in such a way that nothing contains you wholly?

CHAPTER IV

4. What, therefore, is my God? What, I ask, but the Lord God? “For who is Lord but the Lord himself, or who is God besides our God?”⁸ Most high, most excellent, most potent, most omnipotent; most merciful and most just; most secret and most truly present; most beautiful and most strong; stable, yet not supported; unchangeable, yet changing all things; never new, never old; making all things new, yet bringing old age upon the proud, and they know it not; always working, ever at rest; gathering, yet needing nothing; sustaining, pervading, and protecting; creating, nourishing, and developing; seeking, and yet possessing all things. You do love, but without passion; are jealous, yet free from care; do repent without remorse; are angry, yet remain serene. You change your ways, leaving your plans unchanged; you recover what you have never really lost. You are never in need but still you do rejoice at your gains; are never greedy, yet demand dividends. Men pay more than is required so that you do become a debtor; yet who can possess anything at all which is not already yours? You owe men nothing, yet pay out to them as if in debt to your creature, and when you do cancel debts you lose nothing thereby. Yet, O my God, my life, my holy Joy, what is this that I have said? What can any man say when he speaks of you? But woe to them that keep silence – since even those who say most are dumb.

⁶Ps. 139:8.

⁷Jer. 23:24.

⁸Cf. Ps. 18:31.

CHAPTER V

5. Who shall bring me to rest in you? Who will send you into my heart so to overwhelm it that my sins shall be blotted out and I may embrace you, my only good? What are you to me? Have mercy that I may speak. What am I to you that you should command me to love you, and if I do it not, are angry and threaten vast misery? Is it, then, a trifling sorrow not to love you? It is not so to me. Tell me, by your mercy, O Lord, my God, what you are to me. “Say to my soul, I am your salvation.”⁹ So speak that I may hear. Behold, the ears of my heart are before you, O Lord; open them and “say to my soul, I am your salvation.” I will hasten after that voice, and I will lay hold upon you. Hide not your face from me. Even if I die, let me see your face lest I die.

6. The house of my soul is too narrow for you to come in to me; let it be enlarged by you. It is in ruins; do you restore it. There is much about it which must offend your eyes; I confess and know it. But who will cleanse it? Or, to whom shall I cry but to you? “Cleanse you me from my secret faults,” O Lord, “and keep back your servant from strange sins.”¹⁰ “I believe, and therefore do I speak.”¹¹ But you, O Lord, you know. Have I not confessed my transgressions unto you, O my God; and have you not put away the iniquity of my heart?¹² I do not contend in judgment with you,¹³ who are truth itself; and I would not deceive myself, lest my iniquity lie even to itself. I do not, therefore, contend in judgment with you, for “if you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”¹⁴

CHAPTER VI

7. Still, dust and ashes as I am, allow me to speak before your mercy. Allow me to speak, for, behold, it is to your mercy that I speak and not to a man who scorns me. Yet perhaps even you might scorn me; but when you do turn and attend to me, you will have mercy upon me. For what do I wish to say, O Lord my God, but that I know not whence I came hither into this life-in-death. Or should I call it death-in-life? I do not know. And yet the consolations of your mercy have sustained me from the very beginning, as I have heard from my fleshly parents, from whom and in whom you did form me in time – for I cannot myself remember. Thus even though they sustained me by the consolation of woman’s milk, neither my mother nor my nurses filled their own breasts but you, through them, did give me the food of infancy according to your ordinance and your bounty which underlie all things. For it was you who did cause me not to want more than you gave and it was you who gave to those who nourished me the will to give me what you did give them. And they, by an instinctive affection, were willing to give me what you had supplied abundantly. It was, indeed, good for them that my good should come through them, though, in truth, it was not from them but by them. For it is from you, O God, that all good things come – and from my God is all my health. This is what I have since learned, as you have made it abundantly clear by all that I have seen you give, both to me and to those around me. For even at

⁹Ps. 35:3.

¹⁰Cf. Ps. 19:12, 13.

¹¹Ps. 116:10.

¹²Cf. Ps. 32:5.

¹³Cf. Job 9:2.

¹⁴Ps. 130:3.

the very first I knew how to suck, to lie quiet when I was full, and to cry when in pain – nothing more.

8. Afterward I began to laugh – at first in my sleep, then when waking. For this I have been told about myself and I believe it – though I cannot remember it – for I see the same things in other infants. Then, little by little, I realized where I was and wished to tell my wishes to those who might satisfy them, but I could not! For my wants were inside me, and they were outside, and they could not by any power of theirs come into my soul. And so I would fling my arms and legs about and cry, making the few and feeble gestures that I could, though indeed the signs were not much like what I inwardly desired and when I was not satisfied – either from not being understood or because what I got was not good for me – I grew indignant that my elders were not subject to me and that those on whom I actually had no claim did not wait on me as slaves – and I avenged myself on them by crying. That infants are like this, I have myself been able to learn by watching them; and they, though they knew me not, have shown me better what I was like than my own nurses who knew me.

9. And, behold, my infancy died long ago, but I am still living. But you, O Lord, whose life is forever and in whom nothing dies – since before the world was, indeed, before all that can be called “before,” you were, and you are the God and Lord of all your creatures; and with you abide all the stable causes of all unstable things, the unchanging sources of all changeable things, and the eternal reasons of all non-rational and temporal things – tell me, your suppliant, O God, tell me, O merciful One, in pity tell a pitiful creature whether my infancy followed yet an earlier age of my life that had already passed away before it. Was it such another age which I spent in my mother’s womb? For something of that sort has been suggested to me, and I have myself seen pregnant women. But what, O God, my Joy, preceded *that* period of life? Was I, indeed, anywhere, or anybody? No one can explain these things to me, neither father nor mother, nor the experience of others, nor my own memory. do you laugh at me for asking such things? Or do you command me to praise and confess unto you only what I know?

10. I give thanks to you, O Lord of heaven and earth, giving praise to you for that first being and my infancy of which I have no memory. For you have granted to man that he should come to self-knowledge through the knowledge of others, and that he should believe many things about himself on the authority of the womenfolk. Now, clearly, I had life and being; and, as my infancy closed, I was already learning signs by which my feelings could be communicated to others.

Whence could such a creature come but from you, O Lord? Is any man skillful enough to have fashioned himself? Or is there any other source from which being and life could flow into us, save this, that you, O Lord, have made us – you with whom being and life are one, since you yourself are supreme being and supreme life both together. For you are infinite and in you there is no change, nor an end to this present day – although there is a sense in which it ends in you since all things are in you and there would be no such thing as days passing away unless you did sustain them. And since “Your years shall have no end,”¹⁵ your years are an ever-present day. And how many of ours and our fathers’ days have passed through this your day and have received from it what measure and fashion of being they had? And all the days to come shall so

¹⁵Ps. 102:27.

receive and so pass away. “But you are the same”!¹⁶ And all the things of tomorrow and the days yet to come, and all of yesterday and the days that are past, you will gather into this your day. What is it to me if someone does not understand this? Let him still rejoice and continue to ask, “What is this?” Let him also rejoice and prefer to seek you, even if he fails to find an answer, rather than to seek an answer and not find thee!

CHAPTER VII

11. “Hear me, O God! Woe to the sins of men!” When a man cries thus, you show him mercy, for you did create the man but not the sin in him. Who brings to remembrance the sins of my infancy? For in your sight there is none free from sin, not even the infant who has lived but a day upon this earth. Who brings this to my remembrance? Does not each little one, in whom I now observe what I no longer remember of myself? In what ways, in that time, did I sin? Was it that I cried for the breast? If I should now so cry – not indeed for the breast, but for food suitable to my condition – I should be most justly laughed at and rebuked. What I did then deserved rebuke but, since I could not understand those who rebuked me, neither custom nor common sense permitted me to be rebuked. As we grow we root out and cast away from us such childish habits. Yet I have not seen anyone who is wise who cast away the good when trying to purge the bad. Nor was it good, even in that time, to strive to get by crying what, if it had been given me, would have been hurtful; or to be bitterly indignant at those who, because they were older – not slaves, either, but free – and wiser than I, would not indulge my capricious desires. Was it a good thing for me to try, by struggling as hard as I could, to harm them for not obeying me, even when it would have done me harm to have been obeyed? Thus, the infant’s innocence lies in the weakness of his body and not in the infant mind. I have myself observed a baby to be jealous, though it could not speak; it was livid as it watched another infant at the breast.

Who is ignorant of this? Mothers and nurses tell us that they cure these things by I know not what remedies. But is this innocence, when the fountain of milk is flowing fresh and abundant, that another who needs it should not be allowed to share it, even though he requires such nourishment to sustain his life? Yet we look leniently on such things, not because they are not faults, or even small faults, but because they will vanish as the years pass. For, although we allow for such things in an infant, the same things could not be tolerated patiently in an adult.

12. Therefore, O Lord my God, you who gave life to the infant, and a body which, as we see, you have furnished with senses, shaped with limbs, beautified with form, and endowed with all vital energies for its well-being and health – you do command me to praise you for these things, to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praise unto his name, O Most High.¹⁷ For you are God, omnipotent and good, even if you had done no more than these things, which no other but you can do – you alone who made all things fair and did order everything according to your law.

I am loath to dwell on this part of my life of which, O Lord, I have no remembrance, about which I must trust the word of others and what I can surmise from observing other infants, even if such guesses are trustworthy. For it lies in the deep murk of my forgetfulness and thus is like

¹⁶Ps. 102:27.

¹⁷Cf. Ps. 92:1.

the period which I passed in my mother's womb. But if "I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin my mother nourished me in her womb,"¹⁸ where, I pray you, O my God, where, O Lord, or when was I, your servant, ever innocent? But see now, I pass over that period, for what have I to do with a time from which I can recall no memories?

CHAPTER VIII

13. Did I not, then, as I grew out of infancy, come next to boyhood, or rather did it not come to me and succeed my infancy? My infancy did not go away (for where would it go?). It was simply no longer present; and I was no longer an infant who could not speak, but now a chattering boy. I remember this, and I have since observed how I learned to speak. My elders did not teach me words by rote, as they taught me my letters afterward. But I myself, when I was unable to communicate all I wished to say to whomever I wished by means of whimperings and grunts and various gestures of my limbs (which I used to reinforce my demands), I myself repeated the sounds already stored in my memory by the mind which you, O my God, had given me. When they called some thing by name and pointed it out while they spoke, I saw it and realized that the thing they wished to indicate was called by the name they then uttered. And what they meant was made plain by the gestures of their bodies, by a kind of natural language, common to all nations, which expresses itself through changes of countenance, glances of the eye, gestures and intonations which indicate a disposition and attitude – either to seek or to possess, to reject or to avoid. So it was that by frequently hearing words, in different phrases, I gradually identified the objects which the words stood for and, having formed my mouth to repeat these signs, I was thereby able to express my will. Thus I exchanged with those about me the verbal signs by which we express our wishes and advanced deeper into the stormy fellowship of human life, depending all the while upon the authority of my parents and the behest of my elders.

CHAPTER IX

14. O my God! What miseries and mockeries did I then experience when it was impressed on me that obedience to my teachers was proper to my boyhood estate if I was to flourish in this world and distinguish myself in those tricks of speech which would gain honor for me among men, and deceitful riches! To this end I was sent to school to get learning, the value of which I knew not – wretch that I was. Yet if I was slow to learn, I was flogged. For this was deemed praiseworthy by our forefathers and many had passed before us in the same course, and thus had built up the precedent for the sorrowful road on which we too were compelled to travel, multiplying labor and sorrow upon the sons of Adam. About this time, O Lord, I observed men praying to you, and I learned from them to conceive you – after my capacity for understanding as it was then – to be some great Being, who, though not visible to our senses, was able to hear and help us. Thus as a boy I began to pray to you, my Help and my Refuge, and, in calling on you, broke the bands of my tongue. Small as I was, I prayed with no slight earnestness that I might not be beaten at school. And when you did not heed me – for that would have been giving me over to my folly – my elders and even my parents too, who wished me no ill, treated my stripes as a joke, though they were then a great and grievous ill to me.

¹⁸Cf. Ps. 51:5.

15. Is there anyone, O Lord, with a spirit so great, who cleaves to you with such steadfast affection (or is there even a kind of obtuseness that has the same effect) – is there any man who, by cleaving devoutly to you, is endowed with so great a courage that he can regard indifferently those racks and hooks and other torture weapons from which men throughout the world pray so fervently to be spared; and can they scorn those who so greatly fear these torments, just as my parents were amused at the torments with which our teachers punished us boys? For we were no less afraid of our pains, nor did we beseech you less to escape them. Yet, even so, we were sinning by writing or reading or studying less than our assigned lessons.

For I did not, O Lord, lack memory or capacity, for, by your will, I possessed enough for my age. However, my mind was absorbed only in play, and I was punished for this by those who were doing the same things themselves. But the idling of our elders is called business; the idling of boys, though quite like it, is punished by those same elders, and no one pities either the boys or the men. For will any common sense observer agree that I was rightly punished as a boy for playing ball – just because this hindered me from learning more quickly those lessons by means of which, as a man, I could play at more shameful games? And did he by whom I was beaten do anything different? When he was worsted in some small controversy with a fellow teacher, he was more tormented by anger and envy than I was when beaten by a playmate in the ball game.

CHAPTER X

16. And yet I sinned, O Lord my God, you ruler and creator of all natural things – but of sins only the ruler – I sinned, O Lord my God, in acting against the precepts of my parents and of those teachers. For this learning which they wished me to acquire – no matter what their motives were – I might have put to good account afterward. I disobeyed them, not because I had chosen a better way, but from a sheer love of play. I loved the vanity of victory, and I loved to have my ears tickled with lying fables, which made them itch even more ardently, and a similar curiosity glowed more and more in my eyes for the shows and sports of my elders. Yet those who put on such shows are held in such high repute that almost all desire the same for their children. They are therefore willing to have them beaten, if their childhood games keep them from the studies by which their parents desire them to grow up to be able to give such shows. Look down on these things with mercy, O Lord, and deliver us who now call upon you; deliver those also who do not call upon you, that they may call upon you, and you may deliver them.

CHAPTER XI

17. Even as a boy I had heard of eternal life promised to us through the humility of the Lord our God, who came down to visit us in our pride, and I was signed with the sign of his cross, and was seasoned with his salt even from the womb of my mother, who greatly trusted in you. You did see, O Lord, how, once, while I was still a child, I was suddenly seized with stomach pains and was at the point of death – you did see, O my God, for even then you were my keeper, with what agitation and with what faith I solicited from the piety of my mother and from your Church (which is the mother of us all) the baptism of your Christ, my Lord and my God. The mother of my flesh was much perplexed, for, with a heart pure in your faith, she was always in deep travail for my eternal salvation. If I had not quickly recovered, she would have provided forthwith for

my initiation and washing by your life-giving sacraments, confessing you, O Lord Jesus, for the forgiveness of sins. So my cleansing was deferred, as if it were inevitable that, if I should live, I would be further polluted; and, further, because the guilt contracted by sin after baptism would be still greater and more perilous.

Thus, at that time, I “believed” along with my mother and the whole household, except my father. But he did not overcome the influence of my mother’s piety in me, nor did he prevent my believing in Christ, although he had not yet believed in him. For it was her desire, O my God, that I should acknowledge you as my Father rather than him. In this you did aid her to overcome her husband, to whom, though his superior, she yielded obedience. In this way she also yielded obedience to you, who do so command.

18. I ask you, O my God, for I would gladly know if it be your will, to what good end my baptism was deferred at that time? Was it indeed for my good that the reins were slackened, as it were, to encourage me in sin? Or, were they not slackened? If not, then why is it still dinned into our ears on all sides, “Let him alone, let him do as he pleases, for he is not yet baptized”? In the matter of bodily health, no one says, “Let him alone; let him be worse wounded; for he is not yet cured”! How much better, then, would it have been for me to have been cured at once – and if thereafter, through the diligent care of friends and myself, my soul’s restored health had been kept safe in your keeping, who gave it in the first place! This would have been far better, in truth. But how many and great the waves of temptation which appeared to hang over me as I grew out of childhood! These were foreseen by my mother, and she preferred that the unformed clay should be risked to them rather than the clay molded after Christ’s image.¹⁹

CHAPTER XII

19. But in this time of childhood – which was far less dreaded for me than my adolescence – I had no love of learning, and hated to be driven to it. Yet I was driven to it just the same, and good was done for me, even though I did not do it well, for I would not have learned if I had not been forced to it. For no man does well against his will, even if what he does is a good thing. Neither did they who forced me do well, but the good that was done me came from you, my God. For they did not care about the way in which I would use what they forced me to learn, and took it for granted that it was to satisfy the inordinate desires of a rich beggary and a shameful glory. But you, Lord, by whom the hairs of our head are numbered, did use for my good the error of all who pushed me on to study: but my error in not being willing to learn you did use for my punishment. And I – though so small a boy yet so great a sinner – was not punished without warrant. Thus by the instrumentality of those who did not do well, you did well for me; and by my own sin you did justly punish me. For it is even as you have ordained: that every inordinate affection brings on its own punishment.

CHAPTER XIII

20. But what were the causes for my strong dislike of Greek literature, which I studied from my boyhood? Even to this day I have not fully understood them. For Latin I loved exceedingly – not

¹⁹In baptism which, Augustine believed, established the *effigiem Christi* in the human soul.

just the rudiments, but what the grammarians teach. For those beginner’s lessons in reading, writing, and reckoning, I considered no less a burden and pain than Greek. Yet whence came this, unless from the sin and vanity of this life? For I was “but flesh, a wind that passes away and comes not again.”²⁰ Those first lessons were better, assuredly, because they were more certain, and through them I acquired, and still retain, the power of reading what I find written and of writing for myself what I will. In the other subjects, however, I was compelled to learn about the wanderings of a certain Aeneas, oblivious of my own wanderings, and to weep for Dido dead, who slew herself for love. And all this while I bore with dry eyes my own wretched self dying to you, O God, my life, in the midst of these things.

21. For what can be more wretched than the wretch who has no pity upon himself, who sheds tears over Dido, dead for the love of Aeneas, but who sheds no tears for his own death in not loving you, O God, light of my heart, and bread of the inner mouth of my soul, O power that links together my mind with my inmost thoughts? I did not love you, and thus committed fornication against you.²¹ Those around me, also sinning, thus cried out: “Well done! Well done!” The friendship of this world is fornication against you; and “Well done! Well done!” is cried until one feels ashamed not to show himself a man in this way. For my own condition I shed no tears, though I wept for Dido, who “sought death at the sword’s point,”²² while I myself was seeking the lowest rung of your creation, having forsaken you; earth sinking back to earth again. And, if I had been forbidden to read these poems, I would have grieved that I was not allowed to read what grieved me. This sort of madness is considered more honorable and more fruitful learning than the beginner’s course in which I learned to read and write.

22. But now, O my God, cry unto my soul, and let your truth say to me: “Not so, not so! That first learning was far better.” For, obviously, I would rather forget the wanderings of Aeneas, and all such things, than forget how to write and read. Still, over the entrance of the grammar school there hangs a veil. This is not so much the sign of a covering for a mystery as a curtain for error. Let them exclaim against me – those I no longer fear – while I confess to you, my God, what my soul desires, and let me find some rest, for in blaming my own evil ways I may come to love your holy ways. Neither let those cry out against me who buy and sell the baubles of literature. For if I ask them if it is true, as the poet says, that Aeneas once came to Carthage, the unlearned will reply that they do not know and the learned will deny that it is true. But if I ask with what letters the name Aeneas is written, all who have ever learned this will answer correctly, in accordance with the conventional understanding men have agreed upon as to these signs. Again, if I should ask which would cause the greatest inconvenience in our life, if it were forgotten: reading and writing, or these poetical fictions, who does not see what everyone would answer who had not entirely lost his own memory? I erred, then, when as a boy I preferred those vain studies to these more profitable ones, or rather loved the one and hated the other. “One and one are two, two and two are four”: this was then a truly hateful song to me. But the wooden horse full of its armed soldiers, and the holocaust of Troy, and the spectral image of Creusa were all a most delightful – and vain – show!²³

²⁰Cf. Ps. 78:39.

²¹Cf. Ps. 72:27.

²²*Aeneid*, VI, 457

²³Cf. *Aeneid*, II.

23. But why, then, did I dislike Greek learning, which was full of such tales? For Homer was skillful in inventing such poetic fictions and is most sweetly wanton; yet when I was a boy, he was most disagreeable to me. I believe that Virgil would have the same effect on Greek boys as Homer did on me if they were forced to learn him. For the tedium of learning a foreign language mingled gall into the sweetness of those Grecian myths. For I did not understand a word of the language, and yet I was driven with threats and cruel punishments to learn it. There was also a time when, as an infant, I knew no Latin; but this I acquired without any fear or tormenting, but merely by being alert to the blandishments of my nurses, the jests of those who smiled on me, and the sportiveness of those who toyed with me. I learned all this, indeed, without being urged by any pressure of punishment, for my own heart urged me to bring forth its own fashioning, which I could not do except by learning words: not from those who taught me but those who talked to me, into whose ears I could pour forth whatever I could fashion. From this it is sufficiently clear that a free curiosity is more effective in learning than a discipline based on fear. Yet, by your ordinance, O God, discipline is given to restrain the excesses of freedom; this ranges from the ferule of the schoolmaster to the trials of the martyr and has the effect of mingling for us a wholesome bitterness, which calls us back to you from the poisonous pleasures that first drew us from you.

CHAPTER XV

24. Hear my prayer, O Lord; let not my soul faint under your discipline, nor let me faint in confessing unto you your mercies, whereby you have saved me from all my most wicked ways till you should become sweet to me beyond all the allurements that I used to follow. Let me come to love you wholly, and grasp your hand with my whole heart that you may deliver me from every temptation, even unto the last. And thus, O Lord, my King and my God, may all things useful that I learned as a boy now be offered in your service – let it be that for your service I now speak and write and reckon. For when I was learning vain things, you did impose your discipline upon me: and you have forgiven me my sin of delighting in those vanities. In those studies I learned many a useful word, but these might have been learned in matters not so vain; and surely that is the safe way for youths to walk in.

CHAPTER XVI

25. But woe unto you, O torrent of human custom! Who shall stay your course? When will you ever run dry? How long will you carry down the sons of Eve into that vast and hideous ocean, which even those who have the Tree (for an ark)²⁴ can scarcely pass over? Do I not read in you the stories of Jove the thunderer – and the adulterer?²⁵ How could he be both? But so it says, and the sham thunder served as a cloak for him to play at real adultery. Yet which of our gowned masters will give a tempered hearing to a man trained in their own schools who cries out and says: “These were Homer’s fictions; he transfers things human to the gods. I could have wished

²⁴*Lignum* is a common metaphor for the cross; and it was often joined to the figure of Noah's ark, as the means of safe transport from earth to heaven.

²⁵This apostrophe to "the torrent of human custom" now switches its focus to the poets who celebrated the philanderings of the gods; see *De civ. Dei*, II, vii-xi; IV, xxvi-xxviii.

that he would transfer divine things to us.”²⁶ But it would have been more true if he said, “These are, indeed, his fictions, but he attributed divine attributes to sinful men, that crimes might not be accounted crimes, and that whoever committed such crimes might appear to imitate the celestial gods and not abandoned men.”

26. And yet, O torrent of hell, the sons of men are still cast into you, and they pay fees for learning all these things. And much is made of it when this goes on in the forum under the auspices of laws which give a salary over and above the fees. And you beat against your rocky shore and roar: “Here words may be learned; here you can attain the eloquence which is so necessary to persuade people to your way of thinking; so helpful in unfolding your opinions.” Verily, they seem to argue that we should never have understood these words, “golden shower,” “bosom,” “intrigue,” “highest heavens,” and other such words, if Terence had not introduced a good-for-nothing youth upon the stage, setting up a picture of Jove as his example of lewdness and telling the tale

“Of Jove’s descending in a golden shower
Into Danae’s bosom...
With a woman to intrigue.”

See how he excites himself to lust, as if by a heavenly authority, when he says:

“Great Jove,
Who shakes the highest heavens with his thunder;
Shall I, poor mortal man, not do the same?
I’ve done it, and with all my heart, I’m glad.”²⁷

These words are not learned one whit more easily because of this vileness, but through them the vileness is more boldly perpetrated. I do not blame the words, for they are, as it were, choice and precious vessels, but I do deplore the wine of error which was poured out to us by teachers already drunk. And, unless we also drank we were beaten, without liberty of appeal to a sober judge. And yet, O my God, in whose presence I can now with security recall this, I learned these things willingly and with delight, and for it I was called a boy of good promise.

CHAPTER XVII

27. Bear with me, O my God, while I speak a little of those talents, your gifts, and of the follies on which I wasted them. For a lesson was given me that sufficiently disturbed my soul, for in it there was both hope of praise and fear of shame or stripes. The assignment was that I should declaim the words of Juno, as she raged and sorrowed that she could not

“Bar off Italy
From all the approaches
of the Teucrian king.”²⁸

²⁶Probably a contemporary disciple of Cicero (or the Academics) whom Augustine had heard levy a rather common philosopher’s complaint against Olympian religion and the poetic myths about it. Cf. De Labriolle, I, 21 (see Bibl.).

²⁷Terence, *Eunuch.*, 584-591; quoted again in *De civ. Dei*, II, vii.

I had learned that Juno had never uttered these words. Yet we were compelled to stray in the footsteps of these poetic fictions, and to turn into prose what the poet had said in verse. In the declamation, the boy won most applause who most strikingly reproduced the passions of anger and sorrow according to the “character” of the persons presented and who clothed it all in the most suitable language. What is it now to me, O my true Life, my God, that my declaiming was applauded above that of many of my classmates and fellow students? Actually, was not all that smoke and wind? Besides, was there nothing else on which I could have exercised my wit and tongue? Your praise, O Lord, your praises might have propped up the tendrils of my heart by your Scriptures; and it would not have been dragged away by these empty trifles, a shameful prey to the spirits of the air. For there is more than one way in which men sacrifice to the fallen angels.

CHAPTER XVIII

28. But it was no wonder that I was thus carried toward vanity and was estranged from you, O my God, when men were held up as models to me who, when relating a deed of theirs – not in itself evil – were covered with confusion if found guilty of a barbarism or a solecism; but who could tell of their own licentiousness and be applauded for it, so long as they did it in a full and ornate oration of well-chosen words. You see all this, O Lord, and do keep silence – “long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth”²⁹ as you art. will you keep silence forever? Even now you draw from that vast deep the soul that seeks you and thirsts after your delight, whose “heart said unto you, ‘I have sought your face; your face, Lord, will I seek.’”³⁰ For I was far from your face in the dark shadows of passion. For it is not by our feet, nor by change of place, that we either turn from you or return to you. That younger son did not charter horses or chariots, or ships, or fly away on visible wings, or journey by walking so that in the far country he might prodigally waste all that you did give him when he set out.³¹ A kind Father when you gave; and kinder still when he returned destitute! To be wanton, that is to say, to be darkened in heart – this is to be far from your face.

29. Look down, O Lord God, and see patiently, as you are wont to do, how diligently the sons of men observe the conventional rules of letters and syllables, taught them by those who learned their letters beforehand, while they neglect the eternal rules of everlasting salvation taught by you. They carry it so far that if he who practices or teaches the established rules of pronunciation should speak (contrary to grammatical usage) without aspirating the first syllable of “*hominem*” [“*ominem*,” and thus make it “a ‘uman being’], he will offend men more than if he, a human being, were to *hate* another human being contrary to your commandments. It is as if he should feel that there is an enemy who could be more destructive to himself than that hatred which excites him against his fellow man; or that he could destroy him whom he hates more completely than he destroys his own soul by this same hatred. Now, obviously, there is no knowledge of letters more innate than the writing of conscience – against doing unto another what one would

²⁸*Aeneid*, I, 38.

²⁹Cf. Ps. 103:8 and Ps. 86:15.

³⁰Ps. 27:8.

³¹An interesting mixed reminiscence of *Enneads*, I, 5:8 and Luke 15:13-24.

not have done to himself.

How mysterious you are, who “dwell on high”³² in silence. O you, the only great God, who by an unwearied law hurl down the penalty of blindness to unlawful desire! When a man seeking the reputation of eloquence stands before a human judge, while a thronging multitude surrounds him, and inveighs against his enemy with the most fierce hatred, he takes most vigilant heed that his tongue does not slip in a grammatical error, for example, and say *inter hominibus* [instead of *inter homines*], but he takes no heed lest, in the fury of his spirit, he cut off a man from his fellow men [*ex hominibus*].

30. These were the customs in the midst of which I was cast, an unhappy boy. This was the wrestling arena in which I was more fearful of perpetrating a barbarism than, having done so, of envying those who had not. These things I declare and confess to you, my God. I was applauded by those whom I then thought it my whole duty to please, for I did not perceive the gulf of infamy in which I was cast away from your eyes.

For in your eyes, what was more infamous than I was already, since I displeased even my own kind and deceived, with endless lies, my tutor, my masters and parents – all from a love of play, a craving for frivolous spectacles, a stage-struck restlessness to imitate what I saw in these shows? I pilfered from my parents’ cellar and table, sometimes driven by gluttony, sometimes just to have something to give to other boys in exchange for their baubles, which they were prepared to sell even though they liked them as well as I. Moreover, in this kind of play, I often sought dishonest victories, being myself conquered by the vain desire for pre-eminence. And what was I so unwilling to endure, and what was it that I censured so violently when I caught anyone, except the very things I did to others? And, when I was myself detected and censured, I preferred to quarrel rather than to yield. Is this the innocence of childhood? It is not, O Lord, it is not. I entreat your mercy, O my God, for these same sins as we grow older are transferred from tutors and masters; they pass from nuts and balls and sparrows, to magistrates and kings, to gold and lands and slaves, just as the rod is succeeded by more severe chastisements. It was, then, the fact of humility in childhood that you, O our King, did approve as a symbol of humility when you said, “Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”³³

CHAPTER XIX

31. However, O Lord, to you most excellent and most good, you Architect and Governor of the universe, thanks would be due you, O our God, even if you had not willed that I should survive my boyhood. For I existed even then; I lived and felt and was solicitous about my own well-being – a trace of that most mysterious unity from whence I had my being.³⁴ I kept watch, by my inner sense, over the integrity of my outer senses, and even in these trifles and also in my thoughts about trifles, I learned to take pleasure in truth. I was averse to being deceived; I had a vigorous memory; I was gifted with the power of speech, was softened by friendship, shunned sorrow, meanness, ignorance. Is not such an animated creature as this wonderful and

³²Ps. 123:1.

³³Matt. 19:14.

³⁴Another Plotinian echo; cf. *Enneads*, III, 8:10.

praiseworthy? But all these are gifts of my God; I did not give them to myself. Moreover, they are good, and they all together constitute myself. Good, then, is he that made me, and he is my God; and before him will I rejoice exceedingly for every good gift which, even as a boy, I had. But herein lay my sin, that it was not in him, but in his creatures – myself and the rest – that I sought for pleasures, honors, and truths. And I fell thereby into sorrows, troubles, and errors. Thanks be to you, my joy, my pride, my confidence, my God – thanks be to you for your gifts; but do you preserve them in me. For thus will you preserve me; and those things which you have given me shall be developed and perfected, and I myself shall be with you, for from you is my being.

BOOK TWO – Adolescent Mischief

He concentrates here on his sixteenth year, a year of idleness, lust, and adolescent mischief. The memory of stealing some pears prompts a deep probing of the motives and aims of sinful acts. “I became to myself a wasteland.”

CHAPTER I

1. I wish now to review in memory my past wickedness and the carnal corruptions of my soul – not because I still love them, but that I may love you, O my God. For love of your love I do this, recalling in the bitterness of self-examination my wicked ways, that you may grow sweet to me, you sweetness without deception! You sweetness happy and assured! Thus you may gather me up out of those fragments in which I was torn to pieces, while I turned away from you, O Unity, and lost myself among “the many.”¹ For as I became a youth, I longed to be satisfied with worldly things, and I dared to grow wild in a succession of various and shadowy loves. My form wasted away, and I became corrupt in your eyes, yet I was still pleasing to my own eyes – and eager to please the eyes of men.

CHAPTER II

2. But what was it that delighted me save to love and to be loved? Still I did not keep the moderate way of the love of mind to mind – the bright path of friendship. Instead, the mists of passion steamed up out of the puddly concupiscence of the flesh, and the hot imagination of puberty, and they so obscured and overcast my heart that I was unable to distinguish pure affection from unholy desire. Both boiled confusedly within me, and dragged my unstable youth down over the cliffs of unchaste desires and plunged me into a gulf of infamy. Your anger had come upon me, and I knew it not. I had been deafened by the clanking of the chains of my mortality, the punishment for my soul’s pride, and I wandered farther from you, and you did permit me to do so. I was tossed to and fro, and wasted, and poured out, and I boiled over in my fornications – and yet you did hold your peace, O my tardy Joy! You did still hold your peace, and I wandered still farther from you into more and yet more barren fields of sorrow, in proud dejection and restless lassitude.

3. If only there had been someone to regulate my disorder and turn to my profit the fleeting beauties of the things around me, and to fix a bound to their sweetness, so that the tides of my youth might have spent themselves upon the shore of marriage! Then they might have been tranquilized and satisfied with having children, as your law prescribes, O Lord – O you who do form the offspring of our death and are able also with a tender hand to blunt the thorns which were excluded from your paradise!² For your omnipotence is not far from us even when we are far from you. Now, on the other hand, I might have given more vigilant heed to the voice from the clouds: “Nevertheless, such shall have trouble in the flesh, but I spare you,”³ and, “It is good

¹Yet another Plotinian phrase; cf. *Enneads*, I, 6, 9:1-2.

²Cf. Gen. 3:18 and *De bono conjugali*, 8-9, 39-35 (*N-PNF*, III, 396-413).

³1 Cor. 7:28.

for a man not to touch a woman,”⁴ and, “He that is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he that is married cares for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.”⁵ I should have listened more attentively to these words, and, thus having been “made a eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake,”⁶ I would have with greater happiness expected your embraces.

4. But, fool that I was, I foamed in my wickedness as the sea and, forsaking you, followed the rushing of my own tide, and burst out of all your bounds. But I did not escape your scourges. For what mortal can do so? You were always by me, mercifully angry and flavoring all my unlawful pleasures with bitter discontent, in order that I might seek pleasures free from discontent. But where could I find such pleasure save in you, O Lord – save in you, who do teach us by sorrow, who wound us to heal us, and do kill us that we may not die apart from you. Where was I, and how far was I exiled from the delights of your house, in that sixteenth year of the age of my flesh, when the madness of lust held full sway in me – that madness which grants indulgence to human shamelessness, even though it is forbidden by your laws – and I gave myself entirely to it? Meanwhile, my family took no care to save me from ruin by marriage, for their sole care was that I should learn how to make a powerful speech and become a persuasive orator.

CHAPTER III

5. Now, in that year my studies were interrupted. I had come back from Madaura, a neighboring city⁷ where I had gone to study grammar and rhetoric; and the money for a further term at Carthage was being got together for me. This project was more a matter of my father’s ambition than of his means, for he was only a poor citizen of Tagaste.

To whom am I narrating all this? Not to you, O my God, but to my own kind in your presence – to that small part of the human race who may chance to come upon these writings. And to what end? That I and all who read them may understand what depths there are from which we are to cry unto you.⁸ For what is more surely heard in your ear than a confessing heart and a faithful life?

Who did not extol and praise my father, because he went quite beyond his means to supply his son with the necessary expenses for a far journey in the interest of his education? For many far richer citizens did not do so much for their children. Still, this same father troubled himself not at all as to how I was progressing toward you nor how chaste I was, just so long as I was skillful in speaking – no matter how barren I was to your tillage, O God, who are the one true and good Lord of my heart, which is your field.⁹

⁴1 Cor. 7:1.

⁵1 Cor. 7:32, 33.

⁶Cf. Matt. 19:12.

⁷Twenty miles from Tagaste, famed as the birthplace of Apuleius, the only notable classical author produced by the province of Africa.

⁸Another echo of the *De profundis* (Ps. 130:1) – and the most explicit statement we have from Augustine of his motive and aim in writing these “confessions.”

⁹Cf. 1 Cor. 3:9.

6. During that sixteenth year of my age, I lived with my parents, having a holiday from school for a time – this idleness imposed upon me by my parents’ straitened finances. The thornbushes of lust grew rank about my head, and there was no hand to root them out. Indeed, when my father saw me one day at the baths and perceived that I was becoming a man, and was showing the signs of adolescence, he joyfully told my mother about it as if already looking forward to grandchildren, rejoicing in that sort of inebriation in which the world so often forgets you, its Creator, and falls in love with your creature instead of you – the inebriation of that invisible wine of a perverted will which turns and bows down to infamy. But in my mother’s breast you had already begun to build your temple and the foundation of your holy habitation – whereas my father was only a catechumen, and that but recently. She was, therefore, startled with a holy fear and trembling: for though I had not yet been baptized, she feared those crooked ways in which they walk who turn their backs to you and not their faces.

7. Woe is me! Do I dare affirm that you did hold your peace, O my God, while I wandered farther away from you? Didst you really then hold your peace? Then whose words were they but yours which by my mother, your faithful handmaid, you did pour into my ears? None of them, however, sank into my heart to make me do anything. She deplored and, as I remember, warned me privately with great solicitude, “not to commit fornication; but above all things never to defile another man’s wife.” These appeared to me but womanish counsels, which I would have blushed to obey. Yet they were from you, and I knew it not. I thought that you were silent and that it was only she who spoke. Yet it was through her that you did not keep silence toward me; and in rejecting her counsel I was rejecting you – I, her son, “the son of your handmaid, your servant.”¹⁰ But I did not realize this, and rushed on headlong with such blindness that, among my friends, I was ashamed to be less shameless than they, when I heard them boasting of their disgraceful exploits – yes, and glorying all the more the worse their baseness was. What is worse, I took pleasure in such exploits, not for the pleasure’s sake only but mostly for praise. What is worthy of vituperation except vice itself? Yet I made myself out worse than I was, in order that I might not go lacking for praise. And when in anything I had not sinned as the worst ones in the group, I would still say that I had done what I had not done, in order not to appear contemptible because I was more innocent than they; and not to drop in their esteem because I was more chaste.

8. Behold with what companions I walked the streets of Babylon! I rolled in its mire and lolled about on it, as if on a bed of spices and precious ointments. And, drawing me more closely to the very center of that city, my invisible enemy trod me down and seduced me, for I was easy to seduce. My mother had already fled out of the midst of Babylon¹¹ and was progressing, albeit slowly, toward its outskirts. For in counseling me to chastity, she did not bear in mind what her husband had told her about me. And although she knew that my passions were destructive even then and dangerous for the future, she did not think they should be restrained by the bonds of conjugal affection – if, indeed, they could not be cut away to the quick. She took no heed of this, for she was afraid lest a wife should prove a hindrance and a burden to my hopes. These were not her hopes of the world to come, which my mother had in you, but the hope of learning, which both my parents were too anxious that I should acquire – my father, because he had little or no

¹⁰Ps. 116:16.

¹¹Cf. Jer. 51:6; 50:8.

thought of you, and only vain thoughts for me; my mother, because she thought that the usual course of study would not only be no hindrance but actually a furtherance toward my eventual return to you. This much I conjecture, recalling as well as I can the temperaments of my parents. Meantime, the reins of discipline were slackened on me, so that without the restraint of due severity, I might play at whatsoever I fancied, even to the point of dissoluteness. And in all this there was that mist which shut out from my sight the brightness of your truth, O my God; and my iniquity bulged out, as it were, with fatness!¹²

CHAPTER IV

9. Theft is punished by your law, O Lord, and by the law written in men's hearts, which not even ingrained wickedness can erase. For what thief will tolerate another thief stealing from him? Even a rich thief will not tolerate a poor thief who is driven to theft by want. Yet I had a desire to commit robbery, and did so, compelled to it by neither hunger nor poverty, but through a contempt for well-doing and a strong impulse to iniquity. For I pilfered something which I already had in sufficient measure, and of much better quality. I did not desire to enjoy what I stole, but only the theft and the sin itself.

There was a pear tree close to our own vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was not tempting either for its color or for its flavor. Late one night – having prolonged our games in the streets until then, as our bad habit was – a group of young scoundrels, and I among them, went to shake and rob this tree. We carried off a huge load of pears, not to eat ourselves, but to dump out to the hogs, after barely tasting some of them ourselves. Doing this pleased us all the more because it was forbidden. Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart – which you did pity even in that bottomless pit. Behold, now let my heart confess to you what it was seeking there, when I was being gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to evil but the evil itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved my own undoing. I loved my error – not that for which I erred but the error itself. A depraved soul, falling away from security in you to destruction in itself, seeking nothing from the shameful deed but shame itself.

CHAPTER V

10. Now there is a comeliness in all beautiful bodies, and in gold and silver and all things. The sense of touch has its own power to please and the other senses find their proper objects in physical sensation. Worldly honor also has its own glory, and so do the powers to command and to overcome: and from these there springs up the desire for revenge. Yet, in seeking these pleasures, we must not depart from you, O Lord, nor deviate from your law. The life which we live here has its own peculiar attractiveness because it has a certain measure of comeliness of its own and a harmony with all these inferior values. The bond of human friendship has a sweetness of its own, binding many souls together as one. Yet because of these values, sin is committed, because we have an inordinate preference for these goods of a lower order and neglect the better and the higher good – neglecting you, O our Lord God, and your truth and your law. For these inferior values have their delights, but not at all equal to my God, who has made them all. For in him do the righteous delight and he is the sweetness of the upright in heart.

¹²Cf. Ps. 73:7.

11. When, therefore, we inquire why a crime was committed, we do not accept the explanation unless it appears that there was the desire to obtain some of those values which we designate inferior, or else a fear of losing them. For truly they are beautiful and comely, though in comparison with the superior and celestial goods they are abject and contemptible. A man has murdered another man – what was his motive? Either he desired his wife or his property or else he would steal to support himself; or else he was afraid of losing something to him; or else, having been injured, he was burning to be revenged. Would a man commit murder without a motive, taking delight simply in the act of murder? Who would believe such a thing? Even for that savage and brutal man [Catiline], of whom it was said that he was gratuitously wicked and cruel, there is still a motive assigned to his deeds. “Lest through idleness,” he says, “hand or heart should grow inactive.”¹³ And to what purpose? Why, even this: that, having once got possession of the city through his practice of his wicked ways, he might gain honors, empire, and wealth, and thus be exempt from the fear of the laws and from financial difficulties in supplying the needs of his family – and from the consciousness of his own wickedness. So it seems that even Catiline himself loved not his own villainies, but something else, and it was this that gave him the motive for his crimes.

CHAPTER VI

12. What was it in you, O theft of mine, that I, poor wretch, doted on – you deed of darkness – in that sixteenth year of my age? Beautiful you were not, for you were a theft. But are you anything at all, so that I could analyze the case with you? Those pears that we stole were fair to the sight because they were your creation, O Beauty beyond compare, O Creator of all, O you good God – God the highest good and my true good.¹⁴ Those pears were truly pleasant to the sight, but it was not for them that my miserable soul lusted, for I had an abundance of better pears. I stole those simply that I might steal, for, having stolen them, I threw them away. My sole gratification in them was my own sin, which I was pleased to enjoy; for, if any one of these pears entered my mouth, the only good flavor it had was my sin in eating it. And now, O Lord my God, I ask what it was in that theft of mine that caused me such delight; for behold it had no beauty of its own – certainly not the sort of beauty that exists in justice and wisdom, nor such as is in the mind, memory senses, and the animal life of man; nor yet the kind that is the glory and beauty of the stars in their courses; nor the beauty of the earth, or the sea – teeming with spawning life, replacing in birth that which dies and decays. Indeed, it did not have that false and shadowy beauty which attends the deceptions of vice.

13. For thus we see pride wearing the mask of high-spiritedness, although only you, O God, are high above all. Ambition seeks honor and glory, whereas only you should be honored above all, and glorified forever. The powerful man seeks to be feared, because of his cruelty; but who ought really to be feared but God only? What can be forced away or withdrawn out of his power – when or where or whither or by whom? The enticements of the wanton claim the name of love; and yet nothing is more enticing than your love, nor is anything loved more healthfully than your truth, bright and beautiful above all. Curiosity prompts a desire for knowledge, whereas it is only

¹³Cicero, *De Catiline*, 16.

¹⁴*Deus summum bonum et bonum verum meum.*

you who know all things supremely. Indeed, ignorance and foolishness themselves go masked under the names of simplicity and innocence; yet there is no being that has true simplicity like yours, and none is innocent as you art. Thus it is that by a sinner's own deeds he is himself harmed. Human sloth pretends to long for rest, but what sure rest is there save in the Lord? Luxury would fain be called plenty and abundance; but you are the fullness and unfailing abundance of unfading joy. Prodigality presents a show of liberality; but you are the most lavish giver of all good things. Covetousness desires to possess much; but you are already the possessor of all things. Envy contends that its aim is for excellence; but what is so excellent as thou? Anger seeks revenge; but who avenges more justly than thou? Fear recoils at the unfamiliar and the sudden changes which threaten things beloved, and is wary for its own security; but what can happen that is unfamiliar or sudden to you? Or who can deprive you of what you love? Where, really, is there unshaken security save with you? Grief languishes for things lost in which desire had taken delight, because it wills to have nothing taken from it, just as nothing can be taken from you.

14. Thus the soul commits fornication when she is turned from you,¹⁵ and seeks apart from you what she cannot find pure and untainted until she returns to you. All things thus imitate you – but perversely – when they separate themselves far from you and raise themselves up against you. But, even in this act of perverse imitation, they acknowledge you to be the Creator of all nature, and recognize that there is no place whither they can altogether separate themselves from you. What was it, then, that I loved in that theft? And in what was I imitating my Lord, even in a corrupted and perverted way? Did I wish, if only by gesture, to rebel against your law, even though I had no power to do so actually – so that, even as a captive, I might produce a sort of counterfeit liberty, by doing with impunity deeds that were forbidden, in a deluded sense of omnipotence? Behold this servant of yours, fleeing from his Lord and following a shadow! O rottenness! O monstrosity of life and abyss of death! Could I find pleasure only in what was unlawful, and only because it was unlawful?

CHAPTER VII

15. “What shall I render unto the Lord”¹⁶ for the fact that while my memory recalls these things my soul no longer fears them? I will love you, O Lord, and thank you, and confess to your name, because you have put away from me such wicked and evil deeds. To your grace I attribute it and to your mercy, that you have melted away my sin as if it were ice. To your grace also I attribute whatsoever of evil I did *not* commit – for what might I not have done, loving sin as I did, just for the sake of sinning? Yea, all the sins that I confess now to have been forgiven me, both those which I committed willfully and those which, by your providence, I did not commit. What man is there who, when reflecting upon his own infirmity, dares to ascribe his chastity and innocence to his own powers, so that he should love you less – as if he were in less need of your mercy in which you forgive the transgressions of those that return to you? As for that man who, when called by you, obeyed your voice and shunned those things which he here reads of me as I recall and confess them of myself, let him not despise me – for I, who was sick, have been healed by the same Physician by whose aid it was that he did not fall sick, or rather was less sick than I.

¹⁵*Avertitur*, the opposite of *convertitur*: the evil will turns the soul *away* from God; this is sin. By grace it is turned *to* God; this is *conversion*.

¹⁶Ps. 116:12.

And for this let him love you just as much – indeed, all the more – since he sees me restored from such a great weakness of sin by the selfsame Saviour by whom he sees himself preserved from such a weakness.

CHAPTER VIII

16. What profit did I, a wretched one, receive from those things which, when I remember them now, cause me shame – above all, from that theft, which I loved only for the theft’s sake? And, as the theft itself was nothing, I was all the more wretched in that I loved it so. Yet by myself alone I would not have done it – I still recall how I felt about this then – I could not have done it alone. I loved it then because of the companionship of my accomplices with whom I did it. I did not, therefore, love the theft alone – yet, indeed, it was only the theft that I loved, for the companionship was nothing. What is this paradox? Who is it that can explain it to me but God, who illumines my heart and searches out the dark corners thereof? What is it that has prompted my mind to inquire about it, to discuss and to reflect upon all this? For had I at that time loved the pears that I stole and wished to enjoy them, I might have done so alone, if I could have been satisfied with the mere act of theft by which my pleasure was served. Nor did I need to have that itching of my own passions inflamed by the encouragement of my accomplices. But since the pleasure I got was not from the pears, it was in the crime itself, enhanced by the companionship of my fellow sinners.

CHAPTER IX

17. By what passion, then, was I animated? It was undoubtedly depraved and a great misfortune for me to feel it. But still, what was it? “Who can understand his errors?”¹⁷

We laughed because our hearts were tickled at the thought of deceiving the owners, who had no idea of what we were doing and would have strenuously objected. Yet, again, why did I find such delight in doing this which I would not have done alone? Is it that no one readily laughs alone? No one does so readily; but still sometimes, when men are by themselves and no one else is about, a fit of laughter will overcome them when something very droll presents itself to their sense or mind. Yet alone I would not have done it – alone I could not have done it at all. Behold, my God, the lively review of my soul’s career is laid bare before you. I would not have committed that theft alone. My pleasure in it was not what I stole but, rather, the act of stealing. Nor would I have enjoyed doing it alone – indeed I would not have done it! O friendship all unfriendly! You strange seducer of the soul, who hungers for mischief from impulses of mirth and wantonness, who craves another’s loss without any desire for one’s own profit or revenge – so that, when they say, “Let’s go, let’s do it,” we are ashamed not to be shameless.

CHAPTER X

18. Who can unravel such a twisted and tangled knottiness? It is unclean. I hate to reflect upon it. I hate to look on it. But I do long for you, O Righteousness and Innocence, so beautiful and comely to all virtuous eyes – I long for you with an insatiable satiety. With you is perfect rest,

¹⁷Ps. 19:12.

and life unchanging. He who enters into you enters into the joy of his Lord,¹⁸ and shall have no fear and shall achieve excellence in the Excellent. I fell away from you, O my God, and in my youth I wandered too far from you, my true support. And I became to myself a wasteland.

¹⁸Cf. Matt. 25:21.

BOOK THREE – Student Days at Carthage

The story of his student days in Carthage, his discovery of Cicero's *Hortensius*, the enkindling of his philosophical interest, his infatuation with the Manichean heresy, and his mother's dream which foretold his eventual return to the true faith and to God.

CHAPTER I

1. I came to Carthage, where a caldron of unholy loves was seething and bubbling all around me. I was not in love as yet, but I was in love with love; and, from a hidden hunger, I hated myself for not feeling more intensely a sense of hunger. I was looking for something to love, for I was in love with loving, and I hated security and a smooth way, free from snares. Within me I had a dearth of that inner food which is yourself, my God – although that dearth caused me no hunger. And I remained without any appetite for incorruptible food – not because I was already filled with it, but because the emptier I became the more I loathed it. Because of this my soul was unhealthy; and, full of sores, it exuded itself forth, itching to be scratched by scraping on the things of the senses.¹ Yet, had these things no soul, they would certainly not inspire our love. To love and to be loved was sweet to me, and all the more when I gained the enjoyment of the body of the person I loved. Thus I polluted the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence and I dimmed its luster with the slime of lust. Yet, foul and unclean as I was, I still craved, in excessive vanity, to be thought elegant and urbane. And I did fall precipitately into the love I was longing for. My God, my mercy, with how much bitterness did you, out of your infinite goodness, flavor that sweetness for me! For I was not only beloved but also I secretly reached the climax of enjoyment; and yet I was joyfully bound with troublesome tics, so that I could be scourged with the burning iron rods of jealousy, suspicion, fear, anger, and strife.

CHAPTER II

2. Stage plays also captivated me, with their sights full of the images of my own miseries: fuel for my own fire. Now, why does a man like to be made sad by viewing doleful and tragic scenes, which he himself could not by any means endure? Yet, as a spectator, he wishes to experience from them a sense of grief, and in this very sense of grief his pleasure consists. What is this but wretched madness? For a man is more affected by these actions the more he is spuriously involved in these affections. Now, if he should suffer them in his own person, it is the custom to call this "misery." But when he suffers with another, then it is called "compassion." But what kind of compassion is it that arises from viewing fictitious and unreal sufferings? The spectator is not expected to aid the sufferer but merely to grieve for him. And the more he grieves the more he applauds the actor of these fictions. If the misfortunes of the characters – whether historical or entirely imaginary – are represented so as not to touch the feelings of the spectator, he goes away disgusted and complaining. But if his feelings are deeply touched, he sits it out attentively, and sheds tears of joy.

3. Tears and sorrow, then, are loved. Surely every man desires to be joyful. And, though no one

¹Cf. Job 2:7, 8.

is willingly miserable, one may, nevertheless, be pleased to be merciful so that we love their sorrows because without them we should have nothing to pity. This also springs from that same vein of friendship. But whither does it go? Whither does it flow? Why does it run into that torrent of pitch which seethes forth those huge tides of loathsome lusts in which it is changed and altered past recognition, being diverted and corrupted from its celestial purity by its own will? Shall, then, compassion be repudiated? By no means! Let us, however, love the sorrows of others. But let us beware of uncleanness, O my soul, under the protection of my God, the God of our fathers, who is to be praised and exalted – let us beware of uncleanness. I have not yet ceased to have compassion. But in those days in the theaters I sympathized with lovers when they sinfully enjoyed one another, although this was done fictitiously in the play. And when they lost one another, I grieved with them, as if pitying them, and yet had delight in both grief and pity. Nowadays I feel much more pity for one who delights in his wickedness than for one who counts himself unfortunate because he fails to obtain some harmful pleasure or suffers the loss of some miserable felicity. This, surely, is the truer compassion, but the sorrow I feel in it has no delight for me. For although he that grieves with the unhappy should be commended for his work of love, yet he who has the power of real compassion would still prefer that there be nothing for him to grieve about. For if good will were to be ill will – which it cannot be – only then could he who is truly and sincerely compassionate wish that there were some unhappy people so that he might commiserate them. Some grief may then be justified, but none of it loved. Thus it is that you do act, O Lord God, for you love souls far more purely than we do and are more incorruptibly compassionate, although you are never wounded by any sorrow. Now “who is sufficient for these things?”²

4. But at that time, in my wretchedness, I loved to grieve; and I sought for things to grieve about. In another man’s misery, even though it was feigned and impersonated on the stage, that performance of the actor pleased me best and attracted me most powerfully which moved me to tears. What marvel then was it that an unhappy sheep, straying from your flock and impatient of your care, I became infected with a foul disease? This is the reason for my love of griefs: that they would not probe into me too deeply (for I did not love to suffer in myself such things as I loved to look at), and they were the sort of grief which came from hearing those fictions, which affected only the surface of my emotion. Still, just as if they had been poisoned fingernails, their scratching was followed by inflammation, swelling, putrefaction, and corruption. Such was my life! But was it life, O my God?

CHAPTER III

5. And still your faithful mercy hovered over me from afar. In what unseemly iniquities did I wear myself out, following a sacrilegious curiosity, which, having deserted you, then began to drag me down into the treacherous abyss, into the beguiling obedience of devils, to whom I made offerings of my wicked deeds. And still in all this you did not fail to scourge me. I dared, even while your solemn rites were being celebrated inside the walls of your church, to desire and to plan a project which merited death as its fruit. For this you did chastise me with grievous punishments, but nothing in comparison with my fault, O you my greatest mercy, my God, my refuge from those terrible dangers in which I wandered with stiff neck, receding farther from

²2 Cor. 2:16.

you, loving my own ways and not yours – loving a vagrant liberty!

6. Those studies I was then pursuing, generally accounted as respectable, were aimed at distinction in the courts of law – to excel in which, the more crafty I was, the more I should be praised. Such is the blindness of men that they even glory in their blindness. And by this time I had become a master in the School of Rhetoric, and I rejoiced proudly in this honor and became inflated with arrogance. Still I was relatively sedate, O Lord, as you know, and had no share in the wreckings of “The Wreckers”³ (for this stupid and diabolical name was regarded as the very badge of gallantry) among whom I lived with a sort of ashamed embarrassment that I was not even as they were. But I lived with them, and at times I was delighted with their friendship, even when I abhorred their acts (that is, their “wrecking”) in which they insolently attacked the modesty of strangers, tormenting them by uncalled-for jeers, gratifying their mischievous mirth. Nothing could more nearly resemble the actions of devils than these fellows. By what name, therefore, could they be more aptly called than “wreckers”? – being themselves wrecked first, and altogether turned upside down. They were secretly mocked at and seduced by the deceiving spirits, in the very acts by which they amused themselves in jeering and horseplay at the expense of others.

CHAPTER IV

7. Among such as these, in that unstable period of my life, I studied the books of eloquence, for it was in eloquence that I was eager to be eminent, though from a reprehensible and vainglorious motive, and a delight in human vanity. In the ordinary course of study I came upon a certain book of Cicero’s, whose language almost all admire, though not his heart. This particular book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy and was called *Hortensius*.⁴ Now it was this book which quite definitely changed my whole attitude and turned my prayers toward you, O Lord, and gave me new hope and new desires. Suddenly every vain hope became worthless to me, and with an incredible warmth of heart I yearned for an immortality of wisdom and began now to arise that I might return to you. It was not to sharpen my tongue further that I made use of that book. I was now nineteen; my father had been dead two years,⁵ and my mother was providing the money for my study of rhetoric. What won me in it [i.e., the *Hortensius*] was not its style but its substance.

8. How ardent was I then, my God, how ardent to fly from earthly things to thee! Nor did I know how you were even then dealing with me. For with you is wisdom. In Greek the love of wisdom is called “philosophy,” and it was with this love that that book inflamed me. There are some who seduce through philosophy, under a great, alluring, and honorable name, using it to color and adorn their own errors. And almost all who did this, in Cicero’s own time and earlier, are censored and pointed out in his book. In it there is also manifest that most salutary admonition of

³*Eversores*, “overturers,” from *overtere*, to overthrow or ruin. This was the nickname of a gang of young hoodlums in Carthage, made up largely, it seems, of students in the schools.

⁴A minor essay now lost. We know of its existence from other writers, but the only fragments that remain are in Augustine’s works: *Contra Academicos*, III, 14:31; *De beata vita*, X; *Soliloquia*, I, 17; *De civitate Dei*, III, 15; *Contra Julianum*, IV, 15:78; *De Trinitate*, XIII, 4:7, 5:8; XIV, 9:12, 19:26; *Epist.* CXXX, 10.

⁵Note this merely parenthetical reference to his father’s death and contrast it with the account of his mother’s death in Bk. IX, Chs. X-XII.

your Spirit, spoken by your good and pious servant: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ: for in him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.”⁶ Since at that time, as you know, O Light of my heart, the words of the apostle were unknown to me, I was delighted with Cicero’s exhortation, at least enough so that I was stimulated by it, and enkindled and inflamed to love, to seek, to obtain, to hold, and to embrace, not this or that sect, but wisdom itself, wherever it might be. Only this checked my ardor: that the name of Christ was not in it. For this name, by your mercy, O Lord, this name of my Saviour your Son, my tender heart had piously drunk in, deeply treasured even with my mother’s milk. And whatsoever was lacking that name, no matter how erudite, polished, and truthful, did not quite take complete hold of me.

CHAPTER V

9. I resolved, therefore, to direct my mind to the Holy Scriptures, that I might see what they were. And behold, I saw something not comprehended by the proud, not disclosed to children, something lowly in the hearing, but sublime in the doing, and veiled in mysteries. Yet I was not of the number of those who could enter into it or bend my neck to follow its steps. For then it was quite different from what I now feel. When I then turned toward the Scriptures, they appeared to me to be quite unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Tully.⁷ For my inflated pride was repelled by their style, nor could the sharpness of my wit penetrate their inner meaning. Truly they were of a sort to aid the growth of little ones, but I scorned to be a little one and, swollen with pride, I looked upon myself as fully grown.

CHAPTER VI

10. Thus I fell among men, delirious in their pride, carnal and voluble, whose mouths were the snares of the devil – a trap made out of a mixture of the syllables of your name and the names of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Paraclete.⁸ These names were never out of their mouths, but only as sound and the clatter of tongues, for their heart was empty of truth. Still they cried, “Truth, Truth,” and were forever speaking the word to me. But the thing itself was not in them. Indeed, they spoke falsely not only of you – who truly are the Truth – but also about the basic elements of this world, your creation. And, indeed, I should have passed by the philosophers themselves even when they were speaking truth concerning your creatures, for the sake of your love, O Highest Good, and my Father, O Beauty of all things beautiful.

⁶Col. 2:8, 9.

⁷I.e., Marcus Tullius Cicero.

⁸These were the Manicheans, a pseudo-Christian sect founded by a Persian religious teacher, Mani (c. A.D. 216-277). They professed a highly eclectic religious system chiefly distinguished by its radical dualism and its elaborate cosmogony in which good was co-ordinated with light and evil with darkness. In the sect, there was an esoteric minority called *perfecti*, who were supposed to obey the strict rules of an ascetic ethic; the rest were *auditores*, who followed, at a distance, the doctrines of the *perfecti* but not their rules. The chief attraction of Manicheism lay in the fact that it appeared to offer a straightforward, apparently profound and rational solution to the problem of evil, both in nature and in human experience. Cf. H.C. Puech, *Le Manichéisme, son fondateur – sa doctrine* (Paris, 1949); F.C. Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees* (Cambridge, 1925); and Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee* (Cambridge, 1947).

O Truth, Truth, how inwardly even then did the marrow of my soul sigh for you when, frequently and in manifold ways, in numerous and vast books, [the Manicheans] sounded out your name though it was only a sound! And in these dishes – while I starved for you – they served up to me, in your stead, the sun and moon your beauteous works – but still only your works and not yourself; indeed, not even your first work. For your spiritual works came before these material creations, celestial and shining though they are. But I was hungering and thirsting, not even after those first works of yours, but after yourself the Truth, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”⁹ Yet they still served me glowing fantasies in those dishes. And, truly, it would have been better to have loved this very sun – which at least is true to our sight – than those illusions of theirs which deceive the mind through the eye. And yet because I supposed the illusions to be from you I fed on them – not with avidity, for you did not taste in my mouth as you are, and you were not these empty fictions. Neither was I nourished by them, but was instead exhausted. Food in dreams appears like our food awake; yet the sleepers are not nourished by it, for they are asleep. But the fantasies of the Manicheans were not in any way like you as you have spoken to me now. They were simply fantastic and false. In comparison to them the actual bodies which we see with our fleshly sight, both celestial and terrestrial, are far more certain. These true bodies even the beasts and birds perceive as well as we do and they are more certain than the images we form about them. And again, we do with more certainty form our conceptions about them than, from them, we go on by means of them to imagine of other greater and infinite bodies which have no existence. With such empty husks was I then fed, and yet was not fed.

But you, my Love, for whom I longed in order that I might be strong, neither are those bodies that we see in heaven nor are you those which we do not see there, for you have created them all and yet you reckon them not among your greatest works. How far, then, are you from those fantasies of mine, fantasies of bodies which have no real being at all! The images of those bodies which actually exist are far more certain than these fantasies. The bodies themselves are more certain than the images, yet even these you are not. You are not even the soul, which is the life of bodies; and, clearly, the life of the body is better than the body itself. But you are the life of souls, life of lives, having life in yourself, and never changing, O Life of my soul.¹⁰

11. Where, then, were you and how far from me? Far, indeed, was I wandering away from you, being barred even from the husks of those swine whom I fed with husks.¹¹ For how much better were the fables of the grammarians and poets than these snares [of the Manicheans]! For verses and poems and “the flying Medea”¹² are still more profitable truly than these men’s “five elements,” with their various colors, answering to “the five caves of darkness”¹³ (none of which exist and yet in which they slay the one who believes in them). For verses and poems I can turn into food for the mind, for though I sang about “the flying Medea” I never believed it, but those other things [the fantasies of the Manicheans] I did believe. Woe, woe, by what steps I was

⁹James 1:17.

¹⁰Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 3:14.

¹¹Cf. Luke 15:16.

¹²Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 219-224.

¹³For the details of the Manichean cosmogony, see Burkitt, *op. cit.*, ch. 4.

dragged down to “the depths of hell”¹⁴ – toiling and fuming because of my lack of the truth, even when I was seeking after you, my God! To you I now confess it, for you did have mercy on me when I had not yet confessed it. I sought after you, but not according to the understanding of the mind, by means of which you have willed that I should excel the beasts, but only after the guidance of my physical senses. You were more inward to me than the most inward part of me; and higher than my highest reach. I came upon that brazen woman, devoid of prudence, who, in Solomon’s obscure parable, sits at the door of the house on a seat and says, “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.”¹⁵ This woman seduced me, because she found my soul outside its own door, dwelling on the sensations of my flesh and ruminating on such food as I had swallowed through these physical senses.

CHAPTER VII

12. For I was ignorant of that other reality, true Being. And so it was that I was subtly persuaded to agree with these foolish deceivers when they put their questions to me: “Whence comes evil?” and, “Is God limited by a bodily shape, and has he hairs and nails?” and, “Are those patriarchs to be esteemed righteous who had many wives at one time, and who killed men and who sacrificed living creatures?” In my ignorance I was much disturbed over these things and, though I was retreating from the truth, I appeared to myself to be going toward it, because I did not yet know that evil was nothing but a privation of good (that, indeed, it has no being)¹⁶; and how should I have seen this when the sight of my eyes went no farther than physical objects, and the sight of my mind reached no farther than to fantasms? And I did not know that God is a spirit who has no parts extended in length and breadth, whose being has no mass – for every mass is less in a part than in a whole – and if it be an infinite mass it must be less in such parts as are limited by a certain space than in its infinity. It cannot therefore be wholly everywhere as Spirit is, as God is. And I was entirely ignorant as to what is that principle within us by which we are like God, and which is rightly said in Scripture to be made “after God’s image.”

13. Nor did I know that true inner righteousness – which does not judge according to custom but by the measure of the most perfect law of God Almighty – by which the mores of various places and times were adapted to those places and times (though the law itself is the same always and everywhere, not one thing in one place and another in another). By this inner righteousness Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob and Moses and David, and all those commended by the mouth of God were righteous and were judged unrighteous only by foolish men who were judging by human judgment and gauging their judgment of the mores of the whole human race by the narrow norms of their own mores. It is as if a man in an armory, not knowing what piece goes on what part of the body, should put a greave on his head and a helmet on his shin and then complain because they did not fit. Or as if, on some holiday when afternoon business was forbidden, one were to grumble at not being allowed to go on selling as it had been lawful for him to do in the forenoon. Or, again, as if, in a house, he sees a servant handle something that the butler is not permitted to touch, or when something is done behind a stable that would be prohibited in a dining room, and then a person should be indignant that in one house and one

¹⁴Prov. 9:18.

¹⁵Cf. Prov. 9:17; see also Prov. 9:13 (Vulgate text).

¹⁶Cf. *Enchiridion*, IV.

family the same things are not allowed to every member of the household. Such is the case with those who cannot endure to hear that something was lawful for righteous men in former times that is not so now; or that God, for certain temporal reasons, commanded then one thing to them and another now to these: yet both would be serving the same righteous will. These people should see that in one man, one day, and one house, different things are fit for different members; and a thing that was formerly lawful may become, after a time, unlawful – and something allowed or commanded in one place that is justly prohibited and punished in another. Is justice, then, variable and changeable? No, but the times over which she presides are not all alike because they are different times. But men, whose days upon the earth are few, cannot by their own perception harmonize the causes of former ages and other nations, of which they had no experience, and compare them with these of which they do have experience; although in one and the same body, or day, or family, they can readily see that what is suitable for each member, season, part, and person may differ. To the one they take exception; to the other they submit.

14. These things I did not know then, nor had I observed their import. They met my eyes on every side, and I did not see. I composed poems, in which I was not free to place each foot just anywhere, but in one meter one way, and in another meter another way, nor even in any one verse was the same foot allowed in all places. Yet the art by which I composed did not have different principles for each of these different cases, but the same law throughout. Still I did not see how, by that righteousness to which good and holy men submitted, all those things that God had commanded were gathered, in a far more excellent and sublime way, into one moral order; and it did not vary in any essential respect, though it did not in varying times prescribe all things at once but, rather, distributed and prescribed what was proper for each. And, being blind, I blamed those pious fathers, not only for making use of present things as God had commanded and inspired them to do, but also for foreshadowing things to come, as God revealed it to them.

CHAPTER VIII

15. Can it ever, at any time or place, be unrighteous for a man to love God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind; and his neighbor as himself?¹⁷ Similarly, offenses against nature are everywhere and at all times to be held in detestation and should be punished. Such offenses, for example, were those of the Sodomites; and, even if all nations should commit them, they would all be judged guilty of the same crime by the divine law, which has not made men so that they should ever abuse one another in that way. For the fellowship that should be between God and us is violated whenever that nature of which he is the author is polluted by perverted lust. But these offenses against customary morality are to be avoided according to the variety of such customs. Thus, what is agreed upon by convention, and confirmed by custom or the law of any city or nation, may not be violated at the lawless pleasure of any, whether citizen or stranger. For any part that is not consistent with its whole is unseemly. Nevertheless, when God commands anything contrary to the customs or compacts of any nation, even though it were never done by them before, it is to be done; and if it has been interrupted, it is to be restored; and if it has never been established, it is to be established. For it is lawful for a king, in the state over which he reigns, to command that which neither he himself nor anyone before him had commanded. And if it cannot be held to be inimical to the public interest to obey him – and, in

¹⁷Cf. Matt. 22:37-39.

truth, it would be inimical if he were not obeyed, since obedience to princes is a general compact of human society – how much more, then, ought we unhesitatingly to obey God, the Governor of all his creatures! For, just as among the authorities in human society, the greater authority is obeyed before the lesser, so also must God be above all.

16. This applies as well to deeds of violence where there is a real desire to harm another, either by humiliating treatment or by injury. Either of these may be done for reasons of revenge, as one enemy against another, or in order to obtain some advantage over another, as in the case of the highwayman and the traveler; else they may be done in order to avoid some other evil, as in the case of one who fears another; or through envy as, for example, an unfortunate man harming a happy one just because he is happy; or they may be done by a prosperous man against someone whom he fears will become equal to himself or whose equality he resents. They may even be done for the mere pleasure in another man's pain, as the spectators of gladiatorial shows or the people who deride and mock at others. These are the major forms of iniquity that spring out of the lust of the flesh, and of the eye, and of power.¹⁸ Sometimes there is just one; sometimes two together; sometimes all of them at once. Thus we live, offending against the Three and the Seven, that harp of ten strings, your Decalogue, O God most high and most sweet.¹⁹ But now how can offenses of vileness harm you who can not be defiled; or how can deeds of violence harm you who can not be harmed? Still you do punish these sins which men commit against themselves because, even when they sin against you, they are also committing impiety against their own souls. Iniquity gives itself the lie, either by corrupting or by perverting that nature which you have made and ordained. And they do this by an immoderate use of lawful things; or by lustful desire for things forbidden, as “against nature”; or when they are guilty of sin by raging with heart and voice against you, rebelling against you, “kicking against the pricks”²⁰; or when they cast aside respect for human society and take audacious delight in conspiracies and feuds according to their private likes and dislikes.

This is what happens whenever you are forsaken, O Fountain of Life, who are the one and true Creator and Ruler of the universe. This is what happens when through self-willed pride a part is loved under the false assumption that it is the whole. Therefore, we must return to you in humble piety and let you purge us from our evil ways, and be merciful to those who confess their sins to you, and hear the groanings of the prisoners and loosen us from those fetters which we have forged for ourselves. This you will do, provided we do not raise up against you the arrogance of a false freedom – for thus we lose all through craving more, by loving our own good more than you, the common good of all.

CHAPTER IX

17. But among all these vices and crimes and manifold iniquities, there are also the sins that are committed by men who are, on the whole, making progress toward the good. When these are judged rightly and after the rule of perfection, the sins are censured but the men are to be commended because they show the hope of bearing fruit, like the green shoot of the growing

¹⁸Cf. 1 John 2:16. And see also Bk. X, Chs. XXX-XLI, for an elaborate analysis of them.

¹⁹Cf. Ex. 20:3-8; Ps. 144:9. In Augustine's *Sermon IX*, he points out that in the Decalogue *three* commandments pertain to God and *seven* to men.

²⁰Acts 9:5.

corn. And there are some deeds that resemble vice and crime and yet are not sin because they offend neither you, our Lord God, nor social custom. For example, when suitable reserves for hard times are provided, we cannot judge that this is done merely from a hoarding impulse. Or, again, when acts are punished by constituted authority for the sake of correction, we cannot judge that they are done merely out of a desire to inflict pain. Thus, many a deed which is disapproved in man's sight may be approved by your testimony. And many a man who is praised by men is condemned – as you are witness – because frequently the deed itself, the mind of the doer, and the hidden exigency of the situation all vary among themselves. But when, contrary to human expectation, you command something unusual or unthought of – indeed, something you may formerly have forbidden, about which you may conceal the reason for your command at that particular time; and even though it may be contrary to the ordinance of some society of men²¹ – who doubts but that it should be done because only that society of men is righteous which obeys you? But blessed are they who know what you do command. For all things done by those who obey you either exhibit something necessary at that particular time or they foreshow things to come.

CHAPTER X

18. But I was ignorant of all this, and so I mocked those holy servants and prophets of yours. Yet what did I gain by mocking them save to be mocked in turn by you? Insensibly and little by little, I was led on to such follies as to believe that a fig tree wept when it was plucked and that the sap of the mother tree was tears. Notwithstanding this, if a fig was plucked, by not his own but another man's wickedness, some Manichean saint might eat it, digest it in his stomach, and breathe it out again in the form of angels. Indeed, in his prayers he would assuredly groan and sigh forth particles of God, although these particles of the most high and true God would have remained bound in that fig unless they had been set free by the teeth and belly of some "elect saint"²²! And, wretch that I was, I believed that more mercy was to be shown to the fruits of the earth than unto men, for whom these fruits were created. For, if a hungry man – who was not a Manichean – should beg for any food, the morsel that we gave to him would seem condemned, as it were, to capital punishment.

CHAPTER XI

19. And now you did "stretch forth your hand from above"²³ and did draw up my soul out of that profound darkness [of Manicheism] because my mother, your faithful one, wept to you on my behalf more than mothers are accustomed to weep for the bodily deaths of their children. For by the light of the faith and spirit which she received from you, she saw that I was dead. And you did hear her, O Lord, you did hear her and despised not her tears when, pouring down, they watered the earth under her eyes in every place where she prayed. You did truly hear her.

For what other source was there for that dream by which you did console her, so that she permitted me to live with her, to have my meals in the same house at the table which she had

²¹An example of this which Augustine doubtless had in mind is God's command to Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a human sacrifice. Cf. Gen. 22:1, 2.

²²*Electi sancti*. Another Manichean term for the *perfecti*, the elite and "perfect" among them.

²³Ps. 144:7.

begun to avoid, even while she hated and detested the blasphemies of my error? In her dream she saw herself standing on a sort of wooden rule, and saw a bright youth approaching her, joyous and smiling at her, while she was grieving and bowed down with sorrow. But when he inquired of her the cause of her sorrow and daily weeping (not to learn from her, but to teach her, as is customary in visions), and when she answered that it was my soul's doom she was lamenting, he bade her rest content and told her to look and see that where she was there I was also. And when she looked she saw me standing near her on the same rule.

Whence came this vision unless it was that your ears were inclined toward her heart? O you Omnipotent Good, you care for every one of us as if you did care for him only, and so for all as if they were but one!

20. And what was the reason for this also, that, when she told me of this vision, and I tried to put this construction on it: “that she should not despair of being someday what I was,” she replied immediately, without hesitation, “No; for it was not told me that ‘where he is, there you shall be’ but ‘where you are, there he will be’”? I confess my remembrance of this to you, O Lord, as far as I can recall it – and I have often mentioned it. Your answer, given through my watchful mother, in the fact that she was not disturbed by the plausibility of my false interpretation but saw immediately what should have been seen – and which I certainly had not seen until she spoke – this answer moved me more deeply than the dream itself. Still, by that dream, the joy that was to come to that pious woman so long after was predicted long before, as a consolation for her present anguish.

Nearly nine years passed in which I wallowed in the mud of that deep pit and in the darkness of falsehood, striving often to rise, but being all the more heavily dashed down. But all that time this chaste, pious, and sober widow – such as you do love – was now more buoyed up with hope, though no less zealous in her weeping and mourning; and she did not cease to bewail my case before you, in all the hours of her supplication. Her prayers entered your presence, and yet you did allow me still to tumble and toss around in that darkness.

CHAPTER XII

21. Meanwhile, you gave her yet another answer, as I remember – for I pass over many things, hastening on to those things which more strongly impel me to confess to you – and many things I have simply forgotten. But you gave her then another answer, by a priest of yours, a certain bishop reared in your Church and well versed in your books. When that woman had begged him to agree to have some discussion with me, to refute my errors, to help me to unlearn evil and to learn the good²⁴ – for it was his habit to do this when he found people ready to receive it – he refused, very prudently, as I afterward realized. For he answered that I was still unteachable, being inflated with the novelty of that heresy, and that I had already perplexed divers inexperienced persons with vexatious questions, as she herself had told him. “But let him alone for a time,” he said, “only pray God for him. He will of his own accord, by reading, come to discover what an error it is and how great its impiety is.” He went on to tell her at the same time how he himself, as a boy, had been given over to the Manicheans by his misguided mother and

²⁴*Dedocere me mala ac docere bona*; a typical Augustinian wordplay.

not only had read but had even copied out almost all their books. Yet he had come to see, without external argument or proof from anyone else, how much that sect was to be shunned – and had shunned it. When he had said this she was not satisfied, but repeated more earnestly her entreaties, and shed copious tears, still beseeching him to see and talk with me. Finally the bishop, a little vexed at her importunity, exclaimed, “Go your way; as you live, it cannot be that the son of these tears should perish.” As she often told me afterward, she accepted this answer as though it were a voice from heaven.

BOOK FOUR – Among the Manicheans

This is the story of his years among the Manicheans. It includes the account of his teaching at Tagaste, his taking a mistress, the attractions of astrology, the poignant loss of a friend which leads to a searching analysis of grief and transience. He reports on his first book, *De pulchro et apto*, and his introduction to Aristotle's *Categories* and other books of philosophy and theology, which he mastered with great ease and little profit.

CHAPTER I

1. During this period of nine years, from my nineteenth year to my twenty-eighth, I went astray and led others astray. I was deceived and deceived others, in varied lustful projects – sometimes publicly, by the teaching of what men style “the liberal arts”; sometimes secretly, under the false guise of religion. In the one, I was proud of myself; in the other, superstitious; in all, vain! In my public life I was striving after the emptiness of popular fame, going so far as to seek theatrical applause, entering poetic contests, striving for the straw garlands and the vanity of theatricals and intemperate desires. In my private life I was seeking to be purged from these corruptions of ours by carrying food to those who were called “elect” and “holy,” which, in the laboratory of their stomachs, they should make into angels and gods for us, and by them we might be set free. These projects I followed out and practiced with my friends, who were both deceived with me and by me. Let the proud laugh at me, and those who have not yet been savingly cast down and stricken by you, O my God. Nevertheless, I would confess to you my shame to your glory. Bear with me, I beseech you, and give me the grace to retrace in my present memory the devious ways of my past errors and thus be able to “offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving.”¹ For what am I to myself without you but a guide to my own downfall? Or what am I, even at the best, but one suckled on your milk and feeding on you, O Food that never perishes?² What indeed is any man, seeing that he is but a man? Therefore, let the strong and the mighty laugh at us, but let us who are “poor and needy”³ confess to you.

CHAPTER II

2. During those years I taught the art of rhetoric. Conquered by the desire for gain, I offered for sale speaking skills with which to conquer others. And yet, O Lord, you know that I really preferred to have honest scholars (or what were esteemed as such) and, without tricks of speech, I taught these scholars the tricks of speech – not to be used against the life of the innocent, but sometimes to save the life of a guilty man. And you, O God, did see me from afar, stumbling on that slippery path and sending out some flashes of fidelity amid much smoke – guiding those who loved vanity and sought after lying,⁴ being myself their companion.

In those years I had a mistress, to whom I was not joined in lawful marriage. She was a woman I

¹Ps. 50:14.

²Cf. John 6:27.

³Ps. 74:21.

⁴Cf. Ps. 4:2.

had discovered in my wayward passion, void as it was of understanding, yet she was the only one; and I remained faithful to her and with her I discovered, by my own experience, what a great difference there is between the restraint of the marriage bond contracted with a view to having children and the compact of a lustful love, where children are born against the parents' will – although once they are born they compel our love.

3. I remember too that, when I decided to compete for a theatrical prize, some magician – I do not remember him now – asked me what I would give him to be certain to win. But I detested and abominated such filthy mysteries,⁵ and answered “that, even if the garland was of imperishable gold, I would still not permit a fly to be killed to win it for me.” For he would have slain certain living creatures in his sacrifices, and by those honors would have invited the devils to help me. This evil thing I refused, but not out of a pure love of you, O God of my heart, for I knew not how to love you because I knew not how to conceive of anything beyond corporeal splendors. And does not a soul, sighing after such idle fictions, commit fornication against you, trust in false things, and “feed on the winds”⁶? But still I would not have sacrifices offered to devils on my behalf, though I was myself still offering them sacrifices of a sort by my own [Manichean] superstition. For what else is it “to feed on the winds” but to feed on the devils, that is, in our wanderings to become their sport and mockery?

CHAPTER III

4. And yet, without scruple, I consulted those other impostors, whom they call “astrologers” [*mathematicos*], because they used no sacrifices and invoked the aid of no spirit for their divinations. Still, true Christian piety must necessarily reject and condemn their art.

It is good to confess to you and to say, “Have mercy on me; heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee”⁷ – not to abuse your goodness as a license to sin, but to remember the words of the Lord, “Behold, you are made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing befall you.”⁸ All this wholesome advice [the astrologers] labor to destroy when they say, “The cause of your sin is inevitably fixed in the heavens,” and, “This is the doing of Venus, or of Saturn, or of Mars” – all this in order that a man, who is only flesh and blood and proud corruption, may regard himself as blameless, while the Creator and Ordainer of heaven and the stars must bear the blame of our ills and misfortunes. But who is this Creator but you, our God, the sweetness and wellspring of righteousness, who renders to every man according to his works and despises not “a broken and a contrite heart”⁹?

5. There was at that time a wise man, very skillful and quite famous in medicine.¹⁰ He was proconsul then, and with his own hand he placed on my distempered head the crown I had won in a rhetorical contest. He did not do this as a physician, however; and for this distemper “only

⁵The rites of the soothsayers, in which animals were killed, for auguries and propitiation of the gods.

⁶Cf. Hos. 12:1.

⁷Ps. 41:4.

⁸John 5:14.

⁹Ps. 51:17.

¹⁰Vindicianus; see below, Bk. VII, Ch. VI, 8.

you can heal who resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.”¹¹ But did you fail me in that old man, or forbear from healing my soul? Actually when I became better acquainted with him, I used to listen, rapt and eager, to his words; for, though he spoke in simple language, his conversation was replete with vivacity, life, and earnestness. He recognized from my own talk that I was given to books of the horoscope-casters, but he, in a kind and fatherly way, advised me to throw them away and not to spend idly on these vanities care and labor that might otherwise go into useful things. He said that he himself in his earlier years had studied the astrologers’ art with a view to gaining his living by it as a profession. Since he had already understood Hippocrates, he was fully qualified to understand this too. Yet, he had given it up and followed medicine for the simple reason that he had discovered astrology to be utterly false and, as a man of honest character, he was unwilling to gain his living by beguiling people. “But you,” he said, “have the profession of rhetoric to support yourself by, so that you are following this delusion in free will and not necessity. All the more, therefore, you ought to believe me, since I worked at it to learn the art perfectly because I wished to gain my living by it.” When I asked him to account for the fact that many true things are foretold by astrology, he answered me, reasonably enough, that the force of chance, diffused through the whole order of nature, brought these things about. For when a man, by accident, opens the leaves of some poet (who sang and intended something far different) a verse oftentimes turns out to be wondrously apposite to the reader’s present business. “It is not to be wondered at,” he continued, “if out of the human mind, by some higher instinct which does not know what goes on within itself, an answer should be arrived at, by chance and not art, which would fit both the business and the action of the inquirer.”

6. And thus truly, either by him or through him, you were looking after me. And you did fix all this in my memory so that afterward I might search it out for myself. But at that time, neither the proconsul nor my most dear Nebridius – a splendid youth and most circumspect, who scoffed at the whole business of divination – could persuade me to give it up, for the authority of the astrological authors influenced me more than they did. And, thus far, I had come upon no certain proof – such as I sought – by which it could be shown without doubt that what had been truly foretold by those consulted came from accident or chance, and not from the art of the stargazers.

CHAPTER IV

7. In those years, when I first began to teach rhetoric in my native town, I had gained a very dear friend, about my own age, who was associated with me in the same studies. Like myself, he was just rising up into the flower of youth. He had grown up with me from childhood and we had been both school fellows and playmates. But he was not then my friend, nor indeed ever became my friend, in the true sense of the term; for there is no true friendship save between those you do bind together and who cleave to you by that love which is “shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us.”¹² Still, it was a sweet friendship, being ripened by the zeal of common studies. Moreover, I had turned him away from the true faith – which he had not soundly and thoroughly mastered as a youth – and turned him toward those superstitious and harmful fables which my mother mourned in me. With me this man went wandering off in error

¹¹James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5.

¹²Rom. 5:5.

and my soul could not exist without him. But behold you were close behind your fugitives – at once a God of vengeance and a Fountain of mercies, who do turn us to yourself by ways that make us marvel. Thus, you did take that man out of this life when he had scarcely completed one whole year of friendship with me, sweeter to me than all the sweetness of my life thus far.

8. Who can show forth all your praise¹³ for that which he has experienced in himself alone? What was it that you did do at that time, O my God; how unsearchable are the depths of your judgments! For when, sore sick of a fever, he long lay unconscious in a death sweat and everyone despaired of his recovery, he was baptized without his knowledge. And I myself cared little, at the time, presuming that his soul would retain what it had taken from me rather than what was done to his unconscious body. It turned out, however, far differently, for he was revived and restored. Immediately, as soon as I could talk to him – and I did this as soon as he was able, for I never left him and we hung on each other overmuch – I tried to jest with him, supposing that he also would jest in return about that baptism which he had received when his mind and senses were inactive, but which he had since learned that he had received. But he recoiled from me, as if I were his enemy, and, with a remarkable and unexpected freedom, he admonished me that, if I desired to continue as his friend, I must cease to say such things. Confounded and confused, I concealed my feelings till he should get well and his health recover enough to allow me to deal with him as I wished. But he was snatched away from my madness, that with you he might be preserved for my consolation. A few days after, during my absence, the fever returned and he died.

9. My heart was utterly darkened by this sorrow and everywhere I looked I saw death. My native place was a torture room to me and my father's house a strange unhappiness. And all the things I had done with him – now that he was gone – became a frightful torment. My eyes sought him everywhere, but they did not see him; and I hated all places because he was not in them, because they could not say to me, "Look, he is coming," as they did when he was alive and absent. I became a hard riddle to myself, and I asked my soul why she was so downcast and why this disquieted me so sorely.¹⁴ But she did not know how to answer me. And if I said, "Hope you in God,"¹⁵ she very properly disobeyed me, because that dearest friend she had lost was as an actual man, both truer and better than the imagined deity she was ordered to put her hope in. Nothing but tears were sweet to me and they took my friend's place in my heart's desire.

CHAPTER V

10. But now, O Lord, these things are past and time has healed my wound. Let me learn from you, who are Truth, and put the ear of my heart to your mouth, that you may tell me why weeping should be so sweet to the unhappy. have you – though omnipresent – dismissed our miseries from your concern? You abide in yourself while we are disquieted with trial after trial. Yet unless we wept in your ears, there would be no hope for us remaining. How does it happen that such sweet fruit is plucked from the bitterness of life, from groans, tears, sighs, and lamentations? Is it the hope that you will hear us that sweetens it? This is true in the case of

¹³Cf. Ps. 106:2.

¹⁴Cf. Ps. 42:5; 43:5.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

prayer, for in a prayer there is a desire to approach you. But is it also the case in grief for a lost love, and in the kind of sorrow that had then overwhelmed me? For I had neither a hope of his coming back to life, nor in all my tears did I seek this. I simply grieved and wept, for I was miserable and had lost my joy. Or is weeping a bitter thing that gives us pleasure because of our aversion to the things we once enjoyed and this only as long as we loathe them?

CHAPTER VI

11. But why do I speak of these things? Now is not the time to ask such questions, but rather to confess to you. I was wretched; and every soul is wretched that is fettered in the friendship of mortal things – it is torn to pieces when it loses them, and then realizes the misery which it had even before it lost them. Thus it was at that time with me. I wept most bitterly, and found a rest in bitterness. I was wretched, and yet that wretched life I still held dearer than my friend. For though I would willingly have changed it, I was still more unwilling to lose it than to have lost him. Indeed, I doubt whether I was willing to lose it, even for him – as they tell (unless it be fiction) of the friendship of Orestes and Pylades¹⁶; they would have gladly died for one another, or both together, because not to love together was worse than death to them. But a strange kind of feeling had come over me, quite different from this, for now it was wearisome to live and a fearful thing to die. I suppose that the more I loved him the more I hated and feared, as the most cruel enemy, that death which had robbed me of him. I even imagined that it would suddenly annihilate all men, since it had had such a power over him. This is the way I remember it was with me.

Look into my heart, O God! Behold and look deep within me, for I remember it well, O my Hope who cleanse me from the uncleanness of such affections, directing my eyes toward you and plucking my feet out of the snare. And I marveled that other mortals went on living since he whom I had loved as if he would never die was now dead. And I marveled all the more that I, who had been a second self to him, could go on living when he was dead. Someone spoke rightly of his friend as being “his soul’s other half”¹⁷ – for I felt that my soul and his soul were but one soul in two bodies. Consequently, my life was now a horror to me because I did not want to live as a half self. But it may have been that I was afraid to die, lest he should then die wholly whom I had so greatly loved.

CHAPTER VII

12. O madness that knows not how to love men as they should be loved! O foolish man that I was then, enduring with so much rebellion the lot of every man! Thus I fretted, sighed, wept, tormented myself, and took neither rest nor counsel, for I was dragging around my torn and bloody soul. It was impatient of my dragging it around, and yet I could not find a place to lay it down. Not in pleasant groves, nor in sport or song, nor in fragrant bowers, nor in magnificent banquetings, nor in the pleasures of the bed or the couch; not even in books or poetry did it find rest. All things looked gloomy, even the very light itself. Whatsoever was not what he was, was now repulsive and hateful, except my groans and tears, for in those alone I found a little rest. But

¹⁶Cf. Ovid, *Tristia*, IV, 4:74.

¹⁷Cf. Horace, Ode I, 3:8, where he speaks of Virgil, *et servas animae dimidium meae*. Augustine’s memory changes the text here to *dimidium animae suae*.

when my soul left off weeping, a heavy burden of misery weighed me down. It should have been raised up to you, O Lord, for you to lighten and to lift. This I knew, but I was neither willing nor able to do; especially since, in my thoughts of you, you were not yourself but only an empty fantasm. Thus my error was my god. If I tried to cast off my burden on this fantasm, that it might find rest there, it sank through the vacuum and came rushing down again upon me. Thus I remained to myself an unhappy lodging where I could neither stay nor leave. For where could my heart fly from my heart? Where could I fly from my own self? Where would I not follow myself? And yet I did flee from my native place so that my eyes would look for him less in a place where they were not accustomed to see him. Thus I left the town of Tagaste and returned to Carthage.

CHAPTER VIII

13. Time never lapses, nor does it glide at leisure through our sense perceptions. It does strange things in the mind. Lo, time came and went from day to day, and by coming and going it brought to my mind other ideas and remembrances, and little by little they patched me up again with earlier kinds of pleasure and my sorrow yielded a bit to them. But yet there followed after this sorrow, not other sorrows just like it, but the causes of other sorrows. For why had that first sorrow so easily penetrated to the quick except that I had poured out my soul onto the dust, by loving a man as if he would never die who nevertheless had to die? What revived and refreshed me, more than anything else, was the consolation of other friends, with whom I went on loving the things I loved instead of you. This was a monstrous fable and a tedious lie which was corrupting my soul with its “itching ears”¹⁸ by its adulterous rubbing. And that fable would not die to me as often as one of my friends died. And there were other things in our companionship that took strong hold of my mind: to discourse and jest with him; to indulge in courteous exchanges; to read pleasant books together; to trifle together; to be earnest together; to differ at times without ill-humor, as a man might do with himself, and even through these infrequent dissensions to find zest in our more frequent agreements; sometimes teaching, sometimes being taught; longing for someone absent with impatience and welcoming the homecomer with joy. These and similar tokens of friendship, which spring spontaneously from the hearts of those who love and are loved in return – in countenance, tongue, eyes, and a thousand ingratiating gestures – were all so much fuel to melt our souls together, and out of the many made us one.

CHAPTER IX

14. This is what we love in our friends, and we love it so much that a man’s conscience accuses itself if he does not love one who loves him, or respond in love to love, seeking nothing from the other but the evidences of his love. This is the source of our moaning when one dies – the gloom of sorrow, the steeping of the heart in tears, all sweetness turned to bitterness – and the feeling of death in the living, because of the loss of the life of the dying.

Blessed is he who loves you, and who loves his friend in you, and his enemy also, for your sake; for he alone loses none dear to him, if all are dear in Him who cannot be lost. And who is this but our God: the God that created heaven and earth, and filled them because he created them by

¹⁸2 Tim. 4:3.

filling them up? None loses you but he who leaves you; and he who leaves you, where does he go, or where can he flee but from you well-pleased to you offended? For where does he not find your law fulfilled in his own punishment? “Your law is the truth”¹⁹ and you are Truth.

CHAPTER X

15. “Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts, cause your face to shine; and we shall be saved.”²⁰ For wherever the soul of man turns itself, unless toward you, it is enmeshed in sorrows, even though it is surrounded by beautiful things outside you and outside itself. For lovely things would simply not be unless they were from you. They come to be and they pass away, and by coming they begin to be, and they grow toward perfection. Then, when perfect, they begin to wax old and perish, and, if all do not wax old, still all perish. Therefore, when they rise and grow toward being, the more rapidly they grow to maturity, so also the more rapidly they hasten back toward nonbeing. This is the way of things. This is the lot you have given them, because they are part of things which do not all exist at the same time, but by passing away and succeeding each other they all make up the universe, of which they are all parts. For example, our speech is accomplished by sounds which signify meanings, but a meaning is not complete unless one word passes away, when it has sounded its part, so that the next may follow after it. Let my soul praise you, in all these things, O God, the Creator of all; but let not my soul be stuck to these things by the glue of love, through the senses of the body. For they go where they were meant to go, that they may exist no longer. And they rend the soul with pestilent desires because she longs to be and yet loves to rest secure in the created things she loves. But in these things there is no resting place to be found. They do not abide. They flee away; and who is he who can follow them with his physical senses? Or who can grasp them, even when they are present? For our physical sense is slow because it is a physical sense and bears its own limitations in itself. The physical sense is quite sufficient for what it was made to do; but it is not sufficient to stay things from running their courses from the beginning appointed to the end appointed. For in your word, by which they were created, they hear their appointed bound: “From there – to here!”

CHAPTER XI

16. Be not foolish, O my soul, and do not let the tumult of your vanity deafen the ear of your heart. Be attentive. The Word itself calls you to return, and with him is a place of unperturbed rest, where love is not forsaken unless it first forsakes. Behold, these things pass away that others may come to be in their place. Thus even this lowest level of unity²¹ may be made complete in all its parts. “But do I ever pass away?” asks the Word of God. Fix your habitation in him. O my soul, commit whatsoever you have to him. For at long last you are now becoming tired of deceit. Commit to truth whatever you have received from the truth, and you will lose nothing. What is decayed will flourish again; your diseases will be healed; your perishable parts shall be reshaped and renovated, and made whole again in you. And these perishable things will not carry you with them down to where they go when they perish, but shall stand and abide, and you with them, before God, who abides and continues forever.

¹⁹Ps. 119:142.

²⁰Ps. 80:3.

²¹That is, our physical universe.

17. Why then, my perverse soul, do you go on following your flesh? Instead, let it be converted so as to follow you. Whatever you feel through it is but partial. You do not know the whole, of which sensations are but parts; and yet the parts delight you. But if my physical senses had been able to comprehend the whole – and had not as a part of their punishment received only a portion of the whole as their own province – you would then desire that whatever exists in the present time should also pass away so that the whole might please you more. For what we speak, you also hear through physical sensation, and yet you would not wish that the syllables should remain. Instead, you wish them to fly past so that others may follow them, and the whole be heard. Thus it is always that when any single thing is composed of many parts which do not coexist simultaneously, the whole gives more delight than the parts could ever do perceived separately. But far better than all this is He who made it all. He is our God and he does not pass away, for there is nothing to take his place.

CHAPTER XII

18. If physical objects please you, praise God for them, but turn back your love to their Creator, lest, in those things which please you, you displease him. If souls please you, let them be loved in God; for in themselves they are mutable, but in him firmly established – without him they would simply cease to exist. In him, then, let them be loved; and bring along to him with yourself as many souls as you can, and say to them: “Let us love him, for he himself created all these, and he is not far away from them. For he did not create them, and then go away. They are of him and in him. Behold, there he is, wherever truth is known. He is within the inmost heart, yet the heart has wandered away from him. Return to your heart, O you transgressors, and hold fast to him who made you. Stand with him and you shall stand fast. Rest in him and you shall be at rest. Where do you go along these rugged paths? Where are you going? The good that you love is from him, and insofar as it is also for him, it is both good and pleasant. But it will rightly be turned to bitterness if whatever comes from him is not rightly loved and if he is deserted for the love of the creature. Why then will you wander farther and farther in these difficult and toilsome ways? There is no rest where you seek it. Seek what you seek; but remember that it is not where you seek it. You seek for a blessed life in the land of death. It is not there. For how can there be a blessed life where life itself is not?”

19. But our very Life came down to earth and bore our death, and slew it with the very abundance of his own life. And, thundering, he called us to return to him into that secret place from which he came forth to us – coming first into the virginal womb, where the human creature, our mortal flesh, was joined to him that it might not be forever mortal – and came “as a bridegroom coming out his chamber, rejoicing as a strong man to run a race.”²² For he did not delay, but ran through the world, crying out by words, deeds, death, life, descent, ascension – crying aloud to us to return to him. And he departed from our sight that we might return to our hearts and find him there. For he left us, and behold, he is here. He could not be with us long, yet he did not leave us. He went back to the place that he had never left, for “the world was made by him.”²³ In this world he was, and into this world he came, to save sinners. To him my soul

²²Ps. 19:5.

²³John 1:10.

confesses, and he heals it, because it had sinned against him. O sons of men, how long will you be so slow of heart? Even now after Life itself has come down to you, will you not ascend and live? But where will you climb if you are already on a pinnacle and have set your mouth against the heavens? First come down that you may climb up, climb up to God. For you have fallen by trying to climb against him. Tell this to the souls you love that they may weep in the valley of tears, and so bring them along with you to God, because it is by his spirit that you speak thus to them, if, as you speak, you burn with the fire of love.

CHAPTER XIII

20. These things I did not understand at that time, and I loved those inferior beauties, and I was sinking down to the very depths. And I said to my friends: “Do we love anything but the beautiful? What then is the beautiful? And what is beauty? What is it that allures and unites us to the things we love; for unless there were a grace and beauty in them, they could not possibly attract us to them?” And I reflected on this and saw that in the objects themselves there is a kind of beauty which comes from their forming a whole and another kind of beauty that comes from mutual fitness – as the harmony of one part of the body with its whole, or a shoe with a foot, and so on. And this idea sprang up in my mind out of my inmost heart, and I wrote some books – two or three, I think – *On the Beautiful and the Fitting*.²⁴ you know them, O Lord; they have escaped my memory. I no longer have them; somehow they have been mislaid.

CHAPTER XIV

21. What was it, O Lord my God, that prompted me to dedicate these books to Hierius, an orator of Rome, a man I did not know by sight but whom I loved for his reputation of learning, in which he was famous – and also for some words of his that I had heard which had pleased me? But he pleased me more because he pleased others, who gave him high praise and expressed amazement that a Syrian, who had first studied Greek eloquence, should thereafter become so wonderful a Latin orator and also so well versed in philosophy. Thus a man we have never seen is commended and loved. Does a love like this come into the heart of the hearer from the mouth of him who sings the other’s praise? Not so. Instead, one catches the spark of love from one who loves. This is why we love one who is praised when the eulogist is believed to give his praise from an unfeigned heart; that is, when he who loves him praises him.

22. Thus it was that I loved men on the basis of other men’s judgment, and not yours, O my God, in whom no man is deceived. But why is it that the feeling I had for such men was not like my feeling toward the renowned charioteer, or the great gladiatorial hunter, famed far and wide and popular with the mob? Actually, I admired the orator in a different and more serious fashion, as I would myself desire to be admired. For I did not want them to praise and love me as actors were praised and loved – although I myself praise and love them too. I would prefer being unknown than known in that way, or even being hated than loved that way. How are these various influences and divers sorts of loves distributed within one soul? What is it that I am in love with in another which, if I did not hate, I should neither detest nor repel from myself, seeing that we

²⁴*De pulchro et apto*; a lost essay with no other record save echoes in the rest of Augustine's aesthetic theories. Cf. *The Nature of the Good Against the Manicheans*, VIII-XV; *City of God*, XI, 18; *De ordine*, I, 7:18; II, 19:51; *Enchiridion*, III, 10; I, 5.

are equally men? For it does not follow that because the good horse is admired by a man who would not be that horse – even if he could – the same kind of admiration should be given to an actor, who shares our nature. Do I then love that in a man, which I also, a man, would hate to be? Man is himself a great deep. You do number his very hairs, O Lord, and they do not fall to the ground without you, and yet the hairs of his head are more readily numbered than are his affections and the movements of his heart.

23. But that orator whom I admired so much was the kind of man I wished myself to be. Thus I erred through a swelling pride and “was carried about with every wind,”²⁵ but through it all I was being piloted by you, though most secretly. And how is it that I know – whence comes my confident confession to you – that I loved him more because of the love of those who praised him than for the things they praised in him? Because if he had gone unpraised, and these same people had criticized him and had spoken the same things of him in a tone of scorn and disapproval, I should never have been kindled and provoked to love him. And yet his qualities would not have been different, nor would he have been different himself; only the appraisals of the spectators. See where the helpless soul lies prostrate that is not yet sustained by the stability of truth! Just as the breezes of speech blow from the breast of the opinionated, so also the soul is tossed this way and that, driven forward and backward, and the light is obscured to it and the truth not seen. And yet, there it is in front of us. And to me it was a great matter that both my literary work and my zest for learning should be known by that man. For if he approved them, I would be even more fond of him; but if he disapproved, this vain heart of mine, devoid of your steadfastness, would have been offended. And so I meditated on the problem “of the beautiful and the fitting” and dedicated my essay on it to him. I regarded it admiringly, though no one else joined me in doing so.

CHAPTER XV

24. But I had not seen how the main point in these great issues [concerning the nature of beauty] lay really in your craftsmanship, O Omnipotent One, “who alone do great wonders.”²⁶ And so my mind ranged through the corporeal forms, and I defined and distinguished as “beautiful” that which is so in itself and as “fit” that which is beautiful in relation to some other thing. This argument I supported by corporeal examples. And I turned my attention to the nature of the mind, but the false opinions which I held concerning spiritual things prevented me from seeing the truth. Still, the very power of truth forced itself on my gaze, and I turned my throbbing soul away from incorporeal substance to qualities of line and color and shape, and, because I could not perceive these with my mind, I concluded that I could not perceive my mind. And since I loved the peace which is in virtue, and hated the discord which is in vice, I distinguished between the unity there is in virtue and the discord there is in vice. I conceived that unity consisted of the rational soul and the nature of truth and the highest good. But I imagined that in the disunity there was some kind of substance of irrational life and some kind of entity in the supreme evil. This evil I thought was not only a substance but real life as well, and yet I believed that it did not come from you, O my God, from whom are all things. And the first I called a Monad, as if it were a soul without sex. The other I called a Dyad, which showed itself in anger

²⁵Eph. 4:14.

²⁶Ps. 72:18.

in deeds of violence, in deeds of passion and lust – but I did not know what I was talking about. For I had not understood nor had I been taught that evil is not a substance at all and that our soul is not that supreme and unchangeable good.

25. For just as in violent acts, if the emotion of the soul from whence the violent impulse springs is depraved and asserts itself insolently and mutinously – and just as in the acts of passion, if the affection of the soul which gives rise to carnal desires is unrestrained – so also, in the same way, errors and false opinions contaminate life if the rational soul itself is depraved. Thus it was then with me, for I was ignorant that my soul had to be enlightened by another light, if it was to be partaker of the truth, since it is not itself the essence of truth. “For you will light my lamp; the Lord my God will lighten my darkness”²⁷; and “of his fullness have we all received,”²⁸ for “that was the true Light that lights every man that comes into the world”²⁹; for “in you there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”³⁰

26. But I pushed on toward you, and was pressed back by you that I might know the taste of death, for “you resist the proud.”³¹ And what greater pride could there be for me than, with a marvelous madness, to assert myself to be that nature which you are? I was mutable – this much was clear enough to me because my very longing to become wise arose out of a wish to change from worse to better – yet I chose rather to think you mutable than to think that I was not as you art. For this reason I was thrust back; you did resist my fickle pride. Thus I went on imagining corporeal forms, and, since I was flesh I accused the flesh, and, since I was “a wind that passes away,”³² I did not return to you but went wandering and wandering on toward those things that have no being – neither in you nor in me, nor in the body. These fancies were not created for me by your truth but conceived by my own vain conceit out of sensory notions. And I used to ask your faithful children – my own fellow citizens, from whom I stood unconsciously exiled – I used flippantly and foolishly to ask them, “Why, then, does the soul, which God created, err?” But I would not allow anyone to ask me, “Why, then, does God err?” I preferred to contend that your immutable substance was involved in error through necessity rather than admit that my own mutable substance had gone astray of its own free will and had fallen into error as its punishment.

27. I was about twenty-six or twenty-seven when I wrote those books, analyzing and reflecting upon those sensory images which clamored in the ears of my heart. I was straining those ears to hear your inward melody, O sweet Truth, pondering on “the beautiful and the fitting” and longing to stay and hear you, and to rejoice greatly at “the Bridegroom’s voice.”³³ Yet I could not, for by the clamor of my own errors I was hurried outside myself, and by the weight of my own pride I was sinking ever lower. You did not “make me to hear joy and gladness,” nor did the

²⁷Ps. 18:28.

²⁸John 1:16.

²⁹John 1:9.

³⁰Cf. James 1:17.

³¹Cf. James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5.

³²Ps. 78:39.

³³Cf. Jer. 25:10; 33:11; John 3:29; Rev. 18:23.

bones rejoice which were not yet humbled.³⁴

28. And what did it profit me that, when I was scarcely twenty years old, a book of Aristotle's entitled *The Ten Categories*³⁵ fell into my hands? On the very title of this I hung as on something great and divine, since my rhetoric master at Carthage and others who had reputations for learning were always referring to it with such swelling pride. I read it by myself and understood it. And what did it mean that when I discussed it with others they said that even with the assistance of tutors – who not only explained it orally, but drew many diagrams in the sand – they scarcely understood it and could tell me no more about it than I had acquired in the reading of it by myself alone? For the book appeared to me to speak plainly enough about substances, such as a man; and of their qualities, such as the shape of a man, his kind, his stature, how many feet high, and his family relationship, his status, when born, whether he is sitting or standing, is shod or armed, or is doing something or having something done to him – and all the innumerable things that are classified under these nine categories (of which I have given some examples) or under the chief category of substance.

29. What did all this profit me, since it actually hindered me when I imagined that whatever existed was comprehended within those ten categories? I tried to interpret them, O my God, so that even your wonderful and unchangeable unity could be understood as subjected to your own magnitude or beauty, as if they existed in you as their Subject – as they do in corporeal bodies – whereas you are yourself your own magnitude and beauty. A body is not great or fair because it is a body, because, even if it were less great or less beautiful, it would still be a body. But my conception of you was falsity, not truth. It was a figment of my own misery, not the stable ground of your blessedness. For you had commanded, and it was carried out in me, that the earth should bring forth briars and thorns for me, and that with heavy labor I should gain my bread.³⁶

30. And what did it profit me that I could read and understand for myself all the books I could get in the so-called “liberal arts,” when I was actually a worthless slave of wicked lust? I took delight in them, not knowing the real source of what it was in them that was true and certain. For I had my back toward the light, and my face toward the things on which the light falls, so that my face, which looked toward the illuminated things, was not itself illuminated. Whatever was written in any of the fields of rhetoric or logic, geometry, music, or arithmetic, I could understand without any great difficulty and without the instruction of another man. All this you know, O Lord my God, because both quickness in understanding and acuteness in insight are your gifts. Yet for such gifts I made no thank offering to you. Therefore, my abilities served not my profit but rather my loss, since I went about trying to bring so large a part of my substance into my own power. And I did not store up my strength for you, but went away from you into the far country to prostitute my gifts in disordered appetite.³⁷ And what did these abilities profit me, if I did not put them to good use? I did not realize that those arts were understood with great difficulty, even by the studious and the intelligent, until I tried to explain them to others and

³⁴Cf. Ps. 51:8.

³⁵The first section of the *Organon*, which analyzes the problem of predication and develops "the ten categories" of *essence* and the nine "accidents." This existed in a Latin translation by Victorinus, who also translated the *Enneads* of Plotinus, to which Augustine refers infra, Bk. VIII, Ch. II, 3.

³⁶Cf. Gen. 3:18.

³⁷Again, the Prodigal Son theme; cf. Luke 15:13.

discovered that even the most proficient in them followed my explanations all too slowly.

31. And yet what did this profit me, since I still supposed that you, O Lord God, the Truth, wert a bright and vast body and that I was a particle of that body? O perversity gone too far! But so it was with me. And I do not blush, O my God, to confess your mercies to me in your presence, or to call upon you – any more than I did not blush when I openly avowed my blasphemies before men, and bayed, houndlike, against you. What good was it for me that my nimble wit could run through those studies and disentangle all those knotty volumes, without help from a human teacher, since all the while I was erring so hatefully and with such sacrilege as far as the right substance of pious faith was concerned? And what kind of burden was it for your little ones to have a far slower wit, since they did not use it to depart from you, and since they remained in the nest of your Church to become safely fledged and to nourish the wings of love by the food of a sound faith.

O Lord our God, under the shadow of your wings let us hope – defend us and support us.³⁸ you will bear us up when we are little and even down to our gray hairs you will carry us. For our stability, when it is in you, is stability indeed; but when it is in ourselves, then it is all unstable. Our good lives forever with you, and when we turn from you with aversion, we fall into our own perversion. Let us now, O Lord, return that we be not overturned, because with you our good lives without blemish – for our good is you yourself. And we need not fear that we shall find no place to return to because we fell away from it. For, in our absence, our home – which is your eternity – does not fall away.

³⁸Cf. Ps. 17:8.

BOOK FIVE – With Ambrose at Milan

A year of decision. Faustus comes to Carthage and Augustine is disenchanted in his hope for solid demonstration of the truth of Manichean doctrine. He decides to flee from his known troubles at Carthage to troubles yet unknown at Rome. His experiences at Rome prove disappointing and he applies for a teaching post at Milan. Here he meets Ambrose, who confronts him as an impressive witness for Catholic Christianity and opens out the possibilities of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Augustine decides to become a Christian catechumen.

CHAPTER I

1. Accept this sacrifice of my confessions from the hand of my tongue. You did form it and have prompted it to praise your name. Heal all my bones and let them say, “O Lord, who is like unto you?”¹ It is not that one who confesses to you instructs you as to what goes on within him. For the closed heart does not bar your sight into it, nor does the hardness of our heart hold back your hands, for you can soften it at will, either by mercy or in vengeance, “and there is no one who can hide himself from your heat.”² But let my soul praise you, that it may love you, and let it confess your mercies to you, that it may praise you. Your whole creation praises you without ceasing: the spirit of man, by his own lips, by his own voice, lifted up to you; animals and lifeless matter by the mouths of those who meditate upon them. Thus our souls may climb out of their weariness toward you and lean on those things which you have created and pass through them to you, who did create them in a marvelous way. With you, there is refreshment and true strength.

CHAPTER II

2. Let the restless and the unrighteous depart, and flee away from you. Even so, you see them and your eye pierces through the shadows in which they run. For lo, they live in a world of beauty and yet are themselves most foul. And how have they harmed you? Or in what way have they discredited your power, which is just and perfect in its rule even to the last item in creation? Indeed, where would they fly when they fled from your presence? Would you be unable to find them? But they fled that they might not see you, who saw them; that they might be blinded and stumble into you. But you forsake nothing that you have made. The unrighteous stumble against you that they may be justly plagued, fleeing from your gentleness and colliding with your justice, and falling on their own rough paths. For in truth they do not know that you are everywhere; that no place contains you, and that only you are near even to those who go farthest from you. Let them, therefore, turn back and seek you, because even if they have abandoned you, their Creator, you have not abandoned your creatures. Let them turn back and seek you – and lo, you are there in their hearts, there in the hearts of those who confess to you. Let them cast themselves upon you, and weep on your bosom, after all their weary wanderings; and you will gently wipe away

¹Ps. 35:10.

²Cf. Ps. 19:6.

their tears.³ And they weep the more and rejoice in their weeping, since you, O Lord, are not a man of flesh and blood. You are the Lord, who can remake what you did make and can comfort them. And where was I when I was seeking you? There you were, before me; but I had gone away, even from myself, and I could not find myself, much less you.

CHAPTER III

3. Let me now lay bare in the sight of God the twenty-ninth year of my age. There had just come to Carthage a certain bishop of the Manicheans, Faustus by name, a great snare of the devil; and many were entangled by him through the charm of his eloquence. Now, even though I found this eloquence admirable, I was beginning to distinguish the charm of words from the truth of things, which I was eager to learn. Nor did I consider the dish as much as I did the kind of meat that their famous Faustus served up to me in it. His fame had run before him, as one very skilled in an honorable learning and pre-eminently skilled in the liberal arts.

And as I had already read and stored up in memory many of the injunctions of the philosophers, I began to compare some of their doctrines with the tedious fables of the Manicheans; and it struck me that the probability was on the side of the philosophers, whose power reached far enough to enable them to form a fair judgment of the world, even though they had not discovered the sovereign Lord of it all. For you are great, O Lord, and you have respect unto the lowly, but the proud you know afar off.⁴ you draw near to none but the contrite in heart, and can not be found by the proud, even if in their inquisitive skill they may number the stars and the sands, and map out the constellations, and trace the courses of the planets.

4. For it is by the mind and the intelligence which you gave them that they investigate these things. They have discovered much; and have foretold, many years in advance, the day, the hour, and the extent of the eclipses of those luminaries, the sun and the moon. Their calculations did not fail, and it came to pass as they predicted. And they wrote down the rules they had discovered, so that to this day they may be read and from them may be calculated in what year and month and day and hour of the day, and at what quarter of its light, either the moon or the sun will be eclipsed, and it will come to pass just as predicted. And men who are ignorant in these matters marvel and are amazed; and those who understand them exult and are exalted. Both, by an impious pride, withdraw from you and forsake your light. They foretell an eclipse of the sun before it happens, but they do not see their own eclipse which is even now occurring. For they do not ask, as religious men should, what is the source of the intelligence by which they investigate these matters. Moreover, when they discover that you did make them, they do not give themselves up to you that you might preserve what you have made. Nor do they offer, as sacrifice to you, what they have made of themselves. For they do not slaughter their own pride – as they do the sacrificial fowls – nor their own curiosities by which, like the fishes of the sea, they wander through the unknown paths of the deep. Nor do they curb their own extravagances as they do those of “the beasts of the field,”⁵ so that you, O Lord, “a consuming fire,”⁶ may burn

³Cf. Rev. 21:4.

⁴Cf. Ps. 138:6.

⁵Ps. 8:7.

⁶Heb. 12:29.

up their mortal cares and renew them unto immortality.

5. They do not know the way which is your word, by which you did create all the things that are and also the men who measure them, and the senses by which they perceive what they measure, and the intelligence whereby they discern the patterns of measure. Thus they know not that your wisdom is not a matter of measure.⁷ But the Only Begotten has been “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification”⁸ and has been numbered among us and paid tribute to Caesar.⁹ And they do not know this “Way” by which they could descend from themselves to him in order to ascend through him to him. They did not know this “Way,” and so they fancied themselves exalted to the stars and the shining heavens. And lo, they fell upon the earth, and “their foolish heart was darkened.”¹⁰ They saw many true things about the creature but they do not seek with true piety for the Truth, the Architect of Creation, and hence they do not find him. Or, if they do find him, and know that he is God, they do not glorify him as God; neither are they thankful but become vain in their imagination, and say that they themselves are wise, and attribute to themselves what is yours. At the same time, with the most perverse blindness, they wish to attribute to you their own quality – so that they load their lies on you who are the Truth, “changing the glory of the incorruptible God for an image of corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.”¹¹ “They exchanged your truth for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”¹²

6. Yet I remembered many a true saying of the philosophers about the creation, and I saw the confirmation of their calculations in the orderly sequence of seasons and in the visible evidence of the stars. And I compared this with the doctrines of Mani, who in his voluminous folly wrote many books on these subjects. But I could not discover there any account, of either the solstices or the equinoxes, or the eclipses of the sun and moon, or anything of the sort that I had learned in the books of secular philosophy. But still I was ordered to believe, even where the ideas did not correspond with – even when they contradicted – the rational theories established by mathematics and my own eyes, but were very different.

CHAPTER IV

7. Yet, O Lord God of Truth, is any man pleasing to you because he knows these things? No, for surely that man is unhappy who knows these things and does not know you. And that man is happy who knows you, even though he does not know these things. He who knows both you and these things is not the more blessed for his learning, for you only are his blessing, if knowing you as God he glorifies you and gives thanks and does not become vain in his thoughts.

For just as that man who knows how to possess a tree, and give thanks to you for the use of it – although he may not know how many feet high it is or how wide it spreads – is better than the

⁷An echo of the opening sentence, Bk. I, Ch. I, 1.

⁸Cf. 1 Cor. 1:30.

⁹Cf. Matt. 22:21.

¹⁰Cf. Rom. 1:21ff.

¹¹Cf. Rom. 1:23.

¹²Cf. Rom. 1:25.

man who can measure it and count all its branches, but neither owns it nor knows or loves its Creator: just so is a faithful man who possesses the world's wealth as though he had nothing, and possesses all things through his union through you, whom all things serve, even though he does not know the circlings of the Great Bear. Just so it is foolish to doubt that this faithful man may truly be better than the one who can measure the heavens and number the stars and weigh the elements, but who is forgetful of you “who have set in order all things in number, weight, and measure.”¹³

CHAPTER V

8. And who ordered this Mani to write about these things, knowledge of which is not necessary to piety? For you have said to man, “Behold, godliness is wisdom”¹⁴ – and of this he might have been ignorant, however perfectly he may have known these other things. Yet, since he did not know even these other things, and most impudently dared to teach them, it is clear that he had no knowledge of piety. For, even when we have a knowledge of this worldly lore, it is folly to make a *profession* of it, when piety comes from *confession* to you. From piety, therefore, Mani had gone astray, and all his show of learning only enabled the truly learned to perceive, from his ignorance of what they knew, how little he was to be trusted to make plain these more really difficult matters. For he did not aim to be lightly esteemed, but went around trying to persuade men that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Enricher of your faithful ones, was personally resident in him with full authority. And, therefore, when he was detected in manifest errors about the sky, the stars, the movements of the sun and moon, even though these things do not relate to religious doctrine, the impious presumption of the man became clearly evident; for he not only taught things about which he was ignorant but also perverted them, and this with pride so foolish and mad that he sought to claim that his own utterances were as if they had been those of a divine person.

9. When I hear of a Christian brother, ignorant of these things, or in error concerning them, I can tolerate his uninformed opinion; and I do not see that any lack of knowledge as to the form or nature of this material creation can do him much harm, as long as he does not hold a belief in anything which is unworthy of you, O Lord, the Creator of all. But if he thinks that his secular knowledge pertains to the essence of the doctrine of piety, or ventures to assert dogmatic opinions in matters in which he is ignorant – there lies the injury. And yet even a weakness such as this, in the infancy of our faith, is tolerated by our Mother Charity until the new man can grow up “unto a perfect man,” and not be “carried away with every wind of doctrine.”¹⁵

But Mani had presumed to be at once the teacher, author, guide, and leader of all whom he could persuade to believe this, so that all who followed him believed that they were following not an ordinary man but your Holy Spirit. And who would not judge that such great madness, when it once stood convicted of false teaching, should then be abhorred and utterly rejected? But I had not yet clearly decided whether the alternation of day and night, and of longer and shorter days and nights, and the eclipses of sun and moon, and whatever else I read about in other books

¹³Wis. 11:20.

¹⁴Cf. Job 28:28.

¹⁵Eph. 4:13, 14.

could be explained consistently with his theories. If they could have been so explained, there would still have remained a doubt in my mind whether the theories were right or wrong. Yet I was prepared, on the strength of his reputed godliness, to rest my faith on his authority.

CHAPTER VI

10. For almost the whole of the nine years that I listened with unsettled mind to the Manichean teaching I had been looking forward with unbounded eagerness to the arrival of this Faustus. For all the other members of the sect that I happened to meet, when they were unable to answer the questions I raised, always referred me to his coming. They promised that, in discussion with him, these and even greater difficulties, if I had them, would be quite easily and amply cleared away. When at last he did come, I found him to be a man of pleasant speech, who spoke of the very same things they themselves did, although more fluently and in a more agreeable style. But what profit was there to me in the elegance of my cupbearer, since he could not offer me the more precious draught for which I thirsted? My ears had already had their fill of such stuff, and now it did not seem any better because it was better expressed nor more true because it was dressed up in rhetoric; nor could I think the man's soul necessarily wise because his face was comely and his language eloquent. But they who extolled him to me were not competent judges. They thought him able and wise because his eloquence delighted them. At the same time I realized that there is another kind of man who is suspicious even of truth itself, if it is expressed in smooth and flowing language. But you, O my God, had already taught me in wonderful and marvelous ways, and therefore I believed – because it is true – that you did teach me and that beside you there is no other teacher of truth, wherever truth shines forth. Already I had learned from you that because a thing is eloquently expressed it should not be taken to be as necessarily true; nor because it is uttered with stammering lips should it be supposed false. Nor, again, is it necessarily true because rudely uttered, nor untrue because the language is brilliant. Wisdom and folly both are like meats that are wholesome and unwholesome, and courtly or simple words are like town-made or rustic vessels – both kinds of food may be served in either kind of dish.

11. That eagerness, therefore, with which I had so long awaited this man, was in truth delighted with his action and feeling in a disputation, and with the fluent and apt words with which he clothed his ideas. I was delighted, therefore, and I joined with others – and even exceeded them – in exalting and praising him. Yet it was a source of annoyance to me that, in his lecture room, I was not allowed to introduce and raise any of those questions that troubled me, in a familiar exchange of discussion with him. As soon as I found an opportunity for this, and gained his ear at a time when it was not inconvenient for him to enter into a discussion with me and my friends, I laid before him some of my doubts. I discovered at once that he knew nothing of the liberal arts except grammar, and that only in an ordinary way. He had, however, read some of Tully's orations, a very few books of Seneca, and some of the poets, and such few books of his own sect as were written in good Latin. With this meager learning and his daily practice in speaking, he had acquired a sort of eloquence which proved the more delightful and enticing because it was under the direction of a ready wit and a sort of native grace. Was this not even as I now recall it, O Lord my God, Judge of my conscience? My heart and my memory are laid open before you, who were even then guiding me by the secret impulse of your providence and were setting my shameful errors before my face so that I might see and hate them.

CHAPTER VII

12. For as soon as it became plain to me that Faustus was ignorant in those arts in which I had believed him eminent, I began to despair of his being able to clarify and explain all these perplexities that troubled me – though I realized that such ignorance need not have affected the authenticity of his piety, if he had not been a Manichean. For their books are full of long fables about the sky and the stars, the sun and the moon; and I had ceased to believe him able to show me in any satisfactory fashion what I so ardently desired: whether the explanations contained in the Manichean books were better or at least as good as the mathematical explanations I had read elsewhere. But when I proposed that these subjects should be considered and discussed, he quite modestly did not dare to undertake the task, for he was aware that he had no knowledge of these things and was not ashamed to confess it. For he was not one of those talkative people – from whom I had endured so much – who undertook to teach me what I wanted to know, and then said nothing. Faustus had a heart which, if not right toward you, was at least not altogether false toward himself; for he was not ignorant of his own ignorance, and he did not choose to be entangled in a controversy from which he could not draw back or retire gracefully. For this I liked him all the more. For the modesty of an ingenious mind is a finer thing than the acquisition of that knowledge I desired; and this I found to be his attitude toward all abstruse and difficult questions.

13. Thus the zeal with which I had plunged into the Manichean system was checked, and I despaired even more of their other teachers, because Faustus who was so famous among them had turned out so poorly in the various matters that puzzled me. And so I began to occupy myself with him in the study of his own favorite pursuit, that of literature, in which I was already teaching a class as a professor of rhetoric among the young Carthaginian students. With Faustus then I read whatever he himself wished to read, or what I judged suitable to his bent of mind. But all my endeavors to make further progress in Manicheism came completely to an end through my acquaintance with that man. I did not wholly separate myself from them, but as one who had not yet found anything better I decided to content myself, for the time being, with what I had stumbled upon one way or another, until by chance something more desirable should present itself. Thus that Faustus who had entrapped so many to their death – though neither willing nor witting it – now began to loosen the snare in which I had been caught. For your hands, O my God, in the hidden design of your providence did not desert my soul; and out of the blood of my mother's heart, through the tears that she poured out by day and by night, there was a sacrifice offered to you for me, and by marvelous ways you did deal with me. For it was you, O my God, who did it: for “the steps of a man are ordered by the Lord, and he shall choose his way.”¹⁶ How shall we attain salvation without your hand remaking what it had already made?

CHAPTER VIII

14. You did so deal with me, therefore, that I was persuaded to go to Rome and teach there what I had been teaching at Carthage. And how I was persuaded to do this I will not omit to confess to you, for in this also the profoundest workings of your wisdom and your constant mercy toward us must be pondered and acknowledged. I did not wish to go to Rome because of the richer fees

¹⁶Ps. 36:23 (Vulgate).

and the higher dignity which my friends promised me there – though these considerations did affect my decision. My principal and almost sole motive was that I had been informed that the students there studied more quietly and were better kept under the control of stern discipline, so that they did not capriciously and impudently rush into the classroom of a teacher not their own – indeed, they were not admitted at all without the permission of the teacher. At Carthage, on the contrary, there was a shameful and intemperate license among the students. They burst in rudely and, with furious gestures, would disrupt the discipline which the teacher had established for the good of his pupils. Many outrages they perpetrated with astounding effrontery, things that would be punishable by law if they were not sustained by custom. Thus custom makes plain that such behavior is all the more worthless because it allows men to do what your eternal law never will allow. They think that they act thus with impunity, though the very blindness with which they act is their punishment, and they suffer far greater harm than they inflict.

The manners that I would not adopt as a student I was compelled as a teacher to endure in others. And so I was glad to go where all who knew the situation assured me that such conduct was not allowed. But you, “O my refuge and my portion in the land of the living,”¹⁷ did goad me thus at Carthage so that I might thereby be pulled away from it and change my worldly habitation for the preservation of my soul. At the same time, you did offer me at Rome an enticement, through the agency of men enchanted with this death-in-life – by their insane conduct in the one place and their empty promises in the other. To correct my wandering footsteps, you did secretly employ their perversity and my own. For those who disturbed my tranquillity were blinded by shameful madness and also those who allured me elsewhere had nothing better than the earth’s cunning. And I who hated actual misery in the one place sought fictitious happiness in the other.

15. You knew the cause of my going from one country to the other, O God, but you did not disclose it either to me or to my mother, who grieved deeply over my departure and followed me down to the sea. She clasped me tight in her embrace, willing either to keep me back or to go with me, but I deceived her, pretending that I had a friend whom I could not leave until he had a favorable wind to set sail. Thus I lied to my mother – and such a mother! – and escaped. For this too you did mercifully pardon me – fool that I was – and did preserve me from the waters of the sea for the water of your grace; so that, when I was purified by that, the fountain of my mother’s eyes, from which she had daily watered the ground for me as she prayed to you, should be dried. And, since she refused to return without me, I persuaded her, with some difficulty, to remain that night in a place quite close to our ship, where there was a shrine in memory of the blessed Cyprian. That night I slipped away secretly, and she remained to pray and weep. And what was it, O Lord, that she was asking of you in such a flood of tears but that you would not allow me to sail? But you, taking your own secret counsel and noting the real point to her desire, did not grant what she was then asking in order to grant to her the thing that she had always been asking.

The wind blew and filled our sails, and the shore dropped out of sight. Wild with grief, she was there the next morning and filled your ears with complaints and groans which you did disregard, although, at the very same time, you were using my longings as a means and were hastening me on to the fulfillment of all longing. Thus the earthly part of her love to me was justly purged by the scourge of sorrow. Still, like all mothers – though even more than others – she loved to have

¹⁷Ps. 142:5.

me with her, and did not know what joy you were preparing for her through my going away. Not knowing this secret end, she wept and mourned and saw in her agony the inheritance of Eve – seeking in sorrow what she had brought forth in sorrow. And yet, after accusing me of perfidy and cruelty, she still continued her intercessions for me to you. She returned to her own home, and I went on to Rome.

CHAPTER IX

16. And lo, I was received in Rome by the scourge of bodily sickness; and I was very near to falling into hell, burdened with all the many and grievous sins I had committed against you, myself, and others – all over and above that fetter of original sin whereby we all die in Adam. For you had forgiven me none of these things in Christ, neither had he abolished by his cross the enmity¹⁸ that I had incurred from you through my sins. For how could he do so by the crucifixion of a phantom, which was all I supposed him to be? The death of my soul was as real then as the death of his flesh appeared to me unreal. And the life of my soul was as false, because it was as unreal as the death of his flesh was real, though I believed it not.

My fever increased, and I was on the verge of passing away and perishing; for, if I had passed away then, where should I have gone but into the fiery torment which my misdeeds deserved, measured by the truth of your rule? My mother knew nothing of this; yet, far away, she went on praying for me. And you, present everywhere, did hear her where she was and had pity on me where I was, so that I regained my bodily health, although I was still disordered in my sacrilegious heart. For that peril of death did not make me wish to be baptized. I was even better when, as a lad, I entreated baptism of my mother's devotion, as I have already related and confessed.¹⁹ But now I had since increased in dishonor, and I madly scoffed at all the purposes of your medicine which would not have allowed me, though a sinner such as I was, to die a double death. Had my mother's heart been pierced with this wound, it never could have been cured, for I cannot adequately tell of the love she had for me, or how she still travailed for me in the spirit with a far keener anguish than when she bore me in the flesh.

17. I cannot conceive, therefore, how she could have been healed if my death (still in my sins) had pierced her inmost love. Where, then, would have been all her earnest, frequent, and ceaseless prayers to you? Nowhere but with you. But couldst you, O most merciful God, despise the "contrite and humble heart"²⁰ of that pure and prudent widow, who was so constant in her alms, so gracious and attentive to your saints, never missing a visit to church twice a day, morning and evening – and this not for vain gossiping, nor old wives' fables, but in order that she might listen to you in your sermons, and you to her in her prayers? Couldst you, by whose gifts she was so inspired, despise and disregard the tears of such a one without coming to her aid – those tears by which she entreated you, not for gold or silver, and not for any changing or fleeting good, but for the salvation of the soul of her son? By no means, O Lord. It is certain that you were near and were hearing and were carrying out the plan by which you had predetermined it should be done. Far be it from you that you should have deluded her in those visions and the

¹⁸Cf. Eph. 2:15.

¹⁹Bk. I, Ch. XI, 17.

²⁰Cf. Ps. 51:17.

answers she had received from you – some of which I have mentioned, and others not – which she kept in her faithful heart, and, forever beseeching, urged them on you as if they had your own signature. For you, “because your mercy endures forever,”²¹ have so condescended to those whose debts you have pardoned that you likewise do become a debtor by your promises.

CHAPTER X

18. You did restore me then from that illness, and did heal the son of your handmaid in his body, that he might live for you and that you might endow him with a better and more certain health. After this, at Rome, I again joined those deluding and deluded “saints”; and not their “hearers” only, such as the man was in whose house I had fallen sick, but also with those whom they called “the elect.” For it still seemed to me “that it is not we who sin, but some other nature sinned in us.” And it gratified my pride to be beyond blame, and when *I* did anything wrong not to have to confess that *I* had done wrong – “that you might heal my soul because it had sinned against thee”²² – and I loved to excuse my soul and to accuse something else inside me (I knew not what) but which was not I. But, assuredly, it was I, and it was my impiety that had divided me against myself. That sin then was all the more incurable because I did not deem myself a sinner. It was an execrable iniquity, O God Omnipotent, that I would have preferred to have you defeated in me, to my destruction, than to be defeated by you to my salvation. Not yet, therefore, had you set a watch upon my mouth and a door around my lips that my heart might not incline to evil speech, to make excuse for sin with men that work iniquity.²³ And, therefore, I continued still in the company of their “elect.”

19. But now, hopeless of gaining any profit from that false doctrine, I began to hold more loosely and negligently even to those points which I had decided to rest content with, if I could find nothing better. I was now half inclined to believe that those philosophers whom they call “The Academics”²⁴ were wiser than the rest in holding that we ought to doubt everything, and in maintaining that man does not have the power of comprehending any certain truth, for, although I had not yet understood their meaning, I was fully persuaded that they thought just as they are commonly reputed to do. And I did not fail openly to dissuade my host from his confidence which I observed that he had in those fictions of which the works of Mani are full. For all this, I was still on terms of more intimate friendship with these people than with others who were not of their heresy. I did not indeed defend it with my former ardor; but my familiarity with that group – and there were many of them concealed in Rome at that time²⁵ – made me slower to seek any other way. This was particularly easy since I had no hope of finding in your Church the truth from which they had turned me aside, O Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of all things visible and invisible. And it still seemed to me most unseemly to believe that you couldst have the form

²¹A constant theme in The Psalms and elsewhere; cf. Ps. 136.

²²Cf. Ps. 41:4.

²³Cf. Ps 141:3f.

²⁴Followers of the skeptical tradition established in the Platonic Academy by Arcesilaus and Carneades in the third century B.C. They taught the necessity of *εποχη*, suspended judgment, in all questions of truth, and would allow nothing more than the consent of probability. This tradition was known in Augustine's time chiefly through the writings of Cicero; cf. his *Academica*. This kind of skepticism shook Augustine's complacency severely, and he wrote one of his first dialogues, *Contra Academicos*, in an effort to clear up the problem posed thereby.

²⁵The Manicheans were under an official ban in Rome.

of human flesh and be bounded by the bodily shape of our limbs. And when I desired to meditate on my God, I did not know what to think of but a huge extended body – for what did not have bodily extension did not seem to me to exist – and this was the greatest and almost the sole cause of my unavoidable errors.

20. And thus I also believed that evil was a similar kind of substance, and that it had its own hideous and deformed extended body – either in a dense form which they called the earth or in a thin and subtle form as, for example, the substance of the air, which they imagined as some malignant spirit penetrating that earth. And because my piety – such as it was – still compelled me to believe that the good God never created any evil substance, I formed the idea of two masses, one opposed to the other, both infinite but with the evil more contracted and the good more expansive. And from this diseased beginning, the other sacrileges followed after. For when my mind tried to turn back to the Catholic faith, I was cast down, since the Catholic faith was not what I judged it to be. And it seemed to me a greater piety to regard you, my God – to whom I make confession of your mercies – as infinite in all respects save that one: where the extended mass of evil stood opposed to you, where I was compelled to confess that you are finite – than if I should think that you couldst be confined by the form of a human body on every side. And it seemed better to me to believe that no evil had been created by you – for in my ignorance evil appeared not only to be some kind of substance but a corporeal one at that. This was because I had, thus far, no conception of mind, except as a subtle body diffused throughout local spaces. This seemed better than to believe that anything could emanate from you which had the character that I considered evil to be in its nature. And I believed that our Saviour himself also – your Only Begotten – had been brought forth, as it were, for our salvation out of the mass of your bright shining substance. So that I could believe nothing about him except what I was able to harmonize with these vain imaginations. I thought, therefore, that such a nature could not be born of the Virgin Mary without being mingled with the flesh, and I could not see how the divine substance, as I had conceived it, could be mingled thus without being contaminated. I was afraid, therefore, to believe that he had been born in the flesh, lest I should also be compelled to believe that he had been contaminated by the flesh. Now will your spiritual ones smile blandly and lovingly at me if they read these confessions. Yet such was I.

CHAPTER XI

21. Furthermore, the things they censured in your Scriptures I thought impossible to be defended. And yet, occasionally, I desired to confer on various matters with someone well learned in those books, to test what he thought of them. For already the words of one Elpidius, who spoke and disputed face to face against these same Manicheans, had begun to impress me, even when I was at Carthage; because he brought forth things out of the Scriptures that were not easily withstood, to which their answers appeared to me feeble. One of their answers they did not give forth publicly, but only to us in private – when they said that the writings of the New Testament had been tampered with by unknown persons who desired to ingraft the Jewish law into the Christian faith. But they themselves never brought forward any uncorrupted copies. Still thinking in corporeal categories and very much ensnared and to some extent stifled, I was borne down by those conceptions of bodily substance. I panted under this load for the air of your truth, but I was not able to breathe it pure and undefiled.

CHAPTER XII

22. I set about diligently to practice what I came to Rome to do – the teaching of rhetoric. The first task was to bring together in my home a few people to whom and through whom I had begun to be known. And lo, I then began to learn that other offenses were committed in Rome which I had not had to bear in Africa. Just as I had been told, those riotous disruptions by young blackguards were not practiced here. Yet, now, my friends told me, many of the Roman students – breakers of faith, who, for the love of money, set a small value on justice – would conspire together and suddenly transfer to another teacher, to evade paying their master’s fees. My heart hated such people, though not with a “perfect hatred”²⁶; for doubtless I hated them more because I was to suffer from them than on account of their own illicit acts. Still, such people are base indeed; they fornicate against you, for they love the transitory mockeries of temporal things and the filthy gain which begrimes the hand that grabs it; they embrace the fleeting world and scorn you, who abide and invite us to return to you and who pardon the prostituted human soul when it does return to you. Now I hate such crooked and perverse men, although I love them if they will be corrected and come to prefer the learning they obtain to money and, above all, to prefer you to such learning, O God, the truth and fullness of our positive good, and our most pure peace. But then the wish was stronger in me for my own sake not to suffer evil from them than was my desire that they should become good for your sake.

CHAPTER XIII

23. When, therefore, the officials of Milan sent to Rome, to the prefect of the city, to ask that he provide them with a teacher of rhetoric for their city and to send him at the public expense, I applied for the job through those same persons, drunk with the Manichean vanities, to be freed from whom I was going away – though neither they nor I were aware of it at the time. They recommended that Symmachus, who was then prefect, after he had proved me by audition, should appoint me.

And to Milan I came, to Ambrose the bishop, famed through the whole world as one of the best of men, your devoted servant. His eloquent discourse in those times abundantly provided your people with the flour of your wheat, the gladness of your oil, and the sober intoxication of your wine.²⁷ To him I was led by you without my knowledge, that by him I might be led to you in full knowledge. That man of God received me as a father would, and welcomed my coming as a good bishop should. And I began to love him, of course, not at the first as a teacher of the truth, for I had entirely despaired of finding that in your Church – but as a friendly man. And I studiously listened to him – though not with the right motive – as he preached to the people. I was trying to discover whether his eloquence came up to his reputation, and whether it flowed fuller or thinner than others said it did. And thus I hung on his words intently, but, as to his subject matter, I was only a careless and contemptuous listener. I was delighted with the charm of his speech, which was more erudite, though less cheerful and soothing, than Faustus’ style. As

²⁶Ps. 139:22.

²⁷A mixed figure here, put together from Ps. 4:7; 45:7; 104:15; the phrase *sobriam vini ebrietatem* is almost certainly an echo of a stanza of one of Ambrose’s own hymns, *Splendor paternae gloriae*, which Augustine had doubtless learned in Milan: “*Bibamus sobriam ebrietatem spiritus.*” Cf. W.I. Merrill, *Latin Hymns* (Boston, 1904), pp. 4, 5.

for subject matter, however, there could be no comparison, for the latter was wandering around in Manichean deceptions, while the former was teaching salvation most soundly. But “salvation is far from the wicked,”²⁸ such as I was then when I stood before him. Yet I was drawing nearer, gradually and unconsciously.

CHAPTER XIV

24. For, although I took no trouble to learn what he said, but only to hear how he said it – for this empty concern remained foremost with me as long as I despaired of finding a clear path from man to you – yet, along with the eloquence I prized, there also came into my mind the ideas which I ignored; for I could not separate them. And, while I opened my heart to acknowledge how skillfully he spoke, there also came an awareness of how *truly* he spoke – but only gradually. First of all, his ideas had already begun to appear to me defensible; and the Catholic faith, for which I supposed that nothing could be said against the onslaught of the Manicheans, I now realized could be maintained without presumption. This was especially clear after I had heard one or two parts of the Old Testament explained allegorically – whereas before this, when I had interpreted them literally, they had “killed” me spiritually.²⁹ However, when many of these passages in those books were expounded to me thus, I came to blame my own despair for having believed that no reply could be given to those who hated and scoffed at the Law and the Prophets. Yet I did not see that this was reason enough to follow the Catholic way, just because it had learned advocates who could answer objections adequately and without absurdity. Nor could I see that what I had held to heretofore should now be condemned, because both sides were equally defensible. For that way did not appear to me yet vanquished; but neither did it seem yet victorious.

25. But now I earnestly bent my mind to require if there was possible any way to prove the Manicheans guilty of falsehood. If I could have conceived of a spiritual substance, all their strongholds would have collapsed and been cast out of my mind. But I could not. Still, concerning the body of this world, nature as a whole – now that I was able to consider and compare such things more and more – I now decided that the majority of the philosophers held the more probable views. So, in what I thought was the method of the Academics – doubting everything and fluctuating between all the options – I came to the conclusion that the Manicheans were to be abandoned. For I judged, even in that period of doubt, that I could not remain in a sect to which I preferred some of the philosophers. But I refused to commit the cure of my fainting soul to the philosophers, because they were without the saving name of Christ. I resolved, therefore, to become a catechumen in the Catholic Church – which my parents had so much urged upon me – until something certain shone forth by which I might guide my course.

²⁸Ps. 119:155.

²⁹Cf. 2 Cor. 3:6. The discovery of the allegorical method of interpretation opened new horizons for Augustine in Biblical interpretation and he adopted it as a settled principle in his sermons and commentaries; cf. M. Pontet, *L'Exégèse de Saint Augustin prédicateur* (Lyons, 1946).

BOOK SIX – Fruitless Search for “Truth”

Turmoil in the twenties. Monica follows Augustine to Milan and finds him a catechumen in the Catholic Church. Both admire Ambrose but Augustine gets no help from him on his personal problems. Ambition spurs and Alypius and Nebridius join him in a confused quest for the happy life. Augustine becomes engaged, dismisses his first mistress, takes another, and continues his fruitless search for truth.

CHAPTER I

1. O Hope from my youth,¹ where were you to me and where had you gone away?² For had you not created me and differentiated me from the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, making me wiser than they? And yet I was wandering about in a dark and slippery way, seeking you outside myself and thus not finding the God of my heart. I had gone down into the depths of the sea and had lost faith, and had despaired of ever finding the truth.

By this time my mother had come to me, having mustered the courage of piety, following over sea and land, secure in you through all the perils of the journey. For in the dangers of the voyage she comforted the sailors – to whom the inexperienced voyagers, when alarmed, were accustomed to go for comfort – and assured them of a safe arrival because she had been so assured by you in a vision.

She found me in deadly peril through my despair of ever finding the truth. But when I told her that I was now no longer a Manichean, though not yet a Catholic Christian, she did not leap for joy as if this were unexpected; for she had already been reassured about that part of my misery for which she had mourned me as one dead, but also as one who would be raised to you. She had carried me out on the bier of her thoughts, that you might say to the widow’s son, “Young man, I say unto you, arise!”³ and then he would revive and begin to speak, and you would deliver him to his mother. Therefore, her heart was not agitated with any violent exultation when she heard that so great a part of what she daily entreated you to do had actually already been done – that, though I had not yet grasped the truth, I was rescued from falsehood. Instead, she was fully confident that you who had promised the whole would give her the rest, and thus most calmly, and with a fully confident heart, she replied to me that she believed, in Christ, that before she died she would see me a faithful Catholic. And she said no more than this to me. But to you, O Fountain of mercy, she poured out still more frequent prayers and tears that you would hasten your aid and enlighten my darkness, and she hurried all the more zealously to the church and hung upon the words of Ambrose, praying for the fountain of water that springs up into everlasting life.⁴ For she loved that man as an angel of God, since she knew that it was by him that I had been brought thus far to that wavering state of agitation I was now in, through which she was fully persuaded I should pass from sickness to health, even though it would be after a

¹Cf. Ps. 71:5.

²Cf. Ps. 10:1.

³Cf. Luke 7:11-17.

⁴Cf. John 4:14.

still sharper convulsion which physicians call “the crisis.”

CHAPTER II

2. So also my mother brought to certain oratories, erected in the memory of the saints, offerings of porridge, bread, and wine – as had been her custom in Africa – and she was forbidden to do so by the doorkeeper [*ostiarius*]. And as soon as she learned that it was the bishop who had forbidden it, she acquiesced so devoutly and obediently that I myself marveled how readily she could bring herself to turn critic of her own customs, rather than question his prohibition. For winebibbing had not taken possession of her spirit, nor did the love of wine stimulate her to hate the truth, as it does too many, both male and female, who turn as sick at a hymn to sobriety as drunkards do at a draught of water. When she had brought her basket with the festive gifts, which she would taste first herself and give the rest away, she would never allow herself more than one little cup of wine, diluted according to her own temperate palate, which she would taste out of courtesy. And, if there were many oratories of departed saints that ought to be honored in the same way, she still carried around with her the same little cup, to be used everywhere. This became not only very much watered but also quite tepid with carrying it about. She would distribute it by small sips to those around, for she sought to stimulate their devotion, not pleasure.

But as soon as she found that this custom was forbidden by that famous preacher and most pious prelate, even to those who would use it in moderation, lest thereby it might be an occasion of gluttony for those who were already drunken (and also because these funereal memorials were very much like some of the superstitious practices of the pagans), she most willingly abstained from it. And, in place of a basket filled with fruits of the earth, she had learned to bring to the oratories of the martyrs a heart full of purer petitions, and to give all that she could to the poor – so that the Communion of the Lord’s body might be rightly celebrated in those places where, after the example of his Passion, the martyrs had been sacrificed and crowned. But yet it seems to me, O Lord my God – and my heart thinks of it this way in your sight – that my mother would probably not have given way so easily to the rejection of this custom if it had been forbidden by another, whom she did not love as she did Ambrose. For, out of her concern for my salvation, she loved him most dearly; and he loved her truly, on account of her faithful religious life, in which she frequented the church with good works, “fervent in spirit.”⁵ Thus he would, when he saw me, often burst forth into praise of her, congratulating me that I had such a mother – little knowing what a son she had in me, who was still a skeptic in all these matters and who could not conceive that the way of life could be found out.

CHAPTER III

3. Nor had I come yet to groan in my prayers that you would help me. My mind was wholly intent on knowledge and eager for disputation. Ambrose himself I esteemed a happy man, as the world counted happiness, because great personages held him in honor. Only his celibacy appeared to me a painful burden. But what hope he cherished, what struggles he had against the temptations that beset his high station, what solace in adversity, and what savory joys your bread

⁵Rom. 12:11.

possessed for the hidden mouth of his heart when feeding on it, I could neither conjecture nor experience.

Nor did he know my own frustrations, nor the pit of my danger. For I could not request of him what I wanted as I wanted it, because I was debarred from hearing and speaking to him by crowds of busy people to whose infirmities he devoted himself. And when he was not engaged with them – which was never for long at a time – he was either refreshing his body with necessary food or his mind with reading.

Now, as he read, his eyes glanced over the pages and his heart searched out the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent. Often when we came to his room – for no one was forbidden to enter, nor was it his custom that the arrival of visitors should be announced to him – we would see him thus reading to himself. After we had sat for a long time in silence – for who would dare interrupt one so intent? – we would then depart, realizing that he was unwilling to be distracted in the little time he could gain for the recruiting of his mind, free from the clamor of other men’s business. Perhaps he was fearful lest, if the author he was studying should express himself vaguely, some doubtful and attentive hearer would ask him to expound it or discuss some of the more abstruse questions, so that he could not get over as much material as he wished, if his time was occupied with others. And even a truer reason for his reading to himself might have been the care for preserving his voice, which was very easily weakened. Whatever his motive was in so doing, it was doubtless, in such a man, a good one.

4. But actually I could find no opportunity of putting the questions I desired to that holy oracle of yours in his heart, unless it was a matter which could be dealt with briefly. However, those surgings in me required that he should give me his full leisure so that I might pour them out to him; but I never found him so. I heard him, indeed, every Lord’s Day, “rightly dividing the word of truth”⁶ among the people. And I became all the more convinced that all those knots of crafty calumnies which those deceivers of ours had knit together against the divine books could be unraveled.

I soon understood that the statement that man was made after the image of Him that created him⁷ was not understood by your spiritual sons – whom you had regenerated through the Catholic Mother⁸ through grace – as if they believed and imagined that you wert bounded by a human form, although what was the nature of a spiritual substance I had not the faintest or vaguest notion. Still rejoicing, I blushed that for so many years I had bayed, not against the Catholic faith, but against the fables of fleshly imagination. For I had been both impious and rash in this, that I had condemned by pronouncement what I ought to have learned by inquiry. For you, O Most High, and most near, most secret, yet most present, who do not have limbs, some of which are larger and some smaller, but who are wholly everywhere and nowhere in space, and are not shaped by some corporeal form: you did create man after your own image and, see, he dwells in space, both head and feet.

⁶2 Tim. 2:15.

⁷Cf. Gen. 1:26f.

⁸The Church.

CHAPTER IV

5. Since I could not then understand how this image of yours could subsist, I should have knocked on the door and propounded the doubt as to how it was to be believed, and not have insultingly opposed it as if it were actually believed. Therefore, my anxiety as to what I could retain as certain gnawed all the more sharply into my soul, and I felt quite ashamed because during the long time I had been deluded and deceived by the [Manichean] promises of certainties, I had, with childish petulance, prated of so many uncertainties as if they were certain. That they were falsehoods became apparent to me only afterward. However, I was certain that they were uncertain and since I had held them as certainly uncertain I had accused your Catholic Church with a blind contentiousness. I had not yet discovered that it taught the truth, but I now knew that it did not teach what I had so vehemently accused it of. In this respect, at least, I was confounded and converted; and I rejoiced, O my God, that the one Church, the body of your only Son – in which the name of Christ had been sealed upon me as an infant – did not relish these childish trifles and did not maintain in its sound doctrine any tenet that would involve pressing you, the Creator of all, into space, which, however extended and immense, would still be bounded on all sides – like the shape of a human body.

6. I was also glad that the old Scriptures of the Law and the Prophets were laid before me to be read, not now with an eye to what had seemed absurd in them when formerly I censured your holy ones for thinking thus, when they actually did not think in that way. And I listened with delight to Ambrose, in his sermons to the people, often recommending this text most diligently as a rule: “The letter kills, but the spirit gives life,”⁹ while at the same time he drew aside the mystic veil and opened to view the spiritual meaning of what seemed to teach perverse doctrine if it were taken according to the letter. I found nothing in his teachings that offended me, though I could not yet know for certain whether what he taught was true. For all this time I restrained my heart from assenting to anything, fearing to fall headlong into error. Instead, by this hanging in suspense, I was being strangled.¹⁰ For my desire was to be as certain of invisible things as I was that seven and three are ten. I was not so deranged as to believe that *this* could not be comprehended, but my desire was to have other things as clear as this, whether they were physical objects, which were not present to my senses, or spiritual objects, which I did not know how to conceive of except in physical terms.

If I could have believed, I might have been cured, and, with the sight of my soul cleared up, it might in some way have been directed toward your truth, which always abides and fails in nothing. But, just as it happens that a man who has tried a bad physician fears to trust himself with a good one, so it was with the health of my soul, which could not be healed except by believing. But lest it should believe falsehoods, it refused to be cured, resisting your hand, who have prepared for us the medicines of faith and applied them to the maladies of the whole world, and endowed them with such great efficacy.

⁹2 Cor. 3:6.

¹⁰Another reference to the Academic doctrine of *suspendium* (εποχῆ); cf. Bk. V, Ch. X, 19, and also *Enchiridion*, VII, 20.

CHAPTER V

7. Still, from this time forward, I began to prefer the Catholic doctrine. I felt that it was with moderation and honesty that it commanded things to be believed that were not demonstrated – whether they could be demonstrated, but not to everyone, or whether they could not be demonstrated at all. This was far better than the method of the Manicheans, in which our credulity was mocked by an audacious promise of knowledge and then many fabulous and absurd things were forced upon believers *because* they were incapable of demonstration. After that, O Lord, little by little, with a gentle and most merciful hand, drawing and calming my heart, you did persuade me that, if I took into account the multitude of things I had never seen, nor been present when they were enacted – such as many of the events of secular history; and the numerous reports of places and cities which I had not seen; or such as my relations with many friends, or physicians, or with these men and those – that unless we should believe, we should do nothing at all in this life.¹¹ Finally, I was impressed with what an unalterable assurance I believed which two people were my parents, though this was impossible for me to know otherwise than by hearsay. By bringing all this into my consideration, you did persuade me that it was not the ones who believed your books – which with so great authority you have established among nearly all nations – but those who did not believe them who were to be blamed. Moreover, those men were not to be listened to who would say to me, “How do you know that those Scriptures were imparted to mankind by the Spirit of the one and most true God?” For this was the point that was most of all to be believed, since no wranglings of blasphemous questions such as I had read in the books of the self-contradicting philosophers could once snatch from me the belief that you do exist – although *what* you are I did not know – and that to you belongs the governance of human affairs.

8. This much I believed, some times more strongly than other times. But I always believed both that you are and that you have a care for us,¹² although I was ignorant both as to what should be thought about your substance and as to which way led, or led back, to you. Thus, since we are too weak by unaided reason to find out truth, and since, because of this, we need the authority of the Holy Writings, I had now begun to believe that you would not, under any circumstances, have given such eminent authority to those Scriptures throughout all lands if it had not been that through them your will may be believed in and that you might be sought. For, as to those passages in the Scripture which had heretofore appeared incongruous and offensive to me, now that I had heard several of them expounded reasonably, I could see that they were to be resolved by the mysteries of spiritual interpretation. The authority of Scripture seemed to me all the more revered and worthy of devout belief because, although it was visible for all to read, it reserved the full majesty of its secret wisdom within its spiritual profundity. While it stooped to all in the great plainness of its language and simplicity of style, it yet required the closest attention of the most serious-minded – so that it might receive all into its common bosom, and direct some few through its narrow passages toward you, yet many more than would have been the case had there not been in it such a lofty authority, which nevertheless allured multitudes to its bosom by its

¹¹*Nisi crederentur, omnino in hac vita nihil ageremus*, which should be set alongside the more famous *nisi crederitis, non intelligetis* (*Enchiridion*, XIII, 14). This is the basic assumption of Augustine's whole epistemology. See Robert E. Cushman, "Faith and Reason in the Thought of St. Augustine," in *Church History* (XIX, 4, 1950), pp. 271-294.

¹²Cf. Heb. 11:6.

holy humility. I continued to reflect upon these things, and you were with me. I sighed, and you did hear me. I vacillated, and you guided me. I roamed the broad way of the world, and you did not desert me.

CHAPTER VI

9. I was still eagerly aspiring to honors, money, and matrimony; and you did mock me. In pursuit of these ambitions I endured the most bitter hardships, in which you were being the more gracious the less you would allow anything that was not you to grow sweet to me. Look into my heart, O Lord, whose prompting it is that I should recall all this, and confess it to you. Now let my soul cleave to you, now that you have freed her from that fast-sticking glue of death.

How wretched she was! And you did irritate her sore wound so that she might forsake all else and turn to you – who are above all and without whom all things would be nothing at all – so that she should be converted and healed. How wretched I was at that time, and how you did deal with me so as to make me aware of my wretchedness, I recall from the incident of the day on which I was preparing to recite a panegyric on the emperor. In it I was to deliver many a lie, and the lying was to be applauded by those who knew I was lying. My heart was agitated with this sense of guilt and it seethed with the fever of my uneasiness. For, while walking along one of the streets of Milan, I saw a poor beggar – with what I believe was a full belly – joking and hilarious. And I sighed and spoke to the friends around me of the many sorrows that flowed from our madness, because in spite of all our exertions – such as those I was then laboring in, dragging the burden of my unhappiness under the spur of ambition, and, by dragging it, increasing it at the same time – still and all we aimed only to attain that very happiness which this beggar had reached before us; and there was a grim chance that we should never attain it! For what he had obtained through a few coins, got by his begging, I was still scheming for by many a wretched and tortuous turning – namely, the joy of a passing felicity. He had not, indeed, gained true joy, but, at the same time, with all my ambitions, I was seeking one still more untrue. Anyhow, he was now joyous and I was anxious. He was free from care, and I was full of alarms. Now, if anyone should inquire of me whether I should prefer to be merry or anxious, I would reply, “Merry.” Again, if I had been asked whether I should prefer to be as he was or as I myself then was, I would have chosen to be myself; though I was beset with cares and alarms. But would not this have been a false choice? Was the contrast valid? Actually, I ought not to prefer myself to him because I happened to be more learned than he was; for I got no great pleasure from my learning, but sought, rather, to please men by its exhibition – and this not to instruct, but only to please. Thus you did break my bones with the rod of your correction.

10. Let my soul take its leave of those who say: “It makes a difference as to the object from which a man derives his joy. The beggar rejoiced in drunkenness; you longed to rejoice in glory.” What glory, O Lord? The kind that is not in you, for, just as his was no true joy, so was mine no true glory; but it turned my head all the more. He would get over his drunkenness that same night, but I had slept with mine many a night and risen again with it, and was to sleep again and rise again with it, I know not how many times. It does indeed make a difference as to the object from which a man’s joy is gained. I know this is so, and I know that the joy of a faithful hope is incomparably beyond such vanity. Yet, at the same time, this beggar was beyond me, for he truly was the happier man – not only because he was thoroughly steeped in his mirth while I

was torn to pieces with my cares, but because he had gotten his wine by giving good wishes to the passers-by while I was following after the ambition of my pride by lying. Much to this effect I said to my good companions, and I saw how readily they reacted pretty much as I did. Thus I found that it went ill with me; and I fretted, and doubled that very ill. And if any prosperity smiled upon me, I loathed to seize it, for almost before I could grasp it, it would fly away.

CHAPTER VII

11. Those of us who were living like friends together used to bemoan our lot in our common talk; but I discussed it with Alypius and Nebridius more especially and in very familiar terms. Alypius had been born in the same town as I; his parents were of the highest rank there, but he was a bit younger than I. He had studied under me when I first taught in our town, and then afterward at Carthage. He esteemed me highly because I appeared to him good and learned, and I esteemed him for his inborn love of virtue, which was uncommonly marked in a man so young. But in the whirlpool of Carthaginian fashion – where frivolous spectacles are hotly followed – he had been inveigled into the madness of the gladiatorial games. While he was miserably tossed about in this fad, I was teaching rhetoric there in a public school. At that time he was not attending my classes because of some ill feeling that had arisen between me and his father. I then came to discover how fatally he doted upon the circus, and I was deeply grieved, for he seemed likely to cast away his very great promise – if, indeed, he had not already done so. Yet I had no means of advising him, or any way of reclaiming him through restraint, either by the kindness of a friend or by the authority of a teacher. For I imagined that his feelings toward me were the same as his father’s. But this turned out not to be the case. Indeed, disregarding his father’s will in the matter, he began to be friendly and to visit my lecture room, to listen for a while and then depart.

12. But it slipped my memory to try to deal with his problem, to prevent him from ruining his excellent mind in his blind and headstrong passion for frivolous sport. But you, O Lord, who hold the helm of all that you have created,¹³ you had not forgotten him who was one day to be numbered among your sons, a chief minister of your sacrament.¹⁴ And in order that his amendment might plainly be attributed to you, you brought it about through me while I knew nothing of it.

One day, when I was sitting in my accustomed place with my scholars before me, he came in, greeted me, sat himself down, and fixed his attention on the subject I was then discussing. It so happened that I had a passage in hand and, while I was interpreting it, a simile occurred to me, taken from the gladiatorial games. It struck me as relevant to make more pleasant and plain the point I wanted to convey by adding a biting gibe at those whom that madness had enthralled. You know, O our God, that I had no thought at that time of curing Alypius of that plague. But he took it to himself and thought that I would not have said it but for his sake. And what any other man would have taken as an occasion of offense against me, this worthy young man took as a reason for being offended at himself, and for loving me the more fervently. You have said it long

¹³Cf. Plato, *Politicus*, 273 D.

¹⁴Alypius was more than Augustine's close friend; he became bishop of Tagaste and was prominent in local Church affairs in the province of Africa.

ago and written in your Book, “Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.”¹⁵ Now I had not rebuked him; but you who can make use of everything, both witting and unwitting, and in the order which you yourself know to be best – and that order is right – you made my heart and tongue into burning coals with which you might cauterize and cure the hopeful mind thus languishing. Let him be silent in your praise who does not meditate on your mercy, which rises up in my inmost parts to confess to you. For after that speech Alypius rushed up out of that deep pit into which he had willfully plunged and in which he had been blinded by its miserable pleasures. And he roused his mind with a resolve to moderation. When he had done this, all the filth of the gladiatorial pleasures dropped away from him, and he went to them no more. Then he also prevailed upon his reluctant father to let him be my pupil. And, at the son’s urging, the father at last consented. Thus Alypius began again to hear my lectures and became involved with me in the same superstition, loving in the Manicheans that outward display of ascetic discipline which he believed was true and unfeigned. It was, however, a senseless and seducing continence, which ensnared precious souls who were not able as yet to reach the height of true virtue, and who were easily beguiled with the veneer of what was only a shadowy and feigned virtue.

CHAPTER VIII

13. He had gone on to Rome before me to study law – which was the worldly way which his parents were forever urging him to pursue – and there he was carried away again with an incredible passion for the gladiatorial shows. For, although he had been utterly opposed to such spectacles and detested them, one day he met by chance a company of his acquaintances and fellow students returning from dinner; and, with a friendly violence, they drew him, resisting and objecting vehemently, into the amphitheater, on a day of those cruel and murderous shows. He protested to them: “Though you drag my body to that place and set me down there, you cannot force me to give my mind or lend my eyes to these shows. Thus I will be absent while present, and so overcome both you and them.” When they heard this, they dragged him on in, probably interested to see whether he could do as he said. When they got to the arena, and had taken what seats they could get, the whole place became a tumult of inhuman frenzy. But Alypius kept his eyes closed and forbade his mind to roam abroad after such wickedness. Would that he had shut his ears also! For when one of the combatants fell in the fight, a mighty cry from the whole audience stirred him so strongly that, overcome by curiosity and still prepared (as he thought) to despise and rise superior to it no matter what it was, he opened his eyes and was struck with a deeper wound in his soul than the victim whom he desired to see had been in his body. Thus he fell more miserably than the one whose fall had raised that mighty clamor which had entered through his ears and unlocked his eyes to make way for the wounding and beating down of his soul, which was more audacious than truly valiant – also it was weaker because it presumed on its own strength when it ought to have depended on you. For, as soon as he saw the blood, he drank in with it a savage temper, and he did not turn away, but fixed his eyes on the bloody pastime, unwittingly drinking in the madness – delighted with the wicked contest and drunk with blood lust. He was now no longer the same man who came in, but was one of the mob he came into, a true companion of those who had brought him thither. Why need I say more? He looked, he shouted, he was excited, and he took away with him the madness that would stimulate him to come again: not only with those who first enticed him, but even without them; indeed, dragging

¹⁵Prov. 9:8.

in others besides. And yet from all this, with a most powerful and most merciful hand, you did pluck him and taught him not to rest his confidence in himself but in you – but not till long after.

CHAPTER IX

14. But this was all being stored up in his memory as medicine for the future. So also was that other incident when he was still studying under me at Carthage and was meditating at noonday in the market place on what he had to recite – as scholars usually have to do for practice – and you did allow him to be arrested by the police officers in the market place as a thief. I believe, O my God, that you did allow this for no other reason than that this man who was in the future to prove so great should now begin to learn that, in making just decisions, a man should not readily be condemned by other men with reckless credulity.

For as he was walking up and down alone before the judgment seat with his tablets and pen, lo, a young man – another one of the scholars, who was the real thief – secretly brought a hatchet and, without Alypius seeing him, got in as far as the leaden bars which protected the silversmith shop and began to hack away at the lead gratings. But when the noise of the hatchet was heard the silversmiths below began to call to each other in whispers and sent men to arrest whomsoever they should find. The thief heard their voices and ran away, leaving his hatchet because he was afraid to be caught with it. Now Alypius, who had not seen him come in, got a glimpse of him as he went out and noticed that he went off in great haste. Being curious to know the reasons, he went up to the place, where he found the hatchet, and stood wondering and pondering when, behold, those that were sent caught him alone, holding the hatchet which had made the noise which had startled them and brought them there. They seized him and dragged him away, gathering the tenants of the market place about them and boasting that they had caught a notorious thief. Thereupon he was led away to appear before the judge.

15. But this is as far as his lesson was to go. For immediately, O Lord, you did come to the rescue of his innocence, of which you were the sole witness. As he was being led off to prison or punishment, they were met by the master builder who had charge of the public buildings. The captors were especially glad to meet him because he had more than once suspected them of stealing the goods that had been lost out of the market place. Now, at last, they thought they could convince him who it was that had committed the thefts. But the custodian had often met Alypius at the house of a certain senator, whose receptions he used to attend. He recognized him at once and, taking his hand, led him apart from the throng, inquired the cause of all the trouble, and learned what had occurred. He then commanded all the rabble still around – and very uproarious and full of threatenings they were – to come along with him, and they came to the house of the young man who had committed the deed. There, before the door, was a slave boy so young that he was not restrained from telling the whole story by fear of harming his master. And he had followed his master to the market place. Alypius recognized him, and whispered to the architect, who showed the boy the hatchet and asked whose it was. “Ours,” he answered directly. And, being further questioned, he disclosed the whole affair. Thus the guilt was shifted to that household and the rabble, who had begun to triumph over Alypius, were shamed. And so he went away home, this man who was to be the future steward of your Word and judge of so many causes in your Church – a wiser and more experienced man.

CHAPTER X

16. I found him at Rome, and he was bound to me with the strongest possible ties, and he went with me to Milan, in order that he might not be separated from me, and also that he might obtain some law practice, for which he had qualified with a view to pleasing his parents more than himself. He had already sat three times as assessor, showing an integrity that seemed strange to many others, though he thought them strange who could prefer gold to integrity. His character had also been tested, not only by the bait of covetousness, but by the spur of fear. At Rome he was assessor to the secretary of the Italian Treasury. There was at that time a very powerful senator to whose favors many were indebted, and of whom many stood in fear. In his usual highhanded way he demanded to have a favor granted him that was forbidden by the laws. This Alypius resisted. A bribe was promised, but he scorned it with all his heart. Threats were employed, but he trampled them underfoot – so that all men marveled at so rare a spirit, which neither coveted the friendship nor feared the enmity of a man at once so powerful and so widely known for his great resources of helping his friends and doing harm to his enemies. Even the official whose counselor Alypius was – although he was unwilling that the favor should be granted – would not openly refuse the request, but passed the responsibility on to Alypius, alleging that he would not permit him to give his assent. And the truth was that even if the judge had agreed, Alypius would have simply left the court.

There was one matter, however, which appealed to his love of learning, in which he was very nearly led astray. He found out that he might have books copied for himself at praetorian rates [i.e., at public expense]. But his sense of justice prevailed, and he changed his mind for the better, thinking that the rule that forbade him was still more profitable than the privilege that his office would have allowed him. These are little things, but “he that is faithful in a little matter is faithful also in a great one.”¹⁶ Nor can that possibly be void which was uttered by the mouth of your truth: “If, therefore, you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?”¹⁷ Such a man was Alypius, who clung to me at that time and who wavered in his purpose, just as I did, as to what course of life to follow.

17. Nebridius also had come to Milan for no other reason than that he might live with me in a most ardent search after truth and wisdom. He had left his native place near Carthage – and Carthage itself, where he usually lived – leaving behind his fine family estate, his house, and his mother, who would not follow him. Like me, he sighed; like me, he wavered; an ardent seeker after the true life and a most acute analyst of the most abstruse questions. So there were three begging mouths, sighing out their wants one to the other, and waiting upon you, that you might give them their meat in due season.¹⁸ And in all the vexations with which your mercy followed our worldly pursuits, we sought for the reason why we suffered so – and all was darkness! We turned away groaning and exclaiming, “How long shall these things be?” And this we often asked, yet for all our asking we did not relinquish them; for as yet we had not discovered anything certain which, when we gave those others up, we might grasp in their stead.

¹⁶Luke 16:10.

¹⁷Luke 16:11, 12.

¹⁸Cf. Ps. 145:15.

CHAPTER XI

18. And I especially puzzled and wondered when I remembered how long a time had passed since my nineteenth year, in which I had first fallen in love with wisdom and had determined as soon as I could find her to abandon the empty hopes and mad delusions of vain desires. Behold, I was now getting close to thirty, still stuck fast in the same mire, still greedy of enjoying present goods which fly away and distract me; and I was still saying, “Tomorrow I shall discover it; behold, it will become plain, and I shall see it; behold, Faustus will come and explain everything.” Or I would say¹⁹: “O you mighty Academics, is there no certainty that man can grasp for the guidance of his life? No, let us search the more diligently, and let us not despair. See, the things in the Church’s books that appeared so absurd to us before do not appear so now, and may be otherwise and honestly interpreted. I will set my feet upon that step where, as a child, my parents placed me, until the clear truth is discovered. But where and when shall it be sought? Ambrose has no leisure – we have no leisure to read. Where are we to find the books? How or where could I get hold of them? From whom could I borrow them? Let me set a schedule for my days and set apart certain hours for the health of the soul. A great hope has risen up in us, because the Catholic faith does not teach what we thought it did, and vainly accused it of. Its teachers hold it as an abomination to believe that God is limited by the form of a human body. And do I doubt that I should ‘knock’ in order for the rest also to be ‘opened’ unto me? My pupils take up the morning hours; what am I doing with the rest of the day? Why not do this? But, then, when am I to visit my influential friends, whose favors I need? When am I to prepare the orations that I sell to the class? When would I get some recreation and relax my mind from the strain of work?”

19. “Perish everything and let us dismiss these idle triflings. Let me devote myself solely to the search for truth. This life is unhappy, death uncertain. If it comes upon me suddenly, in what state shall I go hence and where shall I learn what here I have neglected? Should I not indeed suffer the punishment of my negligence here? But suppose death cuts off and finishes all care and feeling. This too is a question that calls for inquiry. God forbid that it should be so. It is not without reason, it is not in vain, that the stately authority of the Christian faith has spread over the entire world, and God would never have done such great things for us if the life of the soul perished with the death of the body. Why, therefore, do I delay in abandoning my hopes of this world and giving myself wholly to seek after God and the blessed life?”

“But wait a moment. This life also is pleasant, and it has a sweetness of its own, not at all negligible. We must not abandon it lightly, for it would be shameful to lapse back into it again. See now, it is important to gain some post of honor. And what more should I desire? I have crowds of influential friends, if nothing else; and, if I push my claims, a governorship may be offered me, and a wife with some money, so that she would not be an added expense. This would be the height of my desire. Many men, who are great and worthy of imitation, have combined the pursuit of wisdom with a marriage life.”

20. While I talked about these things, and the winds of opinions veered about and tossed my

¹⁹Here begins a long soliloquy which sums up his turmoil over the past decade and his present plight of confusion and indecision.

heart hither and thither, time was slipping away. I delayed my conversion to the Lord; I postponed from day to day the life in you, but I could not postpone the daily death in myself. I was enamored of a happy life, but I still feared to seek it in its own abode, and so I fled from it while I sought it. I thought I should be miserable if I were deprived of the embraces of a woman, and I never gave a thought to the medicine that your mercy has provided for the healing of that infirmity, for I had never tried it. As for continence, I imagined that it depended on one’s own strength, though I found no such strength in myself, for in my folly I knew not what is written, “None can be continent unless you do grant it.”²⁰ Certainly you would have given it, if I had beseeched your ears with heartfelt groaning, and if I had cast my care upon you with firm faith.

CHAPTER XII

21. Actually, it was Alypius who prevented me from marrying, urging that if I did so it would not be possible for us to live together and to have as much undistracted leisure in the love of wisdom as we had long desired. For he himself was so chaste that it was wonderful, all the more because in his early youth he had entered upon the path of promiscuity, but had not continued in it. Instead, feeling sorrow and disgust at it, he had lived from that time down to the present most continently. I quoted against him the examples of men who had been married and still lovers of wisdom, who had pleased God and had been loyal and affectionate to their friends. I fell far short of them in greatness of soul, and, enthralled with the disease of my carnality and its deadly sweetness, I dragged my chain along, fearing to be loosed of it. Thus I rejected the words of him who counseled me wisely, as if the hand that would have loosed the chain only hurt my wound. Moreover, the serpent spoke to Alypius himself by me, weaving and lying in his path, by my tongue to catch him with pleasant snares in which his honorable and free feet might be entangled.

22. For he wondered that I, for whom he had such a great esteem, should be stuck so fast in the gluepot of pleasure as to maintain, whenever we discussed the subject, that I could not possibly live a celibate life. And when I urged in my defense against his accusing questions that the hasty and stolen delight, which he had tasted and now hardly remembered, and therefore too easily disparaged, was not to be compared with a settled acquaintance with it; and that, if to this stable acquaintance were added the honorable name of marriage, he would not then be astonished at my inability to give it up – when I spoke thus, then he also began to wish to be married, not because he was overcome by the lust for such pleasures, but out of curiosity. For, he said, he longed to know what that could be without which my life, which he thought was so happy, seemed to me to be no life at all, but a punishment. For he who wore no chain was amazed at my slavery, and his amazement awoke the desire for experience, and from that he would have gone on to the experiment itself, and then perhaps he would have fallen into the very slavery that amazed him in me, since he was ready to enter into “a covenant with death,”²¹ for “he that loves danger shall fall into it.”²²

Now, the question of conjugal honor in the ordering of a good married life and the bringing up of

²⁰Cf. Wis. 8:21 (LXX).

²¹Isa. 28:15.

²²Ecclus. 3:26.

children interested us but slightly. What afflicted me most and what had made me already a slave to it was the habit of satisfying an insatiable lust; but Alypius was about to be enslaved by a merely curious wonder. This is the state we were in until you, O Most High, who never forsake our lowliness, did take pity on our misery and did come to our rescue in wonderful and secret ways.

CHAPTER XIII

23. Active efforts were made to get me a wife. I wooed; I was engaged; and my mother took the greatest pains in the matter. For her hope was that, when I was once married, I might be washed clean in health-giving baptism for which I was being daily prepared, as she joyfully saw, taking note that her desires and promises were being fulfilled in my faith. Yet, when, at my request and her own impulse, she called upon you daily with strong, heartfelt cries, that you would, by a vision, disclose unto her a leading about my future marriage, you would not. She did, indeed, see certain vain and fantastic things, such as are conjured up by the strong preoccupation of the human spirit, and these she supposed had some reference to me. And she told me about them, but not with the confidence she usually had when you had shown her anything. For she always said that she could distinguish, by a certain feeling impossible to describe, between your revelations and the dreams of her own soul. Yet the matter was pressed forward, and proposals were made for a girl who was as yet some two years too young to marry.²³ And because she pleased me, I agreed to wait for her.

CHAPTER XIV

24. Many in my band of friends, consulting about and abhorring the turbulent vexations of human life, had often considered and were now almost determined to undertake a peaceful life, away from the turmoil of men. This we thought could be obtained by bringing together what we severally owned and thus making of it a common household, so that in the sincerity of our friendship nothing should belong more to one than to the other; but all were to have one purse and the whole was to belong to each and to all. We thought that this group might consist of ten persons, some of whom were very rich – especially Romanianus, my fellow townsman, an intimate friend from childhood days. He had been brought up to the court on grave business matters and he was the most earnest of us all about the project and his voice was of great weight in commending it because his estate was far more ample than that of the others. We had resolved, also, that each year two of us should be managers and provide all that was needful, while the rest were left undisturbed. But when we began to reflect whether this would be permitted by our wives, which some of us had already and others hoped to have, the whole plan, so excellently framed, collapsed in our hands and was utterly wrecked and cast aside. From this we fell again into sighs and groans, and our steps followed the broad and beaten ways of the world; for many thoughts were in our hearts, but “Your counsel stands fast forever.”²⁴ In your counsel you did mock ours, and did prepare your own plan, for it was your purpose “to give us meat in due season, to open your hand, and to fill our souls with blessing.”²⁵

²³The normal minimum legal age for marriage was twelve! Cf. Justinian, *Institutiones*, I, 10:22.

²⁴Cf. Ps. 33:11.

²⁵Cf. Ps. 145:15, 16.

CHAPTER XV

25. Meanwhile my sins were being multiplied. My mistress was torn from my side as an impediment to my marriage, and my heart which clung to her was torn and wounded till it bled. And she went back to Africa, vowing to you never to know any other man and leaving with me my natural son by her. But I, unhappy as I was, and weaker than a woman, could not bear the delay of the two years that should elapse before I could obtain the bride I sought. And so, since I was not a lover of wedlock so much as a slave of lust, I procured another mistress – not a wife, of course. Thus in bondage to a lasting habit, the disease of my soul might be nursed up and kept in its vigor or even increased until it reached the realm of matrimony. Nor indeed was the wound healed that had been caused by cutting away my former mistress; only it ceased to burn and throb, and began to fester, and was more dangerous because it was less painful.

CHAPTER XVI

26. Yours be the praise; unto you be the glory, O Fountain of mercies. I became more wretched and you did come nearer. Your right hand was ever ready to pluck me out of the mire and to cleanse me, but I did not know it. Nor did anything call me back from a still deeper plunge into carnal pleasure except the fear of death and of your future judgment, which, amid all the waverings of my opinions, never faded from my breast. And I discussed with my friends, Alypius and Nebridius, the nature of good and evil, maintaining that, in my judgment, Epicurus would have carried off the palm if I had not believed what Epicurus would not believe: that after death there remains a life for the soul, and places of recompense. And I demanded of them: “Suppose we are immortal and live in the enjoyment of perpetual bodily pleasure, and that without any fear of losing it – why, then, should we not be happy, or why should we search for anything else?” I did not know that this was in fact the root of my misery: that I was so fallen and blinded that I could not discern the light of virtue and of beauty which must be embraced for its own sake, which the eye of flesh cannot see, and only the inner vision can see. Nor did I, alas, consider the reason why I found delight in discussing these very perplexities, shameful as they were, with my friends. For I could not be happy without friends, even according to the notions of happiness I had then, and no matter how rich the store of my carnal pleasures might be. Yet of a truth I loved my friends for their own sakes, and felt that they in turn loved me for my own sake.

O crooked ways! Woe to the audacious soul which hoped that by forsaking you it would find some better thing! It tossed and turned, upon back and side and belly – but the bed is hard, and you alone give it rest.²⁶ And lo, you are near, and you deliver us from our wretched wanderings and establish us in your way, and you comfort us and say, “Run, I will carry you; yea, I will lead you home and then I will set you free.”²⁷

²⁶A variation on “restless is our heart until it comes to find rest in you,” Bk. I, Ch. I, 1.

²⁷Isa. 46:4.

BOOK SEVEN – Conversion to Neo-Platonism

The conversion to Neoplatonism. Augustine traces his growing disenchantment with the Manichean conceptions of God and evil and the dawning understanding of God's incorruptibility. But his thought is still bound by his materialistic notions of reality. He rejects astrology and turns to the study of Neoplatonism. There follows an analysis of the differences between Platonism and Christianity and a remarkable account of his appropriation of Plotinian wisdom and his experience of a Plotinian ecstasy. From this, he comes finally to the diligent study of the Bible, especially the writings of the apostle Paul. His pilgrimage is drawing toward its goal, as he begins to know Jesus Christ and to be drawn to him in hesitant faith.

CHAPTER I

1. Dead now was that evil and shameful youth of mine, and I was passing into full manhood.¹ As I increased in years, the worse was my vanity. For I could not conceive of any substance but the sort I could see with my own eyes. I no longer thought of you, O God, by the analogy of a human body. Ever since I inclined my ear to philosophy I had avoided this error – and the truth on this point I rejoiced to find in the faith of our spiritual mother, your Catholic Church. Yet I could not see how else to conceive you. And I, a man – and such a man! – sought to conceive you, the sovereign and only true God. In my inmost heart, I believed that you are incorruptible and inviolable and unchangeable, because – though I knew not how or why – I could still see plainly and without doubt that the corruptible is inferior to the incorruptible, the inviolable obviously superior to its opposite, and the unchangeable better than the changeable.

My heart cried out violently against all fantasies,² and with this one clear certainty I endeavored to brush away the swarm of unclean flies that swarmed around the eyes of my mind. But behold they were scarcely scattered before they gathered again, buzzed against my face, and beclouded my vision. I no longer thought of God in the analogy of a human body, yet I was constrained to conceive you to be some kind of body in space, either infused into the world, or infinitely diffused beyond the world – and this was the incorruptible, inviolable, unchangeable substance, which I thought was better than the corruptible, the violable, and the changeable.³ For whatever I conceived to be deprived of the dimensions of space appeared to me to be nothing, absolutely nothing; not even a void, for if a body is taken out of space, or if space is emptied of all its contents (of earth, water, air, or heaven), yet it remains an empty space – a spacious nothing, as it were.

2. Being thus gross-hearted and not clear even to myself, I then held that whatever had neither length nor breadth nor density nor solidity, and did not or could not receive such dimensions, was absolutely nothing. For at that time my mind dwelt only with ideas, which resembled the forms with which my eyes are still familiar, nor could I see that the act of thought, by which I

¹Thirty years old; although the term "youth" (*juventus*) normally included the years twenty to forty.

²*Phantasmata*, mental constructs, which may be internally coherent but correspond to no reality outside the mind.

³Echoes here of Plato's *Timaeus* and Plotinus' *Enneads*, although with no effort to recall the sources or elaborate the ontological theory.

formed those ideas, was itself immaterial, and yet it could not have formed them if it were not itself a measurable entity.

So also I thought about you, O Life of my life, as stretched out through infinite space, interpenetrating the whole mass of the world, reaching out beyond in all directions, to immensity without end; so that the earth should have you, the heaven have you, all things have you, and all of them be limited in you, while you are placed nowhere at all. As the body of the air above the earth does not bar the passage of the light of the sun, so that the light penetrates it, not by bursting nor dividing, but filling it entirely, so I imagined that the body of heaven and air and sea, and even of the earth, was all open to you and, in all its greatest parts as well as the smallest, was ready to receive your presence by a secret inspiration which, from within or without all, orders all things you have created. This was my conjecture, because I was unable to think of anything else; yet it was untrue. For in this way a greater part of the earth would contain a greater part of you; a smaller part, a smaller fraction of you. All things would be full of you in such a sense that there would be more of you in an elephant than in a sparrow, because one is larger than the other and fills a larger space. And this would make the portions of yourself present in the several portions of the world in fragments, great to the great, small to the small. But you are not such a one. But as yet you had not enlightened my darkness.

CHAPTER II

3. But it was not sufficient for me, O Lord, to be able to oppose those deceived deceivers and those dumb orators – dumb because your Word did not sound forth from them – to oppose them with the answer which, in the old Carthaginian days, Nebridius used to propound, shaking all of us who heard it: “What could this imaginary people of darkness, which the Manicheans usually set up as an army opposed to you, have done to you if you had declined the combat?” If they replied that it could have hurt you, they would then have made you violable and corruptible. If, on the other hand, the dark could have done you no harm, then there was no cause for any battle at all; there was less cause for a battle in which a part of you, one of your members, a child of your own substance, should be mixed up with opposing powers, not of your creation; and should be corrupted and deteriorated and changed by them from happiness into misery, so that it could not be delivered and cleansed without your help. This offspring of your substance was supposed to be the human soul to which your Word – free, pure, and entire – could bring help when it was being enslaved, contaminated, and corrupted. But on their hypothesis that Word was itself corruptible because it is one and the same substance as the soul.

And therefore if they admitted that your nature – whatsoever you art – is incorruptible, then all these assertions of theirs are false and should be rejected with horror. But if your substance is corruptible, then this is self-evidently false and should be abhorred at first utterance. This line of argument, then, was enough against those deceivers who ought to be cast forth from a surfeited stomach – for out of this dilemma they could find no way of escape without dreadful sacrilege of mind and tongue, when they think and speak such things about you.

CHAPTER III

4. But as yet, although I said and was firmly persuaded that you our Lord, the true God, who made not only our souls but our bodies as well – and not only our souls and bodies but all creatures and all things – were free from stain and alteration and in no way mutable, yet I could not readily and clearly understand what was the cause of evil. Whatever it was, I realized that the question must be so analyzed as not to constrain me by any answer to believe that the immutable God was mutable, lest I should myself become the thing that I was seeking out. And so I pursued the search with a quiet mind, now in a confident feeling that what had been said by the Manicheans – and I shrank from them with my whole heart – could not be true. I now realized that when they asked what was the origin of evil their answer was dictated by a wicked pride, which would rather affirm that your nature is capable of suffering evil than that their own nature is capable of doing it.

5. And I directed my attention to understand what I now was told, that free will is the cause of our doing evil and that your just judgment is the cause of our having to suffer from its consequences. But I could not see this clearly. So then, trying to draw the eye of my mind up out of that pit, I was plunged back into it again, and trying often was just as often plunged back down. But one thing lifted me up toward your light: it was that I had come to know that I had a will as certainly as I knew that I had life. When, therefore, I willed or was unwilling to do something, I was utterly certain that it was none but myself who willed or was unwilling – and immediately I realized that there was the cause of my sin. I could see that what I did against my will I suffered rather than did; and I did not regard such actions as faults, but rather as punishments in which I might quickly confess that I was not unjustly punished, since I believed you to be most just. Who was it that put this in me, and implanted in me the root of bitterness, in spite of the fact that I was altogether the handiwork of my most sweet God? If the devil is to blame, who made the devil himself? And if he was a good angel who by his own wicked will became the devil, how did there happen to be in him that wicked will by which he became a devil, since a good Creator made him wholly a good angel? By these reflections was I again cast down and stultified. Yet I was not plunged into that hell of error – where no man confesses to you – where I thought that you did suffer evil, rather than that men do it.

CHAPTER IV

6. For in my struggle to solve the rest of my difficulties, I now assumed henceforth as settled truth that the incorruptible must be superior to the corruptible, and I did acknowledge that you, whatever you are, are incorruptible. For there never yet was, nor will be, a soul able to conceive of anything better than you, who are the highest and best good.⁴ And since most truly and certainly the incorruptible is to be placed above the corruptible – as I now admit it – it followed that I could rise in my thoughts to something better than my God, if you wert not incorruptible. When, therefore, I saw that the incorruptible was to be preferred to the corruptible, I saw then where I ought to seek you, and where I should look for the source of evil: that is, the corruption by which your substance can in no way be profaned. For it is obvious that corruption in no way injures our God, by no inclination, by no necessity, by no unforeseen chance – because he is our

⁴Cf. the famous "definition" of God in Anselm's ontological argument: "that being than whom no greater can be conceived." Cf. *Proslogium*, II-V.

God, and what he wills is good, and he himself is that good. But to be corrupted is not good. Nor are you compelled to do anything against your will, since your will is not greater than your power. But it would have to be greater if you yourself were greater than yourself – for the will and power of God are God himself. And what can take you by surprise, since you know all, and there is no sort of nature but you know it? And what more should we say about why that substance which God is cannot be corrupted; because if this were so it could not be God?

CHAPTER V

7. And I kept seeking for an answer to the question, Whence is evil? And I sought it in an evil way, and I did not see the evil in my very search. I marshaled before the sight of my spirit all creation: all that we see of earth and sea and air and stars and trees and animals; and all that we do not see, the firmament of the sky above and all the angels and all spiritual things, for my imagination arranged these also, as if they were bodies, in this place or that. And I pictured to myself your creation as one vast mass, composed of various kinds of bodies – some of which were actually bodies, some of those which I imagined spirits were like. I pictured this mass as vast – of course not in its full dimensions, for these I could not know – but as large as I could possibly think, still only finite on every side. But you, O Lord, I imagined as environing the mass on every side and penetrating it, still infinite in every direction – as if there were a sea everywhere, and everywhere through measureless space nothing but an infinite sea; and it contained within itself some sort of sponge, huge but still finite, so that the sponge would in all its parts be filled from the immeasurable sea.⁵

Thus I conceived your creation itself to be finite, and filled by you, the infinite. And I said, “Behold God, and behold what God has created!” God is good, yea, most mightily and incomparably better than all his works. But yet he who is good has created them good; behold how he encircles and fills them. Where, then, is evil, and whence does it come and how has it crept in? What is its root and what its seed? Has it no being at all? Why, then, do we fear and shun what has no being? Or if we fear it needlessly, then surely that fear is evil by which the heart is unnecessarily stabbed and tortured – and indeed a greater evil since we have nothing real to fear, and yet do fear. Therefore, either that is evil which we fear, or the act of fearing is in itself evil. But, then, whence does it come, since God who is good has made all these things good? Indeed, he is the greatest and chiefest Good, and has created these lesser goods; but both Creator and created are all good. Whence, then, is evil? Or, again, was there some evil matter out of which he made and formed and ordered it, but left something in his creation that he did not convert into good? But why should this be? Was he powerless to change the whole lump so that no evil would remain in it, if he is the Omnipotent? Finally, why would he make anything at all out of such stuff? Why did he not, rather, annihilate it by his same almighty power? Could evil exist contrary to his will? And if it were from eternity, why did he permit it to be nonexistent for unmeasured intervals of time in the past, and why, then, was he pleased to make something out of it after so long a time? Or, if he wished now all of a sudden to create something, would not an almighty being have chosen to annihilate this evil matter and live by himself – the perfect, true, sovereign, and infinite Good? Or, if it were not good that he who was good should not also be the framer and creator of what was good, then why was that evil matter not removed and brought

⁵This simile is Augustine's apparently original improvement on Plotinus' similar figure of the net in the sea; *Enneads*, IV, 3:9.

to nothing, so that he might form good matter, out of which he might then create all things? For he would not be omnipotent if he were not able to create something good without being assisted by that matter which had not been created by himself.

Such perplexities I revolved in my wretched breast, overwhelmed with gnawing cares lest I die before I discovered the truth. And still the faith of your Christ, our Lord and Saviour, as it was taught me by the Catholic Church, stuck fast in my heart. As yet it was unformed on many points and diverged from the rule of right doctrine, but my mind did not utterly lose it, and every day drank in more and more of it.

CHAPTER VI

8. By now I had also repudiated the lying divinations and impious absurdities of the astrologers. Let your mercies, out of the depth of my soul, confess this to you also, O my God. For you, you only (for who else is it who calls us back from the death of all errors except the Life which does not know how to die and the Wisdom which gives light to minds that need it, although it itself has no need of light – by which the whole universe is governed, even to the fluttering leaves of the trees?) – you alone provided also for my obstinacy with which I struggled against Vindicianus, a sagacious old man, and Nebridius, that remarkably talented young man. The former declared vehemently and the latter frequently – though with some reservation – that no art existed by which we foresee future things. But men’s surmises have oftentimes the help of chance, and out of many things which they foretold some came to pass unawares to the predictors, who lighted on the truth by making so many guesses.

And you also provided a friend for me, who was not a negligent consulter of the astrologers even though he was not thoroughly skilled in the art either – as I said, one who consulted them out of curiosity. He knew a good deal about it, which, he said, he had heard from his father, and he never realized how far his ideas would help to overthrow my estimation of that art. His name was Firminus and he had received a liberal education and was a cultivated rhetorician. It so happened that he consulted me, as one very dear to him, as to what I thought about some affairs of his in which his worldly hopes had risen, viewed in the light of his so-called horoscope. Although I had now begun to learn in this matter toward Nebridius’ opinion, I did not quite decline to speculate about the matter or to tell him what thoughts still came into my irresolute mind, although I did add that I was almost persuaded now that these were but empty and ridiculous follies. He then told me that his father had been very much interested in such books, and that he had a friend who was as much interested in them as he was himself. They, in combined study and consultation, fanned the flame of their affection for this folly, going so far as to observe the moment when the dumb animals which belonged to their household gave birth to young, and then observed the position of the heavens with regard to them, so as to gather fresh evidence for this so-called art.

Moreover, he reported that his father had told him that, at the same time his mother was about to give birth to him [Firminus], a female slave of a friend of his father’s was also pregnant. This could not be hidden from her master, who kept records with the most diligent exactness of the birth dates even of his dogs. And so it happened to pass that – under the most careful observations, one for his wife and the other for his servant, with exact calculations of the days, hours, and minutes – both women were delivered at the same moment, so that both were compelled to cast the selfsame horoscope, down to the minute: the one for his son, the other for

his young slave. For as soon as the women began to be in labor, they each sent word to the other as to what was happening in their respective houses and had messengers ready to dispatch to one another as soon as they had information of the actual birth – and each, of course, knew instantly the exact time. It turned out, Firminus said, that the messengers from the respective houses met one another at a point equidistant from either house, so that neither of them could discern any difference either in the position of the stars or any other of the most minute points. And yet Firminus, born in a high estate in his parents' house, ran his course through the prosperous paths of this world, was increased in wealth, and elevated to honors. At the same time, the slave, the yoke of his condition being still unrelaxed, continued to serve his masters as Firminus, who knew him, was able to report.

9. Upon hearing and believing these things related by so reliable a person all my resistance melted away. First, I endeavored to reclaim Firminus himself from his superstition by telling him that after inspecting his horoscope, I ought, if I could foretell truly, to have seen in it parents eminent among their neighbors, a noble family in its own city, a good birth, a proper education, and liberal learning. But if that servant had consulted me with the same horoscope, since he had the same one, I ought again to tell him likewise truly that I saw in it the lowliness of his origin, the abjectness of his condition, and everything else different and contrary to the former prediction. If, then, by casting up the same horoscopes I should, in order to speak the truth, make contrary analyses, or else speak falsely if I made identical readings, then surely it followed that whatever was truly foretold by the analysis of the horoscopes was not by art, but by chance. And whatever was said falsely was not from incompetence in the art, but from the error of chance.

10. An opening being thus made in my darkness, I began to consider other implications involved here. Suppose that one of the fools – who followed such an occupation and whom I longed to assail, and to reduce to confusion – should urge against me that Firminus had given me false information, or that his father had informed him falsely. I then turned my thoughts to those that are born twins, who generally come out of the womb so near the one to the other that the short interval between them – whatever importance they may ascribe to it in the nature of things – cannot be noted by human observation or expressed in those tables which the astrologer uses to examine when he undertakes to pronounce the truth. But such pronouncements cannot be true. For looking into the same horoscopes, he must have foretold the same future for Esau and Jacob,⁶ whereas the same future did not turn out for them. He must therefore speak falsely. If he is to speak truly, then he must read contrary predictions into the same horoscopes. But this would mean that it was not by art, but by chance, that he would speak truly.

For you, O Lord, most righteous ruler of the universe, do work by a secret impulse – whether those who inquire or those inquired of know it or not – so that the inquirer may hear what, according to the secret merit of his soul, he ought to hear from the deeps of your righteous judgment. Therefore let no man say to you, “What is this?” or, “Why is that?” Let him not speak thus, for he is only a man.

⁶Gen. 25:21 to 33:20.

CHAPTER VII

11. By now, O my Helper, you had freed me from those fetters. But still I inquired, “Whence is evil?” – and found no answer. But you did not allow me to be carried away from the faith by these fluctuations of thought. I still believed both that you do exist and that your substance is immutable, and that you do care for and will judge all men, and that in Christ, your Son our Lord, and the Holy Scriptures, which the authority of your Catholic Church pressed on me, you have planned the way of man’s salvation to that life which is to come after this death. With these convictions safe and immovably settled in my mind, I eagerly inquired, “Whence is evil?” What torments did my travailing heart then endure! What sighs, O my God! Yet even then your ears were open and I knew it not, and when in stillness I sought earnestly, those silent contritions of my soul were loud cries to your mercy. No man knew, but you knew what I endured. How little of it could I express in words to the ears of my dearest friends! How could the whole tumult of my soul, for which neither time nor speech was sufficient, come to them? Yet the whole of it went into your ears, all of which I bellowed out in the anguish of my heart. My desire was before you, and the light of my eyes was not with me; for it was within and I was without. Nor was that light in any place; but I still kept thinking only of things that are contained in a place, and could find among them no place to rest in. They did not receive me in such a way that I could say, “It is sufficient; it is well.” Nor did they allow me to turn back to where it might be well enough with me. For I was higher than they, though lower than you. You are my true joy if I depend upon you, and you had subjected to me what you did create lower than I. And this was the true mean and middle way of salvation for me, to continue in your image and by serving you have dominion over the body. But when I lifted myself proudly against you, and “ran against the Lord, even against his neck, with the thick bosses of my buckler,”⁷ even the lower things were placed above me and pressed down on me, so that there was no respite or breathing space. They thrust on my sight on every side, in crowds and masses, and when I tried to think, the images of bodies obtruded themselves into my way back to you, as if they would say to me, “Where are you going, unworthy and unclean one?” And all these had sprung out of my wound, for you had humbled the haughty as one that is wounded. By my swelling pride I was separated from you, and my bloated cheeks blinded my eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

12. But you, O Lord, are forever the same, yet you are not forever angry with us, for you have compassion on our dust and ashes.⁸ It was pleasing in your sight to reform my deformity, and by inward stings you did disturb me so that I was impatient until you wert made clear to my inward sight. By the secret hand of your healing my swelling was lessened, the disordered and darkened eyesight of my mind was from day to day made whole by the stinging salve of wholesome grief.

⁷Cf. Job 15:26 (Old Latin version).

⁸Cf. Ps. 103:9-14.

CHAPTER IX

13. And first of all, willing to show me how you do “resist the proud, but give grace to the humble,”⁹ and how mercifully you have made known to men the way of humility in that your Word “was made flesh and dwelt among men,”¹⁰ you did procure for me, through one inflated with the most monstrous pride, certain books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin.¹¹ And therein I found, not indeed in the same words, but to the selfsame effect, enforced by many and various reasons that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.” That which was made by him is “life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shined in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” Furthermore, I read that the soul of man, though it “bears witness to the light,” yet itself “is not the light; but the Word of God, being God, is that true light that lights every man who comes into the world.” And further, that “he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.”¹² But that “he came unto his own, and his own received him not. And as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name”¹³ – this I did not find there.

14. Similarly, I read there that God the Word was born “not of flesh nor of blood, nor of the will of man, nor the will of the flesh, but of God.”¹⁴ But, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”¹⁵ – I found this nowhere there. And I discovered in those books, expressed in many and various ways, that “the Son was in the form of God and thought it not robbery to be equal in God,”¹⁶ for he was naturally of the same substance. But, that “he emptied himself and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also has highly exalted him” from the dead, “and given him a name above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”¹⁷ – this those books have not. I read further in them that before all times and beyond all times, your only Son remains unchangeably coeternal with you, and that of

⁹James 4:6.

¹⁰Cf. John 1:14.

¹¹It is not altogether clear as to which "books" and which "Platonists" are here referred to. The succeeding analysis of "Platonism" does not resemble any single known text closely enough to allow for identification. The most reasonable conjecture, as most authorities agree, is that the "books" here mentioned were the *Enneads* of Plotinus, which Marius Victorinus (q.v. *infra*, Bk. VIII, Ch. II, 3-5) had translated into Latin several years before; cf. M.P. Garvey, *St. Augustine: Christian or Neo-Platonist* (Milwaukee, 1939). There is also a fair probability that Augustine had acquired some knowledge of the *Didaskalikos* of Albinus; cf. R.E. Witt, *Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism* (Cambridge, 1937).

¹²Cf. this mixed quotation of John 1:1-10 with the Fifth *Ennead* and note Augustine's identification of *Logos*, in the Fourth Gospel, with *Nous* in Plotinus.

¹³John 1:11, 12

¹⁴John 1:13.

¹⁵John 1:14.

¹⁶Phil. 2:6.

¹⁷Phil. 2:7-11.

his fullness all souls receive that they may be blessed, and that by participation in that wisdom which abides in them, they are renewed that they may be wise. But, that “in due time, Christ died for the ungodly” and that you “spared not your only Son, but delivered him up for us all”¹⁸ – this is not there. “For you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes”¹⁹; that they “that labor and are heavy laden” might “come unto him and he might refresh them” because he is “meek and lowly in heart.”²⁰ “The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way; beholding our lowliness and our trouble and forgiving all our sins.”²¹ But those who strut in the high boots of what they deem to be superior knowledge will not hear Him who says, “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls.”²² Thus, though they know God, yet they do not glorify him as God, nor are they thankful. Therefore, they “become vain in their imaginations; their foolish heart is darkened, and professing themselves to be wise they become fools.”²³

15. And, moreover, I also read there how “they changed the glory of your incorruptible nature into idols and various images – into an image made like corruptible man and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things”²⁴: namely, into that Egyptian food²⁵ for which Esau lost his birthright; so that your first-born people worshiped the head of a four-footed beast instead of you, turning back in their hearts toward Egypt and prostrating your image (their own soul) before the image of an ox that eats grass. These things I found there, but I fed not on them. For it pleased you, O Lord, to take away the reproach of his minority from Jacob, that the elder should serve the younger and you might call the Gentiles, and I had sought strenuously after that gold which you did allow your people to take from Egypt, since wherever it was it was yours.²⁶ And you said unto the Athenians by the mouth of your apostle that in you “we live and move and have our being,” as one of their own poets had said.²⁷ And truly these books came from there. But I did not set my mind on the idols of Egypt which they fashioned of gold, “changing the truth of God into a lie and worshiping and serving the creature more than the Creator.”²⁸

CHAPTER X

16. And being admonished by these books to return into myself, I entered into my inward soul, guided by you. This I could do because you were my helper. And I entered, and with the eye of my soul – such as it was – saw above the same eye of my soul and above my mind the

¹⁸Rom. 5:6; 8:32.

¹⁹Luke 10:21.

²⁰Cf. Matt. 11:28, 29.

²¹Cf. Ps. 25:9, 18.

²²Matt. 11:29.

²³Rom. 1:21, 22.

²⁴Rom. 1:23.

²⁵An echo of Porphyry's *De abstinentia ab esu animalium*.

²⁶The allegorical interpretation of the Israelites' despoiling the Egyptians (Ex. 12:35, 36) made it refer to the liberty of Christian thinkers in appropriating whatever was good and true from the pagan philosophers of the Greco-Roman world. This was a favorite theme of Clement of Alexandria and Origen and was quite explicitly developed in Origen's *Epistle to Gregory Thaumaturgus* (*ANF*, IX, pp. 295, 296); cf. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 41-42.

²⁷Cf. Acts 17:28.

²⁸Cf. Rom. 1:25.

Immutable Light. It was not the common light, which all flesh can see; nor was it simply a greater one of the same sort, as if the light of day were to grow brighter and brighter, and flood all space. It was not like that light, but different, yea, very different from all earthly light whatever. Nor was it above my mind in the same way as oil is above water, or heaven above earth, but it was higher, because it made me, and I was below it, because I was made by it. He who knows the Truth knows that Light, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it, O Eternal Truth and True Love and Beloved Eternity! You are my God, to whom I sigh both night and day. When I first knew you, you did lift me up, that I might see that there was something to be seen, though I was not yet fit to see it. And you did beat back the weakness of my sight, shining forth upon me your dazzling beams of light, and I trembled with love and fear. I realized that I was far away from you in the land of unlikeness, as if I heard your voice from on high: “I am the food of strong men; grow and you shall feed on me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh into yourself, but you shall be changed into my likeness.” And I understood that you chasten man for his iniquity, and makes my soul to be eaten away as though by a spider.²⁹ And I said, “Is Truth, therefore, nothing, because it is not diffused through space – neither finite nor infinite?” And you did cry to me from afar, “I am that I am.”³⁰ And I heard this, as things are heard in the heart, and there was no room for doubt. I should have more readily doubted that I am alive than that the Truth exists – the Truth which is “clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”³¹

CHAPTER XI

17. And I viewed all the other things that are beneath you, and I realized that they are neither wholly real nor wholly unreal. They are real in so far as they come from you; but they are unreal in so far as they are not what you art. For that is truly real which remains immutable. It is good, then, for me to hold fast to God, for if I do not remain in him, neither shall I abide in myself; but he, remaining in himself, renews all things. And you are the Lord my God, since you stand in no need of my goodness.

CHAPTER XII

18. And it was made clear to me that all things are good even if they are corrupted. They could not be corrupted if they were supremely good; but unless they were good they could not be corrupted. If they were supremely good, they would be incorruptible; if they were not good at all, there would be nothing in them to be corrupted. For corruption harms; but unless it could diminish goodness, it could not harm. Either, then, corruption does not harm – which cannot be – or, as is certain, all that is corrupted is thereby deprived of good. But if they are deprived of all good, they will cease to be. For if they are at all and cannot be at all corrupted, they will become better, because they will remain incorruptible. Now what can be more monstrous than to maintain that by losing all good they have become better? If, then, they are deprived of all good, they will cease to exist. So long as they are, therefore, they are good. Therefore, whatsoever is, is good. Evil, then, the origin of which I had been seeking, has no substance at all; for if it were a

²⁹Cf. Ps. 39:11.

³⁰Some MSS. add "*immo vero*" ("yea, verily"), but not the best ones; cf. De Labriolle, *op. cit.*, I, p. 162.

³¹Rom. 1:20.

substance, it would be good. For either it would be an incorruptible substance and so a supreme good, or a corruptible substance, which could not be corrupted unless it were good. I understood, therefore, and it was made clear to me that you made all things good, nor is there any substance at all not made by you. And because all that you made is not equal, each by itself is good, and the sum of all of them is very good, for our God made all things very good.³²

CHAPTER XIII

19. To you there is no such thing as evil, and even in your whole creation taken as a whole, there is not; because there is nothing from beyond it that can burst in and destroy the order which you have appointed for it. But in the parts of creation, some things, because they do not harmonize with others, are considered evil. Yet those same things harmonize with others and are good, and in themselves are good. And all these things which do not harmonize with each other still harmonize with the inferior part of creation which we call the earth, having its own cloudy and windy sky of like nature with itself. Far be it from me, then, to say, “These things should not be.” For if I could see nothing but these, I should indeed desire something better – but still I ought to praise you, if only for these created things. For that you are to be praised is shown from the fact that “earth, dragons, and all deeps; fire, and hail, snow and vapors, stormy winds fulfilling your word; mountains, and all hills, fruitful trees, and all cedars; beasts and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl; things of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth; both young men and maidens, old men and children,”³³ praise your name! But seeing also that in heaven all your angels praise you, O God, praise you in the heights, “and all your hosts, sun and moon, all stars and light, the heavens of heavens, and the waters that are above the heavens,”³⁴ praise your name – seeing this, I say, I no longer desire a better world, because my thought ranged over all, and with a sounder judgment I reflected that the things above were better than those below, yet that all creation together was better than the higher things alone.

CHAPTER XIV

20. There is no health in those who find fault with any part of your creation; as there was no health in me when I found fault with so many of your works. And, because my soul dared not be displeased with my God, it would not allow that the things which displeased me were from you. Hence it had wandered into the notion of two substances, and could find no rest, but talked foolishly, And turning from that error, it had then made for itself a god extended through infinite space; and it thought this was you and set it up in its heart, and it became once more the temple of its own idol, an abomination to you. But you did soothe my brain, though I was unaware of it, and closed my eyes lest they should behold vanity; and thus I ceased from preoccupation with self by a little and my madness was lulled to sleep; and I awoke in you, and beheld you as the Infinite, but not in the way I had thought – and this vision was not derived from the flesh.

³²A *locus classicus* of the doctrine of the privative character of evil and the positive character of the good. This is a fundamental premise in Augustine's metaphysics: it reappears in Bks. XII-XIII, in the *Enchiridion*, and elsewhere (see note, *infra*, p. 343). This doctrine of the goodness of all creation is taken up into the scholastic metaphysics; cf. *Confessions*, Bks. XII-XIII, and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentes*, II: 45.

³³Ps. 148:7-12.

³⁴Ps. 148:1-5.

CHAPTER XV

21. And I looked around at other things, and I saw that it was to you that all of them owed their being, and that they were all finite in you; yet they are in you not as in a space, but because you hold all things in the hand of your truth, and because all things are true in so far as they are; and because falsehood is nothing except the existence in thought of what does not exist in fact. And I saw that all things harmonize, not only in their places but also in their seasons. And I saw that you, who alone are eternal, did not *begin* to work after unnumbered periods of time – because all ages, both those which are past and those which shall pass, neither go nor come except through your working and abiding.

CHAPTER XVI

22. And I saw and found it no marvel that bread which is distasteful to an unhealthy palate is pleasant to a healthy one; or that the light, which is painful to sore eyes, is a delight to sound ones. Your righteousness displeases the wicked, and they find even more fault with the viper and the little worm, which you have created good, fitting in as they do with the inferior parts of creation. The wicked themselves also fit in here, and proportionately more so as they become unlike you – but they harmonize with the higher creation proportionately as they become like you. And I asked what wickedness was, and I found that it was no substance, but a perversion of the will bent aside from you, O God, the supreme substance, toward these lower things, casting away its inmost treasure and becoming bloated with external good.³⁵

CHAPTER XVII

23. And I marveled that I now loved you, and no fantasm in your stead, and yet I was not stable enough to enjoy my God steadily. Instead I was transported to you by your beauty, and then presently torn away from you by my own weight, sinking with grief into these lower things. This weight was carnal habit. But your memory dwelt with me, and I never doubted in the least that there was One for me to cleave to; but I was not yet ready to cleave to you firmly. For the body which is corrupted presses down the soul, and the earthly dwelling weighs down the mind, which muses upon many things.³⁶ My greatest certainty was that “the invisible things of yours from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even your eternal power and Godhead.”³⁷ For when I inquired how it was that I could appreciate the beauty of bodies, both celestial and terrestrial; and what it was that supported me in making correct judgments about things mutable; and when I concluded, “This ought to be thus; this ought not” – *then* when I inquired how it was that I could make such judgments (since I did, in fact, make them), I realized that I had found the unchangeable and true eternity of truth above my changeable mind.

And thus by degrees I was led upward from bodies to the soul which perceives them by means of the bodily senses, and from there on to the soul’s inward faculty, to which the bodily senses

³⁵“The evil which overtakes us has its source in self-will, in the entry into the sphere of process and in the primal assertion of the desire for self-ownership” (Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 1:1).

³⁶“We have gone weighed down from beneath; the vision is frustrated” (*Enneads*, VI, 9:4).

³⁷Rom. 1:20.

report outward things – and this belongs even to the capacities of the beasts – and thence on up to the reasoning power, to whose judgment is referred the experience received from the bodily sense. And when this power of reason within me also found that it was changeable, it raised itself up to its own intellectual principle,³⁸ and withdrew its thoughts from experience, abstracting itself from the contradictory throng of fantasms in order to seek for that light in which it was bathed. Then, without any doubting, it cried out that the unchangeable was better than the changeable. From this it follows that the mind somehow knew the unchangeable, for, unless it had known it in some fashion, it could have had no sure ground for preferring it to the changeable. And thus with the flash of a trembling glance, it arrived at *that which is*.³⁹ And I saw your invisibility [*invisibilia tua*] understood by means of the things that are made. But I was not able to sustain my gaze. My weakness was dashed back, and I lapsed again into my accustomed ways, carrying along with me nothing but a loving memory of my vision, and an appetite for what I had, as it were, smelled the odor of, but was not yet able to eat.

CHAPTER XVIII

24. I sought, therefore, some way to acquire the strength sufficient to enjoy you; but I did not find it until I embraced that “Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus,”⁴⁰ “who is over all, God blessed forever,”⁴¹ who came calling and saying, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,”⁴² and mingling with our fleshly humanity the heavenly food I was unable to receive. For “the Word was made flesh” in order that your wisdom, by which you did create all things, might become milk for our infancy. And, as yet, I was not humble enough to hold the humble Jesus; nor did I understand what lesson his weakness was meant to teach us. For your Word, the eternal Truth, far exalted above even the higher parts of your creation, lifts his subjects up toward himself. But in this lower world, he built for himself a humble habitation of our own clay, so that he might pull down from themselves and win over to himself those whom he is to bring subject to him; lowering their pride and heightening their love, to the end that they might go on no farther in self-confidence – but rather should become weak, seeing at their feet the Deity made weak by sharing our coats of skin – so that they might cast themselves, exhausted, upon him and be uplifted by his rising.

CHAPTER XIX

25. But I thought otherwise. I saw in our Lord Christ only a man of eminent wisdom to whom no other man could be compared – especially because he was miraculously born of a virgin – sent to

³⁸The Plotinian *Nous*.

³⁹This is an astonishingly candid and plain account of a Plotinian ecstasy, the pilgrimage of the soul from its absorption in things to its rapturous but momentary vision of the One; cf. especially the Sixth *Ennead*, 9:3-11, for very close parallels in thought and echoes of language. This is one of two ecstatic visions reported in the *Confessions*; the other is, of course, the last great moment with his mother at Ostia (Bk. IX, Ch. X, 23-25). One comes before the “conversion” in the Milanese garden (Bk. VIII, Ch. XII, 28-29); the other, after. They ought to be compared with particular interest in their *similarities* as well as their significant differences. Cf. also K.E. Kirk, *The Vision of God* (London, 1932), pp. 319-346.

⁴⁰1 Tim. 2:5.

⁴¹Rom. 9:5.

⁴²John 14:6.

set us an example of despising worldly things for the attainment of immortality, and thus exhibiting his divine care for us. Because of this, I held that he had merited his great authority as leader. But concerning the mystery contained in “the Word was made flesh,” I could not even form a notion. From what I learned from what has been handed down to us in the books about him – that he ate, drank, slept, walked, rejoiced in spirit, was sad, and discoursed with his fellows – I realized that his flesh alone was not bound unto your Word, but also that there was a bond with the human soul and body. Everyone knows this who knows the unchangeableness of your Word, and this I knew by now, as far as I was able, and I had no doubts at all about it. For at one time to move the limbs by an act of will, at another time not; at one time to feel some emotion, at another time not; at one time to speak intelligibly through verbal signs, at another, not – these are all properties of a soul and mind subject to change. And if these things were falsely written about him, all the rest would risk the imputation of falsehood, and there would remain in those books no saving faith for the human race.

Therefore, because they were written truthfully, I acknowledged a perfect man to be in Christ – not the body of a man only, nor, in the body, an animal soul without a rational one as well, but a true man. And this man I held to be superior to all others, not only because he was a form of the Truth, but also because of the great excellence and perfection of his human nature, due to his participation in wisdom.

Alypius, on the other hand, supposed the Catholics to believe that God was so clothed with flesh that besides God and the flesh there was no soul in Christ, and he did not think that a human mind was ascribed to him.⁴³ And because he was fully persuaded that the actions recorded of him could not have been performed except by a living rational creature, he moved the more slowly toward Christian faith.⁴⁴ But when he later learned that this was the error of the Apollinarian heretics, he rejoiced in the Catholic faith and accepted it. For myself, I must confess that it was even later that I learned how in the sentence, “The Word was made flesh,” the Catholic truth can be distinguished from the falsehood of Photinus. For the refutation of heretics⁴⁵ makes the tenets of your Church and sound doctrine to stand out boldly. “For there must also be heresies [factions] that those who are approved may be made manifest among the weak.”⁴⁶

CHAPTER XX

26. By having thus read the books of the Platonists, and having been taught by them to search for the incorporeal Truth, I saw how your invisible things are understood through the things that are made. And, even when I was thrown back, I still sensed what it was that the dullness of my soul would not allow me to contemplate. I was assured that you were, and were infinite, though not diffused in finite space or infinity; that you truly are, who are ever the same, varying neither in part nor motion; and that all things are from you, as is proved by this sure cause alone: that they

⁴³An interesting reminder that the Apollinarian heresy was condemned but not extinct.

⁴⁴It is worth remembering that both Augustine and Alypius were catechumens and had presumably been receiving doctrinal instruction in preparation for their eventual baptism and full membership in the Catholic Church. That their ideas on the incarnation, at this stage, were in such confusion raises an interesting problem.

⁴⁵Cf. Augustine's *The Christian Combat* as an example of "the refutation of heretics."

⁴⁶Cf. 1 Cor. 11:19.

exist.

Of all this I was convinced, yet I was too weak to enjoy you. I chattered away as if I were an expert; but if I had not sought your Way in Christ our Saviour, my knowledge would have turned out to be not instruction but destruction.⁴⁷ For now full of what was in fact my punishment, I had begun to desire to seem wise. I did not mourn my ignorance, but rather was puffed up with knowledge. For where was that love which builds upon the foundation of humility, which is Jesus Christ?⁴⁸ Or, when would these books teach me this? I now believe that it was your pleasure that I should fall upon these books before I studied your Scriptures, that it might be impressed on my memory how I was affected by them; and then afterward, when I was subdued by your Scriptures and when my wounds were touched by your healing fingers, I might discern and distinguish what a difference there is between presumption and confession – between those who saw where they were to go even if they did not see the way, and the Way which leads, not only to the observing, but also the inhabiting of the blessed country. For had I first been molded in your Holy Scriptures, and if you had grown sweet to me through my familiar use of them, and if then I had afterward fallen on those volumes, they might have pushed me off the solid ground of godliness – or if I had stood firm in that wholesome disposition which I had there acquired, I might have thought that wisdom could be attained by the study of those [Platonist] books alone.

CHAPTER XXI

27. With great eagerness, then, I fastened upon the venerable writings of your Spirit and principally upon the apostle Paul. I had thought that he sometimes contradicted himself and that the text of his teaching did not agree with the testimonies of the Law and the Prophets; but now all these doubts vanished away. And I saw that those pure words had but one face, and I learned to rejoice with trembling. So I began, and I found that whatever truth I had read [in the Platonists] was here combined with the exaltation of your grace. Thus, he who sees must not glory as if he had not received, not only the things that he sees, but the very power of sight – for what does he have that he has not received as a gift? By this he is not only exhorted to see, but also to be cleansed, that he may grasp you, who are ever the same; and thus he who cannot see you afar off may yet enter upon the road that leads to reaching, seeing, and possessing you. For although a man may “delight in the law of God after the inward man,” what shall he do with that other “law in his members which wars against the law of his mind, and brings him into captivity under the law of sin, which is in his members”?⁴⁹ you are righteous, O Lord; but we have sinned and committed iniquities, and have done wickedly. Your hand has grown heavy upon us, and we are justly delivered over to that ancient sinner, the lord of death. For he persuaded our wills to become like his will, by which he remained not in your truth. What shall “wretched man” do? “Who shall deliver him from the body of this death,”⁵⁰ except your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord; whom you have begotten, coeternal with yourself, and did create in the beginning of your ways⁵¹ – in whom the prince of this world found nothing worthy of death, yet he killed him

⁴⁷*Non peritus, sed periturus essem.*

⁴⁸Cf. 1 Cor. 3:11f.

⁴⁹Rom. 7:22, 23.

⁵⁰Rom. 7:24, 25.

⁵¹Cf. Prov. 8:22 and Col. 1:15. Augustine is here identifying the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs with the figure of

– and so the handwriting which was all against us was blotted out?

The books of the Platonists tell nothing of this. Their pages do not contain the expression of this kind of godliness – the tears of confession, your sacrifice, a troubled spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, the salvation of your people, the espoused City, the earnest of the Holy Spirit, the cup of our redemption. In them, no man sings: “Shall not my soul be subject unto God, for from him comes my salvation? He is my God and my salvation, my defender; I shall no more be moved.”⁵² In them, no one hears him calling, “Come unto me all you who labor.” They scorn to learn of him because he is “meek and lowly of heart”; for “you have hidden those things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes.” For it is one thing to see the land of peace from a wooded mountaintop: and fail to find the way thither – to attempt impassable ways in vain, opposed and waylaid by fugitives and deserters under their captain, the “lion” and “dragon”⁵³; but it is quite another thing to keep to the highway that leads thither, guarded by the hosts of the heavenly Emperor, on which there are no deserters from the heavenly army to rob the passers-by, for they shun it as a torment.⁵⁴ These thoughts sank wondrously into my heart, when I read that “least of your apostles”⁵⁵ and when I had considered all your works and trembled.

the Logos in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel. In the Arian controversy both these references to God's Wisdom and Word as "created" caused great difficulty for the orthodox, for the Arians triumphantly appealed to them as proof that Jesus Christ was a "creature" of God. But Augustine was a Chalcedonian before Chalcedon, and there is no doubt that he is here quoting familiar Scripture and filling it with the interpretation achieved by the long struggle of the Church to affirm the coeternity and consubstantiality of Jesus Christ and God the Father.

⁵²Cf. Ps. 62:1, 2, 5, 6.

⁵³Cf. Ps. 91:13.

⁵⁴A figure that compares the dangers of the solitary traveler in a bandit-infested land and the safety of an imperial convoy on a main highway to the capital city.

⁵⁵Cf. 1 Cor. 15:9.

BOOK EIGHT – Song of True Conversion

Conversion to Christ. Augustine is deeply impressed by Simplicianus' story of the conversion to Christ of the famous orator and philosopher, Marius Victorinus. He is stirred to emulate him, but finds himself still enchained by his incontinence and preoccupation with worldly affairs. He is then visited by a court official, Ponticianus, who tells him and Alypius the stories of the conversion of Anthony and also of two imperial "secret service agents." These stories throw him into a violent turmoil, in which his divided will struggles against himself. He almost succeeds in making the decision for continence, but is still held back. Finally, a child's song, overheard by chance, sends him to the Bible; a text from Paul resolves the crisis; the conversion is a fact. Alypius also makes his decision, and the two inform the rejoicing Monica.

CHAPTER I

1. O my God, let me remember with gratitude and confess to you your mercies toward me. Let my bones be bathed in your love, and let them say: "Lord, who is like unto you?¹ you have broken my bonds in sunder, I will offer unto you the sacrifice of thanksgiving."² And how you did break them I will declare, and all who worship you shall say, when they hear these things: "Blessed be the Lord in heaven and earth, great and wonderful is his name."³

Your words had stuck fast in my breast, and I was hedged round about by you on every side. Of your eternal life I was now certain, although I had seen it "through a glass darkly."⁴ And I had been relieved of all doubt that there is an incorruptible substance and that it is the source of every other substance. Nor did I any longer crave greater certainty about you, but rather greater steadfastness in you.

But as for my temporal life, everything was uncertain, and my heart had to be purged of the old leaven. "The Way" – the Saviour himself – pleased me well, but as yet I was reluctant to pass through the strait gate.

And you did put it into my mind, and it seemed good in my own sight, to go to Simplicianus, who appeared to me a faithful servant of yours, and your grace shone forth in him. I had also been told that from his youth up he had lived in entire devotion to you. He was already an old man, and because of his great age, which he had passed in such a zealous discipleship in your way, he appeared to me likely to have gained much wisdom – and, indeed, he had. From all his experience, I desired him to tell me – setting before him all my agitations – which would be the most fitting way for one who felt as I did to walk in your way.

2. For I saw the Church full; and one man was going this way and another that. Still, I could not be satisfied with the life I was living in the world. Now, indeed, my passions had ceased to excite

¹Ps. 35:10.

²Cf. Ps. 116:16, 17.

³Cf. Ps. 8:1.

⁴1 Cor. 13:12.

me as of old with hopes of honor and wealth, and it was a grievous burden to go on in such servitude. For, compared with your sweetness and the beauty of your house – which I loved – those things delighted me no longer. But I was still tightly bound by the love of women; nor did the apostle forbid me to marry, although he exhorted me to something better, wishing earnestly that all men were as he himself was.

But I was weak and chose the easier way, and for this single reason my whole life was one of inner turbulence and listless indecision, because from so many influences I was compelled – even though unwilling – to agree to a married life which bound me hand and foot. I had heard from the mouth of Truth that “there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake”⁵ but, said he, “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.” Of a certainty, all men are vain who do not have the knowledge of God, or have not been able, from the good things that are seen, to find him who is good. But I was no longer fettered in that vanity. I had surmounted it, and from the united testimony of your whole creation had found you, our Creator, and your Word – God with you, and together with you and the Holy Spirit, one God – by whom you have created all things. There is still another sort of wicked men, who “when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.”⁶ Into this also I had fallen, but your right hand held me up and bore me away, and you did place me where I might recover. For you have said to men, “Behold the fear of the Lord, this is wisdom,”⁷ and, “Be not wise in your own eyes,”⁸ because “they that profess themselves to be wise become fools.”⁹ But I had now found the goodly pearl; and I ought to have sold all that I had and bought it – yet I hesitated.

CHAPTER II

3. I went, therefore, to Simplicianus, the spiritual father of Ambrose (then a bishop), whom Ambrose truly loved as a father. I recounted to him all the mazes of my wanderings, but when I mentioned to him that I had read certain books of the Platonists which Victorinus – formerly professor of rhetoric at Rome, who died a Christian, as I had been told – had translated into Latin, Simplicianus congratulated me that I had not fallen upon the writings of other philosophers, which were full of fallacies and deceit, “after the beggarly elements of this world,”¹⁰ whereas in the Platonists, at every turn, the pathway led to belief in God and his Word.

Then, to encourage me to copy the humility of Christ, which is hidden from the wise and revealed to babes, he told me about Victorinus himself, whom he had known intimately at Rome. And I cannot refrain from repeating what he told me about him. For it contains a glorious proof of your grace, which ought to be confessed to you: how that old man, most learned, most skilled in all the liberal arts; who had read, criticized, and explained so many of the writings of the philosophers; the teacher of so many noble senators; one who, as a mark of his distinguished service in office had both merited and obtained a statue in the Roman Forum – which men of this

⁵Matt. 19:12.

⁶Rom. 1:21.

⁷Job 28:28.

⁸Prov. 3:7.

⁹Rom. 1:22.

¹⁰Col. 2:8.

world esteem a great honor – this man who, up to an advanced age, had been a worshiper of idols, a communicant in the sacrilegious rites to which almost all the nobility of Rome were wedded; and who had inspired the people with the love of Osiris and

“The dog Anubis, and a medley crew
Of monster gods who ‘gainst Neptune stand in arms
‘Gainst Venus and Minerva, steel-clad Mars,”¹¹

whom Rome once conquered, and now worshiped; all of which old Victorinus had with thundering eloquence defended for so many years – despite all this, he did not blush to become a child of your Christ, a babe at your font, bowing his neck to the yoke of humility and submitting his forehead to the ignominy of the cross.

4. O Lord, Lord, “who did bow the heavens and did descend, who did touch the mountains and they smoked,”¹² by what means did you find your way into that breast? He used to read the Holy Scriptures, as Simplicianus said, and thought out and studied all the Christian writings most studiously. He said to Simplicianus – not openly but secretly as a friend – “You must know that I am a Christian.” To which Simplicianus replied, “I shall not believe it, nor shall I count you among the Christians, until I see you in the Church of Christ.” Victorinus then asked, with mild mockery, “Is it then the walls that make Christians?” Thus he often would affirm that he was already a Christian, and as often Simplicianus made the same answer; and just as often his jest about the walls was repeated. He was fearful of offending his friends, proud demon worshipers, from the height of whose Babylonian dignity, as from the tops of the cedars of Lebanon which the Lord had not yet broken down, he feared that a storm of enmity would descend upon him.

But he steadily gained strength from reading and inquiry, and came to fear lest he should be denied by Christ before the holy angels if he now was afraid to confess him before men. Thus he came to appear to himself guilty of a great fault, in being ashamed of the sacraments of the humility of your Word, when he was not ashamed of the sacrilegious rites of those proud demons, whose pride he had imitated and whose rites he had shared. From this he became bold-faced against vanity and shamefaced toward the truth. Thus, suddenly and unexpectedly, he said to Simplicianus – as he himself told me – “Let us go to the church; I wish to become a Christian.” Simplicianus went with him, scarcely able to contain himself for joy. He was admitted to the first sacraments of instruction, and not long afterward gave in his name that he might receive the baptism of regeneration. At this Rome marveled and the Church rejoiced. The proud saw and were enraged; they gnashed their teeth and melted away! But the Lord God was your servant’s hope and he paid no attention to their vanity and lying madness.

5. Finally, when the hour arrived for him to make a public profession of his faith – which at Rome those who are about to enter into your grace make from a platform in the full sight of the faithful people, in a set form of words learned by heart – the presbyters offered Victorinus the chance to make his profession more privately, for this was the custom for some who were likely to be afraid through bashfulness. But Victorinus chose rather to profess his salvation in the

¹¹Virgil, *Aeneid*, VIII, 698.

¹²Ps. 144:5.

presence of the holy congregation. For there was no salvation in the rhetoric which he taught: yet he had professed that openly. Why, then, should he shrink from naming your Word before the sheep of your flock, when he had not shrunk from uttering his own words before the mad multitude?

So, then, when he ascended the platform to make his profession, everyone, as they recognized him, whispered his name one to the other, in tones of jubilation. Who was there among them that did not know him? And a low murmur ran through the mouths of all the rejoicing multitude: “Victorinus! Victorinus!” There was a sudden burst of exaltation at the sight of him, and suddenly they were hushed that they might hear him. He pronounced the true faith with an excellent boldness, and all desired to take him to their very heart – indeed, by their love and joy they did take him to their heart. And they received him with loving and joyful hands.

CHAPTER III

6. O good God, what happens in a man to make him rejoice more at the salvation of a soul that has been despaired of and then delivered from greater danger than over one who has never lost hope, or never been in such imminent danger? For you also, O most merciful Father, “dost rejoice more over one that repents than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance.”¹³ And we listen with much delight whenever we hear how the lost sheep is brought home again on the shepherd’s shoulders while the angels rejoice; or when the piece of money is restored to its place in the treasury and the neighbors rejoice with the woman who found it.¹⁴ And the joy of the solemn festival of your house constrains us to tears when it is read in your house: about the younger son who “was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.” For it is you who rejoice both in us and in your angels, who are holy through holy love. For you are ever the same because you know unchangeably all things which remain neither the same nor forever.

7. What, then, happens in the soul when it takes more delight at finding or having restored to it the things it loves than if it had always possessed them? Indeed, many other things bear witness that this is so – all things are full of witnesses, crying out, “So it is.” The commander triumphs in victory; yet he could not have conquered if he had not fought; and the greater the peril of the battle, the more the joy of the triumph. The storm tosses the voyagers, threatens shipwreck, and everyone turns pale in the presence of death. Then the sky and sea grow calm, and they rejoice as much as they had feared. A loved one is sick and his pulse indicates danger; all who desire his safety are themselves sick at heart; he recovers, though not able as yet to walk with his former strength; and there is more joy now than there was before when he walked sound and strong. Indeed, the very pleasures of human life – not only those which rush upon us unexpectedly and involuntarily, but also those which are voluntary and planned – men obtain by difficulties. There is no pleasure in caring and drinking unless the pains of hunger and thirst have preceded. Drunkards even eat certain salt meats in order to create a painful thirst – and when the drink allays this, it causes pleasure. It is also the custom that the affianced bride should not be immediately given in marriage so that the husband may not esteem her any less, whom as his betrothed he longed for.

¹³Luke 15:4.

¹⁴Cf. Luke, ch. 15.

8. This can be seen in the case of base and dishonorable pleasure. But it is also apparent in pleasures that are permitted and lawful: in the sincerity of honest friendship; and in him who was dead and lived again, who had been lost and was found. The greater joy is everywhere preceded by the greater pain. What does this mean, O Lord my God, when you are an everlasting joy to yourself, and some creatures about you are ever rejoicing in you? What does it mean that this portion of creation thus ebbs and flows, alternately in want and satiety? Is this their mode of being and is this all you have allotted to them: that, from the highest heaven to the lowest earth, from the beginning of the world to the end, from the angels to the worm, from the first movement to the last, you were assigning to all their proper places and their proper seasons – to all the kinds of good things and to all your just works? Alas, how high you are in the highest and how deep in the deepest! You never depart from us, and yet only with difficulty do we return to you.

CHAPTER IV

9. Go on, O Lord, and act: stir us up and call us back; inflame us and draw us to you; stir us up and grow sweet to us; let us now love you, let us run to you. Are there not many men who, out of a deeper pit of darkness than that of Victorinus, return to you – who draw near to you and are illuminated by that light which gives those who receive it power from you to become your sons? But if they are less well-known, even those who know them rejoice less for them. For when many rejoice together the joy of each one is fuller, in that they warm one another, catch fire from each other; moreover, those who are well-known influence many toward salvation and take the lead with many to follow them. Therefore, even those who took the way before them rejoice over them greatly, because they do not rejoice over them alone. But it ought never to be that in your tabernacle the persons of the rich should be welcome before the poor, or the nobly born before the rest – since “you have rather chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong; and have chosen the base things of the world and things that are despised, and the things that are not, in order to bring to nought the things that are.”¹⁵ It was even “the least of the apostles” by whose tongue you did sound forth these words. And when Paulus the proconsul had his pride overcome by the onslaught of the apostle and he was made to pass under the easy yoke of your Christ and became an officer of the great King, he also desired to be called Paul instead of Saul, his former name, in testimony to such a great victory.¹⁶ For the enemy is more overcome in one on whom he has a greater hold, and whom he has hold of more completely. But the proud he controls more readily through their concern about their rank and, through them, he controls more by means of their influence. The more, therefore, the world prized the heart of Victorinus (which the devil had held in an impregnable stronghold) and the tongue of Victorinus (that sharp, strong weapon with which the devil had slain so many), all the more exultingly should your sons rejoice because our King has bound the strong man, and they saw his vessels taken from him and cleansed, and made fit for your honor and “profitable to the Lord for every good work.”¹⁷

¹⁵1 Cor. 1:27.

¹⁶A garbled reference to the story of the conversion of Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus, in Acts 13:4-12.

¹⁷2 Tim. 2:21.

CHAPTER V

10. Now when this man of yours, Simplicianus, told me the story of Victorinus, I was eager to imitate him. Indeed, this was Simplicianus' purpose in telling it to me. But when he went on to tell how, in the reign of the Emperor Julian, there was a law passed by which Christians were forbidden to teach literature and rhetoric; and how Victorinus, in ready obedience to the law, chose to abandon his "school of words" rather than your Word, by which you makes eloquent the tongues of the dumb – he appeared to me not so much brave as happy, because he had found a reason for giving his time wholly to you. For this was what I was longing to do; but as yet I was bound by the iron chain of my own will. The enemy held fast my will, and had made of it a chain, and had bound me tight with it. For out of the perverse will came lust, and the service of lust ended in habit, and habit, not resisted, became necessity. By these links, as it were, forged together – which is why I called it "a chain" – a hard bondage held me in slavery. But that new will which had begun to spring up in me freely to worship you and to enjoy you, O my God, the only certain Joy, was not able as yet to overcome my former willfulness, made strong by long indulgence. Thus my two wills – the old and the new, the carnal and the spiritual – were in conflict within me; and by their discord they tore my soul apart.

11. Thus I came to understand from my own experience what I had read, how "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh."¹⁸ I truly lusted both ways, yet more in that which I approved in myself than in that which I disapproved in myself. For in the latter it was not now really I that was involved, because here I was rather an unwilling sufferer than a willing actor. And yet it was through me that habit had become an armed enemy against me, because I had willingly come to be what I unwillingly found myself to be.

Who, then, can with any justice speak against it, when just punishment follows the sinner? I had now no longer my accustomed excuse that, as yet, I hesitated to forsake the world and serve you because my perception of the truth was uncertain. For now it was certain. But, still bound to the earth, I refused to be your soldier; and was as much afraid of being freed from all entanglements as we ought to fear to be entangled.

12. Thus with the baggage of the world I was sweetly burdened, as one in slumber, and my musings on you were like the efforts of those who desire to awake, but who are still overpowered with drowsiness and fall back into deep slumber. And as no one wishes to sleep forever (for all men rightly count waking better) – yet a man will usually defer shaking off his drowsiness when there is a heavy lethargy in his limbs; and he is glad to sleep on even when his reason disapproves, and the hour for rising has struck – so was I assured that it was much better for me to give myself up to your love than to go on yielding myself to my own lust. Your love satisfied and vanquished me; my lust pleased and fettered me.¹⁹ I had no answer to your calling to me, "Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."²⁰ On all sides, you did show me that your words are true, and I, convicted by the truth, had nothing at all to reply but the drawling and drowsy words: "Presently; see, presently. Leave me alone a little

¹⁸Gal. 5:17.

¹⁹The text here is a typical example of Augustine's love of wordplay and assonance, as a conscious literary device: *tuae caritati me dedere quam meae cupiditati cedere; sed illud placebat et vincebat, hoc libebat et vincebat.*

²⁰Eph. 5:14.

while.” But “presently, presently,” had no present; and my “leave me alone a little while” went on for a long while. In vain did I “delight in your law in the inner man” while “another law in my members warred against the law of my mind and brought me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” For the law of sin is the tyranny of habit, by which the mind is drawn and held, even against its will. Yet it deserves to be so held because it so willingly falls into the habit. “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death” but your grace alone, through Jesus Christ our Lord?²¹

CHAPTER VI

13. And now I will tell and confess unto your name, O Lord, my helper and my redeemer, how you did deliver me from the chain of sexual desire by which I was so tightly held, and from the slavery of worldly business.²² With increasing anxiety I was going about my usual affairs, and daily sighing to you. I attended your church as frequently as my business, under the burden of which I groaned, left me free to do so. Alypius was with me, disengaged at last from his legal post, after a third term as assessor, and now waiting for private clients to whom he might sell his legal advice as I sold the power of speaking (as if it could be supplied by teaching). But Nebridius had consented, for the sake of our friendship, to teach under Verecundus – a citizen of Milan and professor of grammar, and a very intimate friend of us all – who ardently desired, and by right of friendship demanded from us, the faithful aid he greatly needed. Nebridius was not drawn to this by any desire of gain – for he could have made much more out of his learning had he been so inclined – but as he was a most sweet and kindly friend, he was unwilling, out of respect for the duties of friendship, to slight our request. But in this he acted very discreetly, taking care not to become known to those persons who had great reputations in the world. Thus he avoided all distractions of mind, and reserved as many hours as possible to pursue or read or listen to discussions about wisdom.

14. On a certain day, then, when Nebridius was away – for some reason I cannot remember – there came to visit Alypius and me at our house one Ponticianus, a fellow countryman of ours from Africa, who held high office in the emperor’s court. What he wanted with us I do not know; but we sat down to talk together, and it chanced that he noticed a book on a game table before us. He took it up, opened it, and, contrary to his expectation, found it to be the apostle Paul, for he imagined that it was one of my wearisome rhetoric textbooks. At this, he looked up at me with a smile and expressed his delight and wonder that he had so unexpectedly found this book and only this one, lying before my eyes; for he was indeed a Christian and a faithful one at that, and often he prostrated himself before you, our God, in the church in constant daily prayer. When I had told him that I had given much attention to these writings, a conversation followed in which he spoke of Anthony, the Egyptian monk, whose name was in high repute among your servants, although up to that time not familiar to me. When he learned this, he lingered on the topic, giving us an account of this eminent man, and marveling at our ignorance. We in turn were amazed to hear of your wonderful works so fully manifested in recent times – almost in our own – occurring in the true faith and the Catholic Church. We all wondered – we, that these things were

²¹Rom. 7:22-25.

²²The last obstacles that remained. His intellectual difficulties had been cleared away and the intention to become a Christian had become strong. But incontinence and immersion in his career were too firmly fixed in habit to be overcome by an act of conscious resolution.

so great, and he, that we had never heard of them.

15. From this, his conversation turned to the multitudes in the monasteries and their manners so fragrant to you, and to the teeming solitudes of the wilderness, of which we knew nothing at all. There was even a monastery at Milan, outside the city's walls, full of good brothers under the fostering care of Ambrose – and we were ignorant of it. He went on with his story, and we listened intently and in silence. He then told us how, on a certain afternoon, at Trier,²³ when the emperor was occupied watching the gladiatorial games, he and three comrades went out for a walk in the gardens close to the city walls. There, as they chanced to walk two by two, one strolled away with him, while the other two went on by themselves. As they rambled, these first two came upon a certain cottage where lived some of your servants, some of the “poor in spirit” (“of such is the Kingdom of Heaven”), where they found the book in which was written the life of Anthony! One of them began to read it, to marvel and to be inflamed by it. While reading, he meditated on embracing just such a life, giving up his worldly employment to seek you alone. These two belonged to the group of officials called “secret service agents.”²⁴ Then, suddenly being overwhelmed with a holy love and a sober shame and as if in anger with himself, he fixed his eyes on his friend, exclaiming: “Tell me, I beg you, what goal are we seeking in all these toils of ours? What is it that we desire? What is our motive in public service? Can our hopes in the court rise higher than to be ‘friends of the emperor’²⁵? But how frail, how beset with peril, is that pride! Through what dangers must we climb to a greater danger? And when shall we succeed? But if I chose to become a friend of God, see, I can become one now.” Thus he spoke, and in the pangs of the travail of the new life he turned his eyes again onto the page and continued reading; he was inwardly changed, as you did see, and the world dropped away from his mind, as soon became plain to others. For as he read with a heart like a stormy sea, more than once he groaned. Finally he saw the better course, and resolved on it. Then, having become your servant, he said to his friend: “Now I have broken loose from those hopes we had, and I am determined to serve God; and I enter into that service from this hour in this place. If you are reluctant to imitate me, do not oppose me.” The other replied that he would continue bound in his friendship, to share in so great a service for so great a prize. So both became yours, and began to “build a tower”, counting the cost – namely, of forsaking all that they had and following you.²⁶ Shortly after, Ponticianus and his companion, who had walked with him in the other part of the garden, came in search of them to the same place, and having found them reminded them to return, as the day was declining. But the first two, making known to Ponticianus their resolution and purpose, and how a resolve had sprung up and become confirmed in them, entreated them not to take it ill if they refused to join themselves with them. But Ponticianus and his friend, although not changed from their former course, did nevertheless (as he told us) bewail themselves and congratulated their friends on their godliness, recommending themselves to their prayers. And with hearts inclining again toward earthly things, they returned to the palace. But the other two, setting their affections on heavenly things, remained in the cottage. Both of them had affianced brides who,

²³Trèves, an important imperial town on the Moselle; the emperor referred to here was probably Gratian. Cf. E.A. Freeman, “Augusta Treverorum,” in the *British Quarterly Review* (1875), 62, pp. 1-45.

²⁴*Agentes in rebus*, government agents whose duties ranged from postal inspection and tax collection to espionage and secret police work. They were ubiquitous and generally dreaded by the populace; cf. J.S. Reid, “Reorganization of the Empire,” in *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. I, pp. 36-38.

²⁵The inner circle of imperial advisers; usually rather informally appointed and usually with precarious tenure.

²⁶Cf. Luke 14:28-33.

when they heard of this, likewise dedicated their virginity to you.

CHAPTER VII

16. Such was the story Ponticianus told. But while he was speaking, you, O Lord, turned me toward myself, taking me from behind my back, where I had put myself while unwilling to exercise self-scrutiny. And now you did set me face to face with myself, that I might see how ugly I was, and how crooked and sordid, bespotted and ulcerous. And I looked and I loathed myself; but whither to fly from myself I could not discover. And if I sought to turn my gaze away from myself, he would continue his narrative, and you would oppose me to myself and thrust me before my own eyes that I might discover my iniquity and hate it. I had known it, but acted as though I knew it not – I winked at it and forgot it.

17. But now, the more ardently I loved those whose wholesome affections I heard reported – that they had given themselves up wholly to you to be cured – the more did I abhor myself when compared with them. For many of my years – perhaps twelve – had passed away since my nineteenth, when, upon the reading of Cicero’s Hortensius, I was roused to a desire for wisdom. And here I was, still postponing the abandonment of this world’s happiness to devote myself to the search. For not just the finding alone, but also the bare search for it, ought to have been preferred above the treasures and kingdoms of this world; better than all bodily pleasures, though they were to be had for the taking. But, wretched youth that I was – supremely wretched even in the very outset of my youth – I had entreated chastity of you and had prayed, “Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.” For I was afraid lest you should hear me too soon, and too soon cure me of my disease of lust which I desired to have satisfied rather than extinguished. And I had wandered through perverse ways of godless superstition – not really sure of it, either, but preferring it to the other, which I did not seek in piety, but opposed in malice.

18. And I had thought that I delayed from day to day in rejecting those worldly hopes and following you alone because there did not appear anything certain by which I could direct my course. And now the day had arrived in which I was laid bare to myself and my conscience was to chide me: “Where are you, O my tongue? You said indeed that you were not willing to cast off the baggage of vanity for uncertain truth. But behold now it is certain, and still that burden oppresses you. At the same time those who have not worn themselves out with searching for it as you have, nor spent ten years and more in thinking about it, have had their shoulders unburdened and have received wings to fly away.” Thus was I inwardly confused, and mightily confounded with a horrible shame, while Ponticianus went ahead speaking such things. And when he had finished his story and the business he came for, he went his way. And then what did I not say to myself, within myself? With what scourges of rebuke did I not lash my soul to make it follow me, as I was struggling to go after you? Yet it drew back. It refused. It would not make an effort. All its arguments were exhausted and confuted. Yet it resisted in sullen disquiet, fearing the cutting off of that habit by which it was being wasted to death, as if that were death itself.

CHAPTER VIII

19. Then, as this vehement quarrel, which I waged with my soul in the chamber of my heart, was raging inside my inner dwelling, agitated both in mind and countenance, I seized upon Alypius

and exclaimed: “What is the matter with us? What is this? What did you hear? The uninstructed start up and take heaven, and we – with all our learning but so little heart – see where we wallow in flesh and blood! Because others have gone before us, are we ashamed to follow, and not rather ashamed at our not following?” I scarcely knew what I said, and in my excitement I flung away from him, while he gazed at me in silent astonishment. For I did not sound like myself: my face, eyes, color, tone expressed my meaning more clearly than my words.

There was a little garden belonging to our lodging, of which we had the use – as of the whole house – for the master, our landlord, did not live there. The tempest in my breast hurried me out into this garden, where no one might interrupt the fiery struggle in which I was engaged with myself, until it came to the outcome that you knew though I did not. But I was mad for health, and dying for life; knowing what evil thing I was, but not knowing what good thing I was so shortly to become.

I fled into the garden, with Alypius following step by step; for I had no secret in which he did not share, and how could he leave me in such distress? We sat down, as far from the house as possible. I was greatly disturbed in spirit, angry at myself with a turbulent indignation because I had not entered your will and covenant, O my God, while all my bones cried out to me to enter, extolling it to the skies. The way therein is not by ships or chariots or feet – indeed it was not as far as I had come from the house to the place where we were seated. For to go along that road and indeed to reach the goal is nothing else but the will to go. But it must be a strong and single will, not staggering and swaying about this way and that – a changeable, twisting, fluctuating will, wrestling with itself while one part falls as another rises.

20. Finally, in the very fever of my indecision, I made many motions with my body; like men do when they will to act but cannot, either because they do not have the limbs or because their limbs are bound or weakened by disease, or incapacitated in some other way. Thus if I tore my hair, struck my forehead, or, entwining my fingers, clasped my knee, these I did because I willed it. But I might have willed it and still not have done it, if the nerves had not obeyed my will. Many things then I did, in which the will and power to do were not the same. Yet I did not do that one thing which seemed to me infinitely more desirable, which before long I should have power to will because shortly when I willed, I would will with a single will. For in this, the power of willing is the power of doing; and as yet I could not do it. Thus my body more readily obeyed the slightest wish of the soul in moving its limbs at the order of my mind than my soul obeyed itself to accomplish in the will alone its great resolve.

CHAPTER IX

21. How can there be such a strange anomaly? And why is it? Let your mercy shine on me, that I may inquire and find an answer, amid the dark labyrinth of human punishment and in the darkest contritions of the sons of Adam. Whence such an anomaly? And why should it be? The mind commands the body, and the body obeys. The mind commands itself and is resisted. The mind commands the hand to be moved and there is such readiness that the command is scarcely distinguished from the obedience in act. Yet the mind is mind, and the hand is body. The mind commands the mind to will, and yet though it be itself it does not obey itself. Whence this strange anomaly and why should it be? I repeat: The will commands itself to will, and could not

give the command unless it wills; yet what is commanded is not done. But actually the will does not will entirely; therefore it does not command entirely. For as far as it wills, it commands. And as far as it does not will, the thing commanded is not done. For the will commands that there be an act of will – not another, but itself. But it does not command entirely. Therefore, what is commanded does not happen; for if the will were whole and entire, it would not even command it to be, because it would already be. It is, therefore, no strange anomaly partly to will and partly to be unwilling. This is actually an infirmity of mind, which cannot wholly rise, while pressed down by habit, even though it is supported by the truth. And so there are two wills, because one of them is not whole, and what is present in this one is lacking in the other.

CHAPTER X

22. Let them perish from your presence, O God, as vain talkers, and deceivers of the soul perish, who, when they observe that there are two wills in the act of deliberation, go on to affirm that there are two kinds of minds in us: one good, the other evil. They are indeed themselves evil when they hold these evil opinions – and they shall become good only when they come to hold the truth and consent to the truth that your apostle may say to them: “You were formerly in darkness, but now are you in the light in the Lord.”²⁷ But they desired to be light, not “in the Lord,” but in themselves. They conceived the nature of the soul to be the same as what God is, and thus have become a thicker darkness than they were; for in their dread arrogance they have gone farther away from you, from you “the true Light, that lights every man that comes into the world.” Mark what you say and blush for shame; draw near to him and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be ashamed.²⁸

While I was deliberating whether I would serve the Lord my God now, as I had long purposed to do, it was I who willed and it was also I who was unwilling. In either case, it was I. I neither willed with my whole will nor was I wholly unwilling. And so I was at war with myself and torn apart by myself. And this strife was against my will; yet it did not show the presence of another mind, but the punishment of my own. Thus it was no more I who did it, but the sin that dwelt in me – the punishment of a sin freely committed by Adam, and I was a son of Adam.

23. For if there are as many opposing natures as there are opposing wills, there will not be two but many more. If any man is trying to decide whether he should go to their conventicle or to the theater, the Manicheans at once cry out, “See, here are two natures – one good, drawing this way, another bad, drawing back that way; for how else can you explain this indecision between conflicting wills?” But I reply that both impulses are bad – that which draws to them and that which draws back to the theater. But they do not believe that the will which draws to them can be anything but good. Suppose, then, that one of us should try to decide, and through the conflict of his two wills should waver whether he should go to the theater or to our Church. Would not those also waver about the answer here? For either they must confess, which they are unwilling to do, that the will that leads to our church is as good as that which carries their own adherents and those captivated by their mysteries; or else they must imagine that there are two evil natures and two evil minds in one man, both at war with each other, and then it will not be true what they

²⁷Eph. 5:8.

²⁸Cf. Ps. 34:5.

say, that there is one good and another bad. Else they must be converted to the truth, and no longer deny that when anyone deliberates there is one soul fluctuating between conflicting wills.

24. Let them no longer maintain that when they perceive two wills to be contending with each other in the same man the contest is between two opposing minds, of two opposing substances, from two opposing principles, the one good and the other bad. Thus, O true God, you do reprove and confute and convict them. For both wills may be bad: as when a man tries to decide whether he should kill a man by poison or by the sword; whether he should take possession of this field or that one belonging to someone else, when he cannot get both; whether he should squander his money to buy pleasure or hold onto his money through the motive of covetousness; whether he should go to the circus or to the theater, if both are open on the same day; or, whether he should take a third course, open at the same time, and rob another man's house; or, a fourth option, whether he should commit adultery, if he has the opportunity – all these things concurring in the same space of time and all being equally longed for, although impossible to do at one time. For the mind is pulled four ways by four antagonistic wills – or even more, in view of the vast range of human desires – but even the Manicheans do not affirm that there are these many different substances. The same principle applies as in the action of good wills. For I ask them, “Is it a good thing to have delight in reading the apostle, or is it a good thing to delight in a sober psalm, or is it a good thing to discourse on the gospel?” To each of these, they will answer, “It is good.” But what, then, if all delight us equally and all at the same time? Do not different wills distract the mind when a man is trying to decide what he should choose? Yet they are all good, and are at variance with each other until one is chosen. When this is done the whole united will may go forward on a single track instead of remaining as it was before, divided in many ways. So also, when eternity attracts us from above, and the pleasure of earthly delight pulls us down from below, the soul does not will either the one or the other with all its force, but still it is the same soul that does not will this or that with a united will, and is therefore pulled apart with grievous perplexities, because for truth's sake it prefers this, but for custom's sake it does not lay that aside.

CHAPTER XI

25. Thus I was sick and tormented, reproaching myself more bitterly than ever, rolling and writhing in my chain till it should be utterly broken. By now I was held but slightly, but still was held. And you, O Lord, did press upon me in my inmost heart with a severe mercy, redoubling the lashes of fear and shame; lest I should again give way and that same slender remaining tie not be broken off, but recover strength and enchain me yet more securely.

I kept saying to myself, “See, let it be done now; let it be done now.” And as I said this I all but came to a firm decision. I all but did it – yet I did not quite. Still I did not fall back to my old condition, but stood aside for a moment and drew breath. And I tried again, and lacked only a very little of reaching the resolve – and then somewhat less, and then all but touched and grasped it. Yet I still did not quite reach or touch or grasp the goal, because I hesitated to die to death and to live to life. And the worse way, to which I was habituated, was stronger in me than the better, which I had not tried. And up to the very moment in which I was to become another man, the nearer the moment approached, the greater horror did it strike in me. But it did not strike me back, nor turn me aside, but held me in suspense.

26. It was, in fact, my old mistresses, trifles of trifles and vanities of vanities, who still enthralled me. They tugged at my fleshly garments and softly whispered: “Are you going to part with us? And from that moment will we never be with you any more? And from that moment will not this and that be forbidden you forever?” What were they suggesting to me in those words “this or that”? What is it they suggested, O my God? Let your mercy guard the soul of your servant from the vileness and the shame they did suggest! And now I scarcely heard them, for they were not openly showing themselves and opposing me face to face; but muttering, as it were, behind my back; and furtively plucking at me as I was leaving, trying to make me look back at them. Still they delayed me, so that I hesitated to break loose and shake myself free of them and leap over to the place to which I was being called – for unruly habit kept saying to me, “Do you think you can live without them?”

27. But now it said this very faintly; for in the direction I had set my face, and yet toward which I still trembled to go, the chaste dignity of continence appeared to me – cheerful but not wanton, modestly alluring me to come and doubt nothing, extending her holy hands, full of a multitude of good examples – to receive and embrace me. There were there so many young men and maidens, a multitude of youth and every age, grave widows and ancient virgins; and continence herself in their midst: not barren, but a fruitful mother of children – her joys – by you, O Lord, her husband. And she smiled on me with a challenging smile as if to say: “Can you not do what these young men and maidens can? Or can any of them do it of themselves, and not rather in the Lord their God? The Lord their God gave me to them. Why do you stand in your own strength, and so stand not? Cast yourself on him; fear not. He will not flinch and you will not fall. Cast yourself on him without fear, for he will receive and heal you.” And I blushed violently, for I still heard the muttering of those “trifles” and hung suspended. Again she seemed to speak: “Stop your ears against those unclean members of yours, that they may be mortified. They tell you of delights, but not according to the law of the Lord your God.” This struggle raging in my heart was nothing but the contest of self against self. And Alypius kept close beside me, and awaited in silence the outcome of my extraordinary agitation.

CHAPTER XII

28. Now when deep reflection had drawn up out of the secret depths of my soul all my misery and had heaped it up before the sight of my heart, there arose a mighty storm, accompanied by a mighty rain of tears. That I might give way fully to my tears and lamentations, I stole away from Alypius, for it seemed to me that solitude was more appropriate for the business of weeping. I went far enough away that I could feel that even his presence was no restraint upon me. This was the way I felt at the time, and he realized it. I suppose I had said something before I started up and he noticed that the sound of my voice was choked with weeping. And so he stayed alone, where we had been sitting together, greatly astonished. I flung myself down under a fig tree – how I know not – and gave free course to my tears. The streams of my eyes gushed out an acceptable sacrifice to you. And, not indeed in these words, but to this effect, I cried to you: “And you, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord? will you be angry forever? Oh, remember not against us our former iniquities.”²⁹ For I felt that I was still enthralled by them. I sent up these

²⁹Cf. Ps. 6:3; 79:8.

sorrowful cries: “How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour make an end to my uncleanness?”

29. I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or a girl I know not which – coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, “Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it.”³⁰ Immediately I ceased weeping and began most earnestly to think whether it was usual for children in some kind of game to sing such a song, but I could not remember ever having heard the like. So, damming the torrent of my tears, I got to my feet, for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon. For I had heard³¹ how Anthony, accidentally coming into church while the gospel was being read, received the admonition as if what was read had been addressed to him: “Go and sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me.”³² By such an oracle he was forthwith converted to you.

So I quickly returned to the bench where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the apostle’s book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.”³³ I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.³⁴

30. Closing the book, then, and putting my finger or something else for a mark I began – now with a tranquil countenance – to tell it all to Alypius. And he in turn disclosed to me what had been going on in himself, of which I knew nothing. He asked to see what I had read. I showed him, and he looked on even further than I had read. I had not known what followed. But indeed it was this, “Him that is weak in the faith, receive.”³⁵ This he applied to himself, and told me so. By these words of warning he was strengthened, and by exercising his good resolution and purpose – all very much in keeping with his character, in which, in these respects, he was always far different from and better than I – he joined me in full commitment without any restless hesitation.

Then we went in to my mother, and told her what happened, to her great joy. We explained to her how it had occurred – and she leaped for joy triumphant; and she blessed you, who are “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.”³⁶ For she saw that you had granted her far more than she had ever asked for in all her pitiful and doleful lamentations. For you did so convert me to you that I sought neither a wife nor any other of this world’s hopes, but set my

³⁰This is the famous *Tolle, lege; tolle, lege*.

³¹Doubtless from Ponticianus, in their earlier conversation.

³²Matt. 19:21.

³³Rom. 13:13.

³⁴Note the parallels here to the conversion of Anthony and the *agentes in rebus*.

³⁵Rom. 14:1.

³⁶Eph. 3:20.

feet on that rule of faith which so many years before you had showed her in her dream about me.
And so you did turn her grief into gladness more plentiful than she had ventured to desire, and
dearer and purer than the desire she used to cherish of having grandchildren of my flesh.

BOOK NINE – Baptism and the Return Home

The end of the autobiography. Augustine tells of his resigning from his professorship and of the days at Cassiciacum in preparation for baptism. He is baptized together with Adeodatus and Alypius. Shortly thereafter, they start back for Africa. Augustine recalls the ecstasy he and his mother shared in Ostia and then reports her death and burial and his grief. The book closes with a moving prayer for the souls of Monica, Patricius, and all his fellow citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.

CHAPTER I

1. “O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant and the son of your handmaid. You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving.”¹ Let my heart and my tongue praise you, and let all my bones say, “Lord, who is like unto you?” Let them say so, and answer you me and say unto my soul, “I am your salvation.”

Who am I, and what is my nature? What evil is there not in me and my deeds; or if not in my deeds, my words; or if not in my words, my will? But you, O Lord, are good and merciful, and your right hand did reach into the depth of my death and did empty out the abyss of corruption from the bottom of my heart. And this was the result: now I did not will to do what I willed, and began to will to do what you did will.

But where was my free will during all those years and from what deep and secret retreat was it called forth in a single moment, whereby I gave my neck to your “easy yoke” and my shoulders to your “light burden,” O Christ Jesus, “my Strength and my Redeemer”? How sweet did it suddenly become to me to be without the sweetness of trifles! And it was now a joy to put away what I formerly feared to lose. For you did cast them away from me, O true and highest Sweetness. You did cast them away, and in their place you did enter in yourself – sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood; brighter than all light, but more veiled than all mystery; more exalted than all honor, though not to them that are exalted in their own eyes. Now was my soul free from the gnawing cares of seeking and getting, of wallowing in the mire and scratching the itch of lust. And I prattled like a child to you, O Lord my God – my light, my riches, and my salvation.

CHAPTER II

2. And it seemed right to me, in your sight, not to snatch my tongue’s service abruptly out of the speech market, but to withdraw quietly, so that the young men who were not concerned about your law or your peace, but with mendacious follies and forensic strifes, might no longer purchase from my mouth weapons for their frenzy. Fortunately, there were only a few days before the “vintage vacation”²; and I determined to endure them, so that I might resign in due form and, now bought by you, return for sale no more.

¹Ps. 116:16, 17.

²An imperial holiday season, from late August to the middle of October.

My plan was known to you, but, save for my own friends, it was not known to other men. For we had agreed that it should not be made public; although, in our ascent from the “valley of tears” and our singing of “the song of degrees,” you had given us sharp arrows and hot burning coals to stop that deceitful tongue which opposes under the guise of good counsel, and devours what it loves as though it were food.

3. You had pierced our heart with your love, and we carried your words, as it were, thrust through our vitals. The examples of your servants whom you had changed from black to shining white, and from death to life, crowded into the bosom of our thoughts and burned and consumed our sluggish temper, that we might not topple back into the abyss. And they fired us exceedingly, so that every breath of the deceitful tongue of our detractors might fan the flame and not blow it out.

Though this vow and purpose of ours should find those who would loudly praise it – for the sake of your name, which you have sanctified throughout the earth – it nevertheless looked like a self-vaunting not to wait until the vacation time now so near. For if I had left such a public office ahead of time, and had made the break in the eye of the general public, all who took notice of this act of mine and observed how near was the vintage time that I wished to anticipate would have talked about me a great deal, as if I were trying to appear a great person. And what purpose would it serve that people should consider and dispute about my conversion so that my good should be evil spoken of?

4. Furthermore, this same summer my lungs had begun to be weak from too much literary labor. Breathing was difficult; the pains in my chest showed that the lungs were affected and were soon fatigued by too loud or prolonged speaking. This had at first been a trial to me, for it would have compelled me almost of necessity to lay down that burden of teaching; or, if I was to be cured and become strong again, at least to take a leave for a while. But as soon as the full desire to be still that I might know that you are the Lord³ arose and was confirmed in me, you know, my God, that I began to rejoice that I had this excuse ready – and not a feigned one, either – which might somewhat temper the displeasure of those who for their sons’ freedom wished me never to have any freedom of my own.

Full of joy, then, I bore it until my time ran out – it was perhaps some twenty days – yet it was some strain to go through with it, for the greediness which helped to support the drudgery had gone, and I would have been overwhelmed had not its place been taken by patience. Some of your servants, my brethren, may say that I sinned in this, since having once fully and from my heart enlisted in your service, I permitted myself to sit a single hour in the chair of falsehood. I will not dispute it. But have you not, O most merciful Lord, pardoned and forgiven this sin in the holy water⁴ also, along with all the others, horrible and deadly as they were?

³Cf. Ps. 46:10.

⁴His subsequent baptism; see below, Ch. VI.

CHAPTER III

5. Verecundus was severely disturbed by this new happiness of mine, since he was still firmly held by his bonds and saw that he would lose my companionship. For he was not yet a Christian, though his wife was; and, indeed, he was more firmly enchained by her than by anything else, and held back from that journey on which we had set out. Furthermore, he declared he did not wish to be a Christian on any terms except those that were impossible. However, he invited us most courteously to make use of his country house so long as we would stay there. O Lord, you will recompense him for this “in the resurrection of the just,”⁵ seeing that you have already given him “the lot of the righteous.”⁶ For while we were absent at Rome, he was overtaken with bodily sickness, and during it he was made a Christian and departed this life as one of the faithful. Thus you had mercy on him, and not on him only, but on us as well; lest, remembering the exceeding kindness of our friend to us and not able to count him in your flock, we should be tortured with intolerable grief. Thanks be unto you, our God; we are yours. Your exhortations, consolations, and faithful promises assure us that you will repay Verecundus for that country house at Cassiciacum – where we found rest in you from the fever of the world – with the perpetual freshness of your paradise in which you have forgiven him his earthly sins, in that mountain flowing with milk, that fruitful mountain – your own.

6. Thus Verecundus was full of grief; but Nebridius was joyous. For he was not yet a Christian, and had fallen into the pit of deadly error, believing that the flesh of your Son, the Truth, was a phantom.⁷ Yet he had come up out of that pit and now held the same belief that we did. And though he was not as yet initiated in any of the sacraments of your Church, he was a most earnest inquirer after truth. Not long after our conversion and regeneration by your baptism, he also became a faithful member of the Catholic Church, serving you in perfect chastity and continence among his own people in Africa, and bringing his whole household with him to Christianity. Then you did release him from the flesh, and now he lives in Abraham’s bosom. Whatever is signified by that term “bosom,” there lives my Nebridius, my sweet friend, your son by adoption, O Lord, and not a freedman any longer. There he lives; for what other place could there be for such a soul? There he lives in that abode about which he used to ask me so many questions – poor ignorant one that I was. Now he does not put his ear up to my mouth, but his spiritual mouth to your fountain, and drinks wisdom as he desires and as he is able – happy without end. But I do not believe that he is so inebriated by that draught as to forget me; since you, O Lord, who are the draught, are mindful of us.

Thus, then, we were comforting the unhappy Verecundus – our friendship untouched – reconciling him to our conversion and exhorting him to a faith fit for his condition (that is, to his being married). We tarried for Nebridius to follow us, since he was so close, and this he was just about to do when at last the interim ended. The days had seemed long and many because of my eagerness for leisure and liberty in which I might sing to you from my inmost part, “My heart has said to you, I have sought your face; your face, O Lord, will I seek.”⁸

⁵Luke 14:14.

⁶Ps. 125:3.

⁷The heresy of Docetism, one of the earliest and most persistent of all Christological errors.

⁸Cf. Ps. 27:8.

CHAPTER IV

7. Finally the day came on which I was actually to be relieved from the professorship of rhetoric, from which I had already been released in intention. And it was done. And you did deliver my tongue as you had already delivered my heart; and I blessed you for it with great joy, and retired with my friends to the villa.⁹ My books testify to what I got done there in writing, which was now hopefully devoted to your service; though in this pause it was still as if I were panting from my exertions in the school of pride.¹⁰ These were the books in which I engaged in dialogue with my friends, and also those in soliloquy before you alone.¹¹ And there are my letters to Nebridius, who was still absent.¹²

When would there be enough time to recount all your great blessings which you did bestow on us in that time, especially as I am hastening on to still greater mercies? For my memory recalls them to me and it is pleasant to confess them to you, O Lord: the inward goads by which you did subdue me and how you brought me low, leveling the mountains and hills of my thoughts, straightening my crookedness, and smoothing my rough ways. And I remember by what means you also did subdue Alypius, my heart's brother, to the name of your only Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ – which he at first refused to have inserted in our writings. For at first he preferred that they should smell of the cedars of the schools¹³ which the Lord has now broken down, rather than of the wholesome herbs of the Church, hostile to serpents.¹⁴

8. O my God, how did I cry to you when I read the psalms of David, those hymns of faith, those paeans of devotion which leave no room for swelling pride! I was still a novice in your true love, a catechumen keeping holiday at the villa, with Alypius, a catechumen like myself. My mother was also with us – in woman's garb, but with a man's faith, with the peacefulness of age and the fullness of motherly love and Christian piety. What cries I used to send up to you in those songs, and how I was enkindled toward you by them! I burned to sing them if possible, throughout the whole world, against the pride of the human race. And yet, indeed, they are sung throughout the whole world, and none can hide himself from your heat. With what strong and bitter regret was I indignant at the Manicheans! Yet I also pitied them; for they were ignorant of those sacraments, those medicines¹⁵ – and raved insanely against the cure that might have made them sane! I wished they could have been somewhere close by, and – without my knowledge – could have

⁹The group included Monica, Adeodatus (Augustine's fifteen-year-old son), Navigius (Augustine's brother), Rusticus and Fastidianus (relatives), Alypius, Trygetius, and Licentius (former pupils).

¹⁰A somewhat oblique acknowledgment of the fact that none of the Cassiciacum dialogues has any distinctive or substantial Christian content. This has often been pointed to as evidence that Augustine's conversion thus far had brought him no farther than to a kind of Christian Platonism; cf. P. Alfarc, *L'Évolution intellectuelle de Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1918).

¹¹The dialogues written during this stay at Cassiciacum: *Contra Academicos, De beata vita, De ordine, Soliloquia*. See, in this series, Vol. VI, pp. 17-63, for an English translation of the *Soliloquia*.

¹²Cf. *Epistles* II and III.

¹³A symbolic reference to the "cedars of Lebanon"; cf. Isa. 2:12-14; Ps. 29:5.

¹⁴There is perhaps a remote connection here with Luke 10:18-20.

¹⁵Ever since the time of Ignatius of Antioch who referred to the Eucharist as "the medicine of immortality," this had been a popular metaphor to refer to the sacraments; cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* 20:2.

seen my face and heard my words when, in that time of leisure, I pored over the Fourth Psalm. And I wish they could have seen how that psalm affected me.¹⁶ “When I called upon you, O God of my righteousness, you did hear me; you did enlarge me when I was in distress. Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer.” I wish they might have heard what I said in comment on those words – without my knowing that they heard, lest they should think that I was speaking it just on their account. For, indeed, I should not have said quite the same things, nor quite in the same way, if I had known that I was heard and seen by them. And if I had so spoken, they would not have meant the same things to them as they did to me when I spoke by and for myself before you, out of the private affections of my soul.

9. By turns I trembled with fear and warmed with hope and rejoiced in your mercy, O Father. And all these feelings showed forth in my eyes and voice when your good Spirit turned to us and said, “O sons of men, how long will you be slow of heart, how long will you love vanity, and seek after falsehood?” For I had loved vanity and sought after falsehood. And you, O Lord, had already magnified your Holy One, raising him from the dead and setting him at your right hand, that thence he should send forth from on high his promised “Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth.” Already he had sent him, and I knew it not. He had sent him because he was now magnified, rising from the dead and ascending into heaven. For till then “the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”¹⁷ And the prophet cried out: “How long will you be slow of heart? How long will you love vanity, and seek after falsehood? Know this, that the Lord has magnified his Holy One.” He cries, “How long?” He cries, “Know this,” and I – so long “loving vanity, and seeking after falsehood” – heard and trembled, because these words were spoken to such a one as I remembered that I myself had been. For in those phantoms which I once held for truth there was vanity and falsehood. And I spoke many things loudly and earnestly – in the contrition of my memory – which I wish they had heard, who still “love vanity and seek after falsehood.” Perhaps they would have been troubled, and have vomited up their error, and you would have heard them when they cried to you; for by a real death in the flesh He died for us who now makes intercession for us with you.

10. I read on further, “Be angry, and sin not.” And how deeply was I touched, O my God; for I had now learned to be angry with myself for the things past, so that in the future I might not sin. Yes, to be angry with good cause, for it was not another nature out of the race of darkness that had sinned for me – as they affirm who are not angry with themselves, and who store up for themselves dire wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of your righteous judgment. Nor were the good things I saw now outside me, nor were they to be seen with the eyes of flesh in the light of the earthly sun. For they that have their joys from without sink easily into emptiness and are spilled out on those things that are visible and temporal, and in their starving thoughts they lick their very shadows. If only they would grow weary with their hunger and would say, “Who will show us any good?” And we would answer, and they would hear, “O Lord, the light of your countenance shines bright upon us.” For we are not that Light that enlightens every man, but we are enlightened by you, so that we who were formerly in darkness may now be alight in you. If only they could behold the inner Light Eternal which, now that I had tasted it, I gnashed my teeth because I could not show it to them unless they brought me their

¹⁶Here follows (8-11) a brief devotional commentary on Ps. 4.

¹⁷John 7:39.

heart in their eyes – their roving eyes – and said, “Who will show us any good?” But even there, in the inner chamber of my soul – where I was angry with myself; where I was inwardly pricked, where I had offered my sacrifice, slaying my old man, and hoping in you with the new resolve of a new life with my trust laid in you – even there you had begun to grow sweet to me and to “put gladness in my heart.” And thus as I read all this, I cried aloud and felt its inward meaning. Nor did I wish to be increased in worldly goods which are wasted by time, for now I possessed, in your eternal simplicity, other corn and wine and oil.

11. And with a loud cry from my heart, I read the following verse: “Oh, in peace! Oh, in the Selfsame!”¹⁸ See how he says it: “I will lay me down and take my rest.”¹⁹ For who shall withstand us when the truth of this saying that is written is made manifest: “Death is swallowed up in victory”²⁰? For surely you, who do not change, are the Selfsame, and in you is rest and oblivion to all distress. There is none other beside you, nor are we to toil for those many things which are not you, for only you, O Lord, makes me to dwell in hope.”

These things I read and was enkindled – but still I could not discover what to do with those deaf and dead Manicheans to whom I myself had belonged; for I had been a bitter and blind reviler against these writings, honeyed with the honey of heaven and luminous with your light. And I was sorely grieved at these enemies of this Scripture.

12. When shall I call to mind all that happened during those holidays? I have not forgotten them; nor will I be silent about the severity of your scourge, and the amazing quickness of your mercy. During that time you did torture me with a toothache; and when it had become so acute that I was not able to speak, it came into my heart to urge all my friends who were present to pray for me to you, the God of all health. And I wrote it down on the tablet and gave it to them to read. Presently, as we bowed our knees in supplication, the pain was gone. But what pain? How did it go? I confess that I was terrified, O Lord my God, because from my earliest years I had never experienced such pain. And your purposes were profoundly impressed upon me; and rejoicing in faith, I praised your name. But that faith allowed me no rest in respect of my past sins, which were not yet forgiven me through your baptism.

CHAPTER V

13. Now that the vintage vacation was ended, I gave notice to the citizens of Milan that they might provide their scholars with another word-merchant. I gave as my reasons my determination to serve you and also my insufficiency for the task, because of the difficulty in breathing and the pain in my chest.

And by letters I notified your bishop, the holy man Ambrose, of my former errors and my present resolution. And I asked his advice as to which of your books it was best for me to read so that I might be the more ready and fit for the reception of so great a grace. He recommended Isaiah the prophet; and I believe it was because Isaiah foreshows more clearly than others the

¹⁸*Idipsum* – the oneness and immutability of God.

¹⁹Cf. v. 9.

²⁰1 Cor. 15:54.

gospel, and the calling of the Gentiles. But because I could not understand the first part and because I imagined the rest to be like it, I laid it aside with the intention of taking it up again later, when better practiced in our Lord's words.

CHAPTER VI

14. When the time arrived for me to give in my name, we left the country and returned to Milan. Alypius also resolved to be born again in you at the same time. He was already clothed with the humility that befits your sacraments, and was so brave a tamer of his body that he would walk the frozen Italian soil with his naked feet, which called for unusual fortitude. We took with us the boy Adeodatus, my son after the flesh, the offspring of my sin. You had made of him a noble lad. He was barely fifteen years old, but his intelligence excelled that of many grave and learned men. I confess to you your gifts, O Lord my God, creator of all, who have power to reform our deformities – for there was nothing of me in that boy but the sin. For it was you who did inspire us to foster him in your discipline, and none other – your gifts I confess to you. There is a book of mine, entitled *De Magistro*.²¹ It is a dialogue between Adeodatus and me, and you know that all things there put into the mouth of my interlocutor are his, though he was then only in his sixteenth year. Many other gifts even more wonderful I found in him. His talent was a source of awe to me. And who but you couldst be the worker of such marvels? And you did quickly remove his life from the earth, and even now I recall him to mind with a sense of security, because I fear nothing for his childhood or youth, nor for his whole career. We took him for our companion, as if he were the same age in grace with ourselves, to be trained with ourselves in your discipline. And so we were baptized and the anxiety about our past life left us.

Nor did I ever have enough in those days of the wondrous sweetness of meditating on the depth of your counsels concerning the salvation of the human race. How freely did I weep in your hymns and canticles; how deeply was I moved by the voices of your sweet-speaking Church! The voices flowed into my ears; and the truth was poured forth into my heart, where the tide of my devotion overflowed, and my tears ran down, and I was happy in all these things.

CHAPTER VII

15. The church of Milan had only recently begun to employ this mode of consolation and exaltation with all the brethren singing together with great earnestness of voice and heart. For it was only about a year – not much more – since Justina, the mother of the boy-emperor Valentinian, had persecuted your servant Ambrose on behalf of her heresy, in which she had been seduced by the Arians. The devoted people kept guard in the church, prepared to die with their bishop, your servant. Among them my mother, your handmaid, taking a leading part in those anxieties and vigils, lived there in prayer. And even though we were still not wholly melted by the heat of your Spirit, we were nevertheless excited by the alarmed and disturbed city.

This was the time that the custom began, after the manner of the Eastern Church, that hymns and psalms should be sung, so that the people would not be worn out with the tedium of lamentation. This custom, retained from then till now, has been imitated by many, indeed, by almost all your

²¹*Concerning the Teacher*; cf. Vol. VI of this series, pp. 64-101.

congregations throughout the rest of the world.²²

16. Then by a vision you made known to your renowned bishop the spot where lay the bodies of Gervasius and Protasius, the martyrs, whom you had preserved uncorrupted for so many years in your secret storehouse, so that you might produce them at a fit time to check a woman's fury – a woman indeed, but also a queen! When they were discovered and dug up and brought with due honor to the basilica of Ambrose, as they were borne along the road many who were troubled by unclean spirits – the devils confessing themselves – were healed. And there was also a certain man, a well-known citizen of the city, blind many years, who, when he had asked and learned the reason for the people's tumultuous joy, rushed out and begged his guide to lead him to the place. When he arrived there, he begged to be permitted to touch with his handkerchief the bier of your saints, whose death is precious in your sight. When he had done this, and put it to his eyes, they were immediately opened. The fame of all this spread abroad; from this your glory shone more brightly. And also from this the mind of that angry woman, though not enlarged to the sanity of a full faith, was nevertheless restrained from the fury of persecution.

Thanks to you, O my God. Whence and whither have you led my memory, that I should confess such things as these to you – for great as they were, I had forgetfully passed them over? And yet at that time, when the sweet savor of your ointment was so fragrant, I did not run after you.²³ Therefore, I wept more bitterly as I listened to your hymns, having so long panted after you. And now at length I could breathe as much as the space allows in this our straw house.²⁴

CHAPTER VIII

17. You, O Lord, who makes men of one mind to dwell in a single house, also brought Evodius to join our company. He was a young man of our city, who, while serving as a secret service agent, was converted to you and baptized before us. He had relinquished his secular service, and prepared himself for yours. We were together, and we were resolved to live together in our devout purpose.

We cast about for some place where we might be most useful in our service to you, and had planned on going back together to Africa. And when we had got as far as Ostia on the Tiber, my mother died.

I am passing over many things, for I must hasten. Receive, O my God, my confessions and thanksgiving for the unnumbered things about which I am silent. But I will not omit anything my mind has brought back concerning your handmaid who brought me forth – in her flesh, that I might be born into this world's light, and in her heart, that I might be born to life eternal. I will not speak of her gifts, but of your gift in her; for she neither made herself nor trained herself. You did create her, and neither her father nor her mother knew what kind of being was to come forth from them. And it was the rod of your Christ, the discipline of your only Son, that trained her in your fear, in the house of one of your faithful ones who was a sound member of your

²²This was apparently the first introduction into the West of antiphonal chanting, which was already widespread in the East. Ambrose brought it in; Gregory brought it to perfection.

²³Cf. S. of Sol. 1:3, 4.

²⁴Cf. Isa. 40:6; 1 Peter 1:24: "All flesh is grass." See Bk. XI, Ch. II, 3.

Church. Yet my mother did not attribute this good training of hers as much to the diligence of her own mother as to that of a certain elderly maidservant who had nursed her father, carrying him around on her back, as big girls carried babies. Because of her long-time service and also because of her extreme age and excellent character, she was much respected by the heads of that Christian household. The care of her master's daughters was also committed to her, and she performed her task with diligence. She was quite earnest in restraining them with a holy severity when necessary and instructing them with a sober sagacity. Thus, except at mealtimes at their parents' table – when they were fed very temperately – she would not allow them to drink even water, however parched they were with thirst. In this way she took precautions against an evil custom and added the wholesome advice: "You drink water now only because you don't control the wine; but when you are married and mistresses of pantry and cellar, you may not care for water, but the habit of drinking will be fixed." By such a method of instruction, and her authority, she restrained the longing of their tender age, and regulated even the thirst of the girls to such a decorous control that they no longer wanted what they ought not to have.

18. And yet, as your handmaid related to me, her son, there had stolen upon her a love of wine. For, in the ordinary course of things, when her parents sent her as a sober maiden to draw wine from the cask, she would hold a cup under the tap; and then, before she poured the wine into the bottle, she would wet the tips of her lips with a little of it, for more than this her taste refused. She did not do this out of any craving for drink, but out of the overflowing buoyancy of her time of life, which bubbles up with sportiveness and youthful spirits, but is usually borne down by the gravity of the old folks. And so, adding daily a little to that little – for "he that contemns small things shall fall by a little here and a little there"²⁵ – she slipped into such a habit as to drink off eagerly her little cup nearly full of wine.

Where now was that wise old woman and her strict prohibition? Could anything prevail against our secret disease if your medicine, O Lord, did not watch over us? Though father and mother and nurturers are absent, you are present, who do create, who call, and who also work some good for our salvation, through those who are set over us. What did you do at that time, O my God? How did you heal her? How did you make her whole? Didst you not bring forth from another woman's soul a hard and bitter insult, like a surgeon's knife from your secret store, and with one thrust drain off all that putrefaction? For the slave girl who used to accompany her to the cellar fell to quarreling with her little mistress, as it sometimes happened when she was alone with her, and cast in her teeth this vice of hers, along with a very bitter insult: calling her "a drunkard." Stung by this taunt, my mother saw her own vileness and immediately condemned and renounced it.

As the flattery of friends corrupts, so often do the taunts of enemies instruct. Yet you repay them, not for the good you work through their means, but for the malice they intended. That angry slave girl wanted to infuriate her young mistress, not to cure her; and that is why she spoke up when they were alone. Or perhaps it was because their quarrel just happened to break out at that time and place; or perhaps she was afraid of punishment for having told of it so late.

But you, O Lord, ruler of heaven and earth, who change to your purposes the deepest floods and

²⁵Ecclus. 19:1.

controls the turbulent tide of the ages, you heal one soul by the unsoundness of another; so that no man, when he hears of such a happening, should attribute it to his own power if another person whom he wishes to reform is reformed through a word of his.

CHAPTER IX

19. Thus modestly and soberly brought up, she was made subject to her parents by you, rather more than by her parents to you. She arrived at a marriageable age, and she was given to a husband whom she served as her lord. And she busied herself to gain him to you, preaching you to him by her behavior, in which you made her fair and reverently amiable, and admirable to her husband. For she endured with patience his infidelity and never had any dissension with her husband on this account. For she waited for your mercy upon him until, by believing in you, he might become chaste.

Moreover, even though he was earnest in friendship, he was also violent in anger; but she had learned that an angry husband should not be resisted, either in deed or in word. But as soon as he had grown calm and was tranquil, and she saw a fitting moment, she would give him a reason for her conduct, if he had been excited unreasonably. As a result, while many matrons whose husbands were more gentle than hers bore the marks of blows on their disfigured faces, and would in private talk blame the behavior of their husbands, she would blame their tongues, admonishing them seriously – though in a jesting manner – that from the hour they heard what are called the matrimonial tablets read to them, they should think of them as instruments by which they were made servants. So, always being mindful of their condition, they ought not to set themselves up in opposition to their lords. And, knowing what a furious, bad-tempered husband she endured, they marveled that it had never been rumored, nor was there any mark to show, that Patricius had ever beaten his wife, or that there had been any domestic strife between them, even for a day. And when they asked her confidentially the reason for this, she taught them the rule I have mentioned. Those who observed it confirmed the wisdom of it and rejoiced; those who did not observe it were bullied and vexed.

20. Even her mother-in-law, who was at first prejudiced against her by the whisperings of malicious servants, she conquered by submission, persevering in it with patience and meekness; with the result that the mother-in-law told her son of the tales of the meddling servants which had disturbed the domestic peace between herself and her daughter-in-law and begged him to punish them for it. In conformity with his mother's wish, and in the interest of family discipline to insure the future harmony of its members, he had those servants beaten who were pointed out by her who had discovered them; and she promised a similar reward to anyone else who, thinking to please her, should say anything evil of her daughter-in-law. After this no one dared to do so, and they lived together with a wonderful sweetness of mutual good will.

21. This other great gift you also did bestow, O my God, my Mercy, upon that good handmaid of yours, in whose womb you did create me. It was that whenever she could she acted as a peacemaker between any differing and discordant spirits, and when she heard very bitter things on either side of a controversy – the kind of bloated and undigested discord which often belches forth bitter words, when crude malice is breathed out by sharp tongues to a present friend against an absent enemy – she would disclose nothing about the one to the other except what might serve

toward their reconciliation. This might seem a small good to me if I did not know to my sorrow countless persons who, through the horrid and far-spreading infection of sin, not only repeat to enemies mutually enraged things said in passion against each other, but also add some things that were never said at all. It ought not to be enough in a truly humane man merely not to incite or increase the enmities of men by evil-speaking; he ought likewise to endeavor by kind words to extinguish them. Such a one was she – and you, her most intimate instructor, did teach her in the school of her heart.

22. Finally, her own husband, now toward the end of his earthly existence, she won over to you. Henceforth, she had no cause to complain of unfaithfulness in him, which she had endured before he became one of the faithful. She was also the servant of your servants. All those who knew her greatly praised, honored, and loved you in her because, through the witness of the fruits of a holy life, they recognized you present in her heart. For she had “been the wife of one man,”²⁶ had honored her parents, had guided her house in piety, was highly reputed for good works, and brought up her children, travailing in labor with them as often as she saw them swerving from you. Lastly, to all of us, O Lord – since of your favor you allow your servants to speak – to all of us who lived together in that association before her death in you she devoted such care as she might have if she had been mother of us all; she served us as if she had been the daughter of us all.

CHAPTER X

23. As the day now approached on which she was to depart this life – a day which you knew, but which we did not – it happened (though I believe it was by your secret ways arranged) that she and I stood alone, leaning in a certain window from which the garden of the house we occupied at Ostia could be seen. Here in this place, removed from the crowd, we were resting ourselves for the voyage after the fatigues of a long journey.

We were conversing alone very pleasantly and “forgetting those things which are past, and reaching forward toward those things which are future.”²⁷ We were in the present – and in the presence of Truth (which you art) – discussing together what is the nature of the eternal life of the saints: which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man.²⁸ We opened wide the mouth of our heart, thirsting for those supernal streams of your fountain, “the fountain of life” which is with you,²⁹ that we might be sprinkled with its waters according to our capacity and might in some measure weigh the truth of so profound a mystery.

24. And when our conversation had brought us to the point where the very highest of physical sense and the most intense illumination of physical light seemed, in comparison with the sweetness of that life to come, not worthy of comparison, nor even of mention, we lifted ourselves with a more ardent love toward the Selfsame,³⁰ and we gradually passed through all

²⁶1 Tim. 5:9.

²⁷Phil. 3:13.

²⁸Cf. 1 Cor. 2:9.

²⁹Ps. 36:9.

³⁰*Idipsum*.

the levels of bodily objects, and even through the heaven itself, where the sun and moon and stars shine on the earth. Indeed, we soared higher yet by an inner musing, speaking and marveling at your works.

And we came at last to our own minds and went beyond them, that we might climb as high as that region of unfailing plenty where you feed Israel forever with the food of truth, where life is that Wisdom by whom all things are made, both which have been and which are to be. Wisdom is not made, but is as she has been and forever shall be; for “to have been” and “to be hereafter” do not apply to her, but only “to be,” because she is eternal and “to have been” and “to be hereafter” are not eternal.

And while we were thus speaking and straining after her, we just barely touched her with the whole effort of our hearts. Then with a sigh, leaving the first fruits of the Spirit bound to that ecstasy, we returned to the sounds of our own tongue, where the spoken word had both beginning and end.³¹ But what is like to your Word, our Lord, who remains in himself without becoming old, and “makes all things new”³²?

25. What we said went something like this: “If to any man the tumult of the flesh were silenced; and the phantoms of earth and waters and air were silenced; and the poles were silent as well; indeed, if the very soul grew silent to herself, and went beyond herself by not thinking of herself; if fancies and imaginary revelations were silenced; if every tongue and every sign and every transient thing – for actually if any man could hear them, all these would say, ‘We did not create ourselves, but were created by Him who abides forever’ – and if, having uttered this, they too should be silent, having stirred our ears to hear him who created them; and if then he alone spoke, not through them but by himself, that we might hear his word, not in fleshly tongue or angelic voice, nor sound of thunder, nor the obscurity of a parable, but might hear him – him for whose sake we love these things – if we could hear him without these, as we two now strained ourselves to do, we then with rapid thought might touch on that Eternal Wisdom which abides over all. And if this could be sustained, and other visions of a far different kind be taken away, and this one should so ravish and absorb and envelop its beholder in these inward joys that his life might be eternally like that one moment of knowledge which we now sighed after – would not *this* be the reality of the saying, ‘Enter into the joy of your Lord’³³? But when shall such a thing be? Shall it not be ‘when we all shall rise again,’ and shall it not be that ‘all things will be changed’³⁴?”

26. Such a thought I was expressing, and if not in this manner and in these words, still, O Lord, you know that on that day we were talking thus and that this world, with all its joys, seemed cheap to us even as we spoke. Then my mother said: “Son, for myself I have no longer any pleasure in anything in this life. Now that my hopes in this world are satisfied, I do not know what more I want here or why I am here. There was indeed one thing for which I wished to tarry

³¹Cf. this report of a “Christian ecstasy” with the Plotinian ecstasy recounted in Bk. VII, Ch. XVII, 23, above.

³²Cf. Wis. 7:21-30; see especially v. 27: “And being but one, she [Wisdom] can do all things: and remaining in herself the same, she makes all things new.”

³³Matt. 25:21.

³⁴1 Cor. 15:51.

a little in this life, and that was that I might see you a Catholic Christian before I died. My God has answered this more than abundantly, so that I see you now made his servant and spurning all earthly happiness. What more am I to do here?"

CHAPTER XI

27. I do not well remember what reply I made to her about this. However, it was scarcely five days later – certainly not much more – that she was prostrated by fever. While she was sick, she fainted one day and was for a short time quite unconscious. We hurried to her, and when she soon regained her senses, she looked at me and my brother³⁵ as we stood by her, and said, in inquiry, "Where was I?" Then looking intently at us, dumb in our grief, she said, "Here in this place shall you bury your mother." I was silent and held back my tears; but my brother said something, wishing her the happier lot of dying in her own country and not abroad. When she heard this, she fixed him with her eye and an anxious countenance, because he savored of such earthly concerns, and then gazing at me she said, "See how he speaks." Soon after, she said to us both: "Lay this body anywhere, and do not let the care of it be a trouble to you at all. Only this I ask: that you will remember me at the Lord's altar, wherever you are." And when she had expressed her wish in such words as she could, she fell silent, in heavy pain with her increasing sickness.

28. But as I thought about your gifts, O invisible God, which you plant in the heart of your faithful ones, from which such marvelous fruits spring up, I rejoiced and gave thanks to you, remembering what I had known of how she had always been much concerned about her burial place, which she had provided and prepared for herself by the body of her husband. For as they had lived very peacefully together, her desire had always been – so little is the human mind capable of grasping things divine – that this last should be added to all that happiness, and commented on by others: that, after her pilgrimage beyond the sea, it would be granted her that the two of them, so united on earth, should lie in the same grave.

When this vanity, through the bounty of your goodness, had begun to be no longer in her heart, I do not know; but I joyfully marveled at what she had thus disclosed to me – though indeed in our conversation in the window, when she said, "What is there here for me to do any more?" she appeared not to desire to die in her own country. I heard later on that, during our stay in Ostia, she had been talking in maternal confidence to some of my friends about her contempt of this life and the blessing of death. When they were amazed at the courage which was given her, a woman, and had asked her whether she did not dread having her body buried so far from her own city, she replied: "Nothing is far from God. I do not fear that, at the end of time, he should not know the place whence he is to resurrect me." And so on the ninth day of her sickness, in the fifty-sixth year of her life and the thirty-third of mine,³⁶ that religious and devout soul was set loose from the body.

³⁵ Navigius, who had joined them in Milan, but about whom Augustine is curiously silent save for the brief and unrevealing references in *De beata vita*, I, 6, to II, 7, and *De ordine*, I, 2-3.

³⁶ A.D. 387.

CHAPTER XII

29. I closed her eyes; and there flowed in a great sadness on my heart and it was passing into tears, when at the strong behest of my mind my eyes sucked back the fountain dry, and sorrow was in me like a convulsion. As soon as she breathed her last, the boy Adeodatus burst out wailing; but he was checked by us all, and became quiet. Likewise, my own childish feeling which was, through the youthful voice of my heart, seeking escape in tears, was held back and silenced. For we did not consider it fitting to celebrate that death with tearful wails and groanings. This is the way those who die unhappy or are altogether dead are usually mourned. But she neither died unhappy nor did she altogether die.³⁷ For of this we were assured by the witness of her good life, her “faith unfeigned,”³⁸ and other manifest evidence.

30. What was it, then, that hurt me so grievously in my heart except the newly made wound, caused from having the sweet and dear habit of living together with her suddenly broken? I was full of joy because of her testimony in her last illness, when she praised my dutiful attention and called me kind, and recalled with great affection of love that she had never heard any harsh or reproachful sound from my mouth against her. But yet, O my God who made us, how can that honor I paid her be compared with her service to me? I was then left destitute of a great comfort in her, and my soul was stricken; and that life was torn apart, as it were, which had been made but one out of hers and mine together.³⁹

31. When the boy was restrained from weeping, Evodius took up the Psalter and began to sing, with the whole household responding, the psalm, “I will sing of mercy and judgment unto you, O Lord.”⁴⁰ And when they heard what we were doing, many of the brethren and religious women came together. And while those whose office it was to prepare for the funeral went about their task according to custom, I discoursed in another part of the house, with those who thought I should not be left alone, on what was appropriate to the occasion. By this balm of truth, I softened the anguish known to you. They were unconscious of it and listened intently and thought me free of any sense of sorrow. But in your ears, where none of them heard, I reproached myself for the mildness of my feelings, and restrained the flow of my grief which bowed a little to my will. The paroxysm returned again, and I knew what I repressed in my heart, even though it did not make me burst forth into tears or even change my countenance; and I was greatly annoyed that these human things had such power over me, which in the due order and destiny of our natural condition must of necessity happen. And so with a new sorrow I sorrowed for my sorrow and was wasted with a twofold sadness.

32. So, when the body was carried forth, we both went and returned without tears. For neither in those prayers which we poured forth to you, when the sacrifice of our redemption was offered up to you for her – with the body placed by the side of the grave as the custom is there, before it is lowered down into it – neither in those prayers did I weep. But I was most grievously sad in

³⁷*Nec omnino moriebatur.* Is this an echo of Horace's famous memorial ode, *Exegi monumentum aere perennius . . . non omnis moriar*? Cf. *Odes*, Book III, Ode XXX.

³⁸1 Tim. 1:5.

³⁹Cf. this passage, as Augustine doubtless intended, with the story of his morbid and immoderate grief at the death of his boyhood friend, above, Bk. IV, Chs. IV, 9, to VII, 12.

⁴⁰Ps. 101:1.

secret all the day, and with a troubled mind entreated you, as I could, to heal my sorrow; but you did not. I now believe that you were fixing in my memory, by this one lesson, the power of the bonds of all habit, even on a mind which now no longer feeds upon deception. It then occurred to me that it would be a good thing to go and bathe, for I had heard that the word for bath [*balneum*] took its name from the Greek [*balaneion*], because it washes anxiety from the mind. Now see, this also I confess to your mercy, “O Father of the fatherless”⁴¹: I bathed and felt the same as I had done before. For the bitterness of my grief was not sweated from my heart.

Then I slept, and when I awoke I found my grief not a little assuaged. And as I lay there on my bed, those true verses of Ambrose came to my mind, for you are truly,

“Deus, creator omnium,
Polique rector, vestiens
Diem decoro lumine,
Noctem sopora gratia;

Artus solutos ut quies
Reddat laboris usui
Mentesque fessas allevet,
Luctusque solvat anxios.”

“O God, Creator of us all,
Guiding the orbs celestial,
Clothing the day with lovely light,
Appointing gracious sleep by night:

Your grace our wearied limbs restore
To strengthened labor, as before,
And ease the grief of tired minds
From that deep torment which it finds.”⁴²

33. And then, little by little, there came back to me my former memories of your handmaid: her devout life toward you, her holy tenderness and attentiveness toward us, which had suddenly been taken away from me – and it was a solace for me to weep in your sight, for her and for myself, about her and about myself. Thus I set free the tears which before I repressed, that they might flow at will, spreading them out as a pillow beneath my heart. And it rested on them, for your ears were near me – not those of a man, who would have made a scornful comment about my weeping. But now in writing I confess it to you, O Lord! Read it who will, and comment how he will, and if he finds me to have sinned in weeping for my mother for part of an hour – that mother who was for a while dead to my eyes, who had for many years wept for me that I might live in your eyes – let him not laugh at me; but if he be a man of generous love, let him weep for my sins against you, the Father of all the brethren of your Christ.

⁴¹Ps. 68:5.

⁴²Sir Tobie Mathew (adapted). For Augustine's own analysis of the scansion and structure of this hymn, see *De musica*, VI, 2:2-3; for a brief commentary on the Latin text, see A. S. Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 44-49.

CHAPTER XIII

34. Now that my heart is healed of that wound – so far as it can be charged against me as a carnal affection – I pour out to you, O our God, on behalf of your handmaid, tears of a very different sort: those which flow from a spirit broken by the thoughts of the dangers of every soul that dies in Adam. And while she had been “made alive” in Christ⁴³ even before she was freed from the flesh, and had so lived as to praise your name both by her faith and by her life, yet I would not dare say that from the time you did regenerate her by baptism no word came out of her mouth against your precepts. But it has been declared by your Son, the Truth, that “whosoever shall say to his brother, You fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.”⁴⁴ And there would be doom even for the life of a praiseworthy man if you judged it with your mercy set aside. But since you do not so stringently inquire after our sins, we hope with confidence to find some place in your presence. But whoever recounts his actual and true merits to you, what is he doing but recounting to you your own gifts? Oh, if only men would know themselves as men, then “he that glories” would “glory in the Lord”⁴⁵!

35. Thus now, O my Praise and my Life, O God of my heart, forgetting for a little her good deeds for which I give joyful thanks to you, I now beseech you for the sins of my mother. Hearken unto me, through that Medicine of our wounds, who did hang upon the tree and who sit at your right hand “making intercession for us.”⁴⁶ I know that she acted in mercy, and from the heart forgave her debtors their debts.⁴⁷ I beseech you also to forgive her debts, whatever she contracted during so many years since the water of salvation. Forgive her, O Lord, forgive her, I beseech you; “enter not into judgment” with her.⁴⁸ Let your mercy be exalted above your justice, for your words are true and you have promised mercy to the merciful, that the merciful shall obtain mercy.⁴⁹ This is your gift, who have mercy on whom you will and who will have compassion on whom you do have compassion on.⁵⁰

36. Indeed, I believe you have already done what I ask of you, but “accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord.”⁵¹ For when the day of her dissolution was so close, she took no thought to have her body sumptuously wrapped or embalmed with spices. Nor did she covet a handsome monument, or even care to be buried in her own country. About these things she gave no commands at all, but only desired to have her name remembered at your altar, where she had served without the omission of a single day, and where she knew that the holy sacrifice was dispensed by which that handwriting that was against us is blotted out; and that enemy vanquished who, when he summed up our offenses and searched for something to bring against

⁴³1 Cor. 15:22.

⁴⁴Matt. 5:22.

⁴⁵2 Cor. 10:17.

⁴⁶Rom. 8:34.

⁴⁷Cf. Matt. 6:12.

⁴⁸Ps. 143:2.

⁴⁹Matt. 5:7.

⁵⁰Cf. Rom. 9:15.

⁵¹Ps. 119:108.

us, could find nothing in Him, in whom we conquer.

Who will restore to him the innocent blood? Who will repay him the price with which he bought us, so as to take us from him? Thus to the sacrament of our redemption did your hand maid bind her soul by the bond of faith. Let none separate her from your protection. Let not the “lion” and “dragon” bar her way by force or fraud. For she will not reply that she owes nothing, lest she be convicted and duped by that cunning deceiver. Rather, she will answer that her sins are forgiven by Him to whom no one is able to repay the price which he, who owed us nothing, laid down for us all.

37. Therefore, let her rest in peace with her husband, before and after whom she was married to no other man; whom she obeyed with patience, bringing fruit to you that she might also win him for you. And inspire, O my Lord my God, inspire your servants, my brothers; your sons, my masters, who with voice and heart and writings I serve, that as many of them as shall read these confessions may also at your altar remember Monica, your handmaid, together with Patricius, once her husband; by whose flesh you did bring me into this life, in a manner I know not. May they with pious affection remember my parents in this transitory life, and remember my brothers under you our Father in our Catholic mother; and remember my fellow citizens in the eternal Jerusalem, for which your people sigh in their pilgrimage from birth until their return. So be fulfilled what my mother desired of me – more richly in the prayers of so many gained for her through these confessions of mine than by my prayers alone.

BOOK TEN – Motivations and Appetites

From autobiography to self-analysis. Augustine turns from his memories of the past to the inner mysteries of memory itself. In doing so, he reviews his motives for these written “confessions,” and seeks to chart the path by which men come to God. But this brings him into the intricate analysis of memory and its relation to the self and its powers. This done, he explores the meaning and mode of true prayer. In conclusion, he undertakes a detailed analysis of appetite and the temptations to which the flesh and the soul are heirs, and comes finally to see how necessary and right it was for the Mediator between God and man to have been the God-Man.

CHAPTER I

1. Let me know you, O my Knower; let me know you even as I am known.¹ O Strength of my soul, enter it and prepare it for yourself that you may have and hold it, without “spot or blemish.”² This is my hope, therefore have I spoken; and in this hope I rejoice whenever I rejoice aright. But as for the other things of this life, they deserve our lamentations less, the more we lament them; and some should be lamented all the more, the less men care for them. For see, “you desire truth”³ and “he who does the truth comes to the light.”⁴ This is what I wish to do through confession in my heart before you, and in my writings before many witnesses.

CHAPTER II

2. And what is there in me that could be hidden from you, Lord, to whose eyes the abysses of man’s conscience are naked, even if I were unwilling to confess it to you? In doing so I would only hide you from myself, not myself from you. But now that my groaning is witness to the fact that I am dissatisfied with myself, you shine forth and satisfy. You are beloved and desired; so that I blush for myself, and renounce myself and choose you, for I can neither please you nor myself except in you. To you, then, O Lord, I am laid bare, whatever I am, and I have already said with what profit I may confess to you. I do not do it with words and sounds of the flesh but with the words of the soul, and with the sound of my thoughts, which your ear knows. For when I am wicked, to confess to you means nothing less than to be dissatisfied with myself; but when I am truly devout, it means nothing less than not to attribute my virtue to myself; because you, O Lord, bless the righteous, but first you justify him while he is yet ungodly. My confession therefore, O my God, is made unto you silently in your sight – and yet not silently. As far as sound is concerned, it is silent. But in strong affection it cries aloud. For neither do I give voice to something that sounds right to men, which you have not heard from me before, nor do you hear anything of the kind from me which you did not first say to me.

¹Cf. 1 Cor. 13:12.

²Eph. 5:27.

³Ps. 51:6.

⁴John 3:21.

CHAPTER III

3. What is it to me that men should hear my confessions as if it were they who were going to cure all my infirmities? People are curious to know the lives of others, but slow to correct their own. Why are they anxious to hear from me what I am, when they are unwilling to hear from you what they are? And how can they tell when they hear what I say about myself whether I speak the truth, since no man knows what is in a man “save the spirit of man which is in him”⁵? But if they were to hear from you something concerning themselves, they would not be able to say, “The Lord is lying.” For what does it mean to hear from you about themselves but to know themselves? And who is he that knows himself and says, “This is false,” unless he himself is lying? But, because “love believes all things”⁶ – at least among those who are bound together in love by its bonds – I confess to you, O Lord, so that men may also hear; for if I cannot prove to them that I confess the truth, yet those whose ears love opens to me will believe me.

4. But will you, O my inner Physician, make clear to me what profit I am to gain in doing this? For the confessions of my past sins (which you have “forgiven and covered”⁷ that you might make me blessed in you, transforming my soul by faith and your sacrament), when *they* are read and heard, may stir up the heart so that it will stop dozing along in despair, saying, “I cannot”; but will instead awake in the love of your mercy and the sweetness of your grace, by which he that is weak is strong, provided he is made conscious of his own weakness. And it will please those who are good to hear about the past errors of those who are now freed from them. And they will take delight, not because they are errors, but because they were and are so no longer. What profit, then, O Lord my God – to whom my conscience makes her daily confession, far more confident in the hope of your mercy than in her own innocence – what profit is there, I ask you, in confessing to men in your presence, through this book, both what I am now as well as what I have been? For I have seen and spoken of my harvest of things past. But what am I *now*, at this very moment of making my confessions? Many different people desire to know, both those who know me and those who do not know me. Some have heard about me or from me, but their ear is not close to my heart, where I am whatever it is that I am. They have the desire to hear me confess what I am within, where they can neither extend eye nor ear nor mind. They desire as those willing to believe – but will they understand? For the love by which they are good tells them that I am not lying in my confessions, and the love in them believes me.

CHAPTER IV

5. But for what profit do they desire this? Will they wish me happiness when they learn how near I have approached you, by your gifts? And will they pray for me when they learn how much I am still kept back by my own weight? To such as these I will declare myself. For it is no small profit, O Lord my God, that many people should give thanks to you on my account and that many should entreat you for my sake. Let the brotherly soul love in me what you teach him should be loved, and let him lament in me what you teach him should be lamented. Let it be the soul of a brother that does this, and not a stranger – not one of those “strange children, whose

⁵1 Cor. 2:11.

⁶1 Cor. 13:7.

⁷Ps. 32:1.

mouth speaks vanity, and whose right hand is the right hand of falsehood.”⁸ But let my brother do it who, when he approves of me, rejoices for me, but when he disapproves of me is sorry for me; because whether he approves or disapproves, he loves me. To such I will declare myself. Let them be refreshed by my good deeds and sigh over my evil ones. My good deeds are your acts and your gifts; my evil ones are my own faults and your judgment. Let them breathe expansively at the one and sigh over the other. And let hymns and tears ascend in your sight out of their brotherly hearts – which are your censurers.⁹ And, O Lord, who take delight in the incense of your holy temple, have mercy upon me according to your great mercy, for your name’s sake. And do not, on any account whatever, abandon what you have begun in me. Go on, rather, to complete what is yet imperfect in me.

6. This, then, is the fruit of my confessions (not of what I was, but of what I am), that I may not confess this before you alone, in a secret exultation with trembling and a secret sorrow with hope, but also in the ears of the believing sons of men – who are the companions of my joy and sharers of my mortality, my fellow citizens and fellow pilgrims – those who have gone before and those who are to follow after, as well as the comrades of my present way. These are your servants, my brothers, whom you desire to be your sons. They are my masters, whom you have commanded me to serve if I desire to live with and in you. But this your Word would mean little to me if it commanded in words alone, without your prevenient action. I do this, then, both in act and word. I do this under your wings, in a danger too great to risk if it were not that under your wings my soul is subject to you, and my weakness known to you. I am insufficient, but my Father lives forever, and my Defender is sufficient for me. For he is the Selfsame who did beget me and who watches over me; you are the Selfsame who are all my good. You are the Omnipotent, who are with me, even before I am with you. To those, therefore, whom you command me to serve, I will declare, not what I was, but what I now am and what I will continue to be. But I do not judge myself. Thus, therefore, let me be heard.

CHAPTER V

7. For it is you, O Lord, who judge me. For although no man “knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man which is in him,”¹⁰ yet there is something of man which “the spirit of the man which is in him” does not know itself. But you, O Lord, who made him, know him completely. And even I – though in your sight I despise myself and count myself but dust and ashes – even I know something about you which I do not know about myself. And it is certain that “now we see through a glass darkly,” not yet “face to face.”¹¹ Therefore, as long as I journey away from you, I am more present with myself than with you. I know that you can not suffer violence, but I myself do not know what temptations I can resist, and what I cannot. But there is hope, because you are faithful and you will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that we may be able to bear it. I would therefore confess what I know about myself; I will also confess what I do not know about

⁸Ps. 144:7, 8.

⁹Cf. Rev. 8:3-5. "And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints went up before God out of the angel's hand" (v. 4).

¹⁰1 Cor. 2:11.

¹¹1 Cor. 13:12.

myself. What I do know of myself, I know from your enlightening of me; and what I do not know of myself, I will continue not to know until the time when my “darkness is as the noonday”¹² in your sight.

CHAPTER VI

8. It is not with a doubtful consciousness, but one fully certain that I love you, O Lord. You have smitten my heart with your Word, and I have loved you. And see also the heaven, and earth, and all that is in them – on every side they tell me to love you, and they do not cease to tell this to all men, “so that they are without excuse.”¹³ Wherefore, still more deeply will you have mercy on whom you will have mercy, and compassion on whom you will have compassion.¹⁴ For otherwise, both heaven and earth would tell abroad your praises to deaf ears.

But what is it that I love in loving you? Not physical beauty, nor the splendor of time, nor the radiance of the light – so pleasant to our eyes – nor the sweet melodies of the various kinds of songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers and ointments and spices; not manna and honey, not the limbs embraced in physical love – it is not these I love when I love my God. Yet it is true that I love a certain kind of light and sound and fragrance and food and embrace in loving my God, who is the light and sound and fragrance and food and embracement of my inner man – where that light shines into my soul which no place can contain, where time does not snatch away the lovely sound, where no breeze disperses the sweet fragrance, where no eating diminishes the food there provided, and where there is an embrace that no satiety comes to sunder. This is what I love when I love my God.

9. And what is this God? I asked the earth, and it answered, “I am not he”; and everything in the earth made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps and the creeping things, and they replied, “We are not your God; seek above us.” I asked the fleeting winds, and the whole air with its inhabitants answered, “Anaximenes¹⁵ was deceived; I am not God.” I asked the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars; and they answered, “Neither are we the God whom you seek.” And I replied to all these things which stand around the door of my flesh: “You have told me about my God, that you are not he. Tell me something about him.” And with a loud voice they all cried out, “He made us.” My question had come from my observation of them, and their reply came from their beauty of order. And I turned my thoughts into myself and said, “Who are you?” And I answered, “A man.” For see, there is in me both a body and a soul; the one without, the other within. In which of these should I have sought my God, whom I had already sought with my body from earth to heaven, as far as I was able to send those messengers – the beams of my eyes? But the inner part is the better part; for to it, as both ruler and judge, all these messengers of the senses report the answers of heaven and earth and all the things therein, who said, “We are not God, but he made us.” My inner man knew these things through the ministry of the outer

¹²Isa. 58:10.

¹³Rom. 1:20.

¹⁴Cf. Rom. 9:15.

¹⁵One of the pre-Socratic “physiologers” who taught that αἰθήρ was the primary element in ἡ φύσις. Cf. Cicero’s *On the Nature of the Gods* (a likely source for Augustine’s knowledge of early Greek philosophy), I, 10: “After Anaximander comes Anaximenes, who taught that the air is God. . . .”

man, and I, the inner man, knew all this – I, the soul, through the senses of my body.¹⁶ I asked the whole frame of earth about my God, and it answered, “I am not he, but he made me.”

10. Is not this beauty of form visible to all whose senses are unimpaired? Why, then, does it not say the same things to all? Animals, both small and great, see it but they are unable to interrogate its meaning, because their senses are not endowed with the reason that would enable them to judge the evidence which the senses report. But man can interrogate it, so that “the invisible things of him . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”¹⁷ But men love these created things too much; they are brought into subjection to them – and, as subjects, are not able to judge. None of these created things reply to their questioners unless they can make rational judgments. The creatures will not alter their voice – that is, their beauty of form – if one man simply sees what another both sees and questions, so that the world appears one way to this man and another to that. It appears the same way to both; but it is mute to this one and it speaks to that one. Indeed, it actually speaks to all, but only they understand it who compare the voice received from without with the truth within. For the truth says to me, “Neither heaven nor earth nor anybody is your God.” Their very nature tells this to the one who beholds¹⁸ them. “They are a mass, less in part than the whole.” Now, O my soul, you are my better part, and to you I speak; since you animate the whole mass of your body, giving it life, whereas no body furnishes life to a body. But your God is the life of your life.

CHAPTER VII

11. What is it, then, that I love when I love my God? Who is he that is beyond the topmost point of my soul? Yet by this very soul will I mount up to him. I will soar beyond that power of mine by which I am united to the body, and by which the whole structure of it is filled with life. Yet it is not by that vital power that I find my God. For then “the horse and the mule, that have no understanding,”¹⁹ also might find him, since they have the same vital power, by which their bodies also live. But there is, besides the power by which I animate my body, another by which I endow my flesh with sense – a power that the Lord has provided for me; commanding that the eye is not to hear and the ear is not to see, but that I am to see by the eye and to hear by the ear; and giving to each of the other senses its own proper place and function, through the diversity of which I, the single mind, act. I will soar also beyond this power of mine, for the horse and mule have this too, for they also perceive through their bodily senses.

CHAPTER VIII

12. I will soar, then, beyond this power of my nature also, still rising by degrees toward him who made me. And I enter the fields and spacious halls of memory, where are stored as treasures the countless images that have been brought into them from all manner of things by the senses. There, in the memory, is likewise stored what we cogitate, either by enlarging or reducing our

¹⁶An important text for Augustine's conception of sensation and the relation of body and mind. Cf. *On Music*, VI, 5:10; *The Magnitude of the Soul*, 25:48; *On the Trinity*, XII, 2:2; see also F. Coplestone, *A History of Philosophy* (London, 1950), II, 51-60, and E. Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de Saint Augustin*, pp. 74-87.

¹⁷Rom. 1:20.

¹⁸Reading *videnti* (with De Labriolle) instead of *vident* (as in Skutella).

¹⁹Ps. 32:9.

perceptions, or by altering one way or another those things which the senses have made contact with; and everything else that has been entrusted to it and stored up in it, which oblivion has not yet swallowed up and buried.

When I go into this storehouse, I ask that what I want should be brought forth. Some things appear immediately, but others require to be searched for longer, and then dragged out, as it were, from some hidden recess. Other things hurry forth in crowds, on the other hand, and while something else is sought and inquired for, they leap into view as if to say, “Is it not we, perhaps?” These I brush away with the hand of my heart from the face of my memory, until finally the thing I want makes its appearance out of its secret cell. Some things suggest themselves without effort, and in continuous order, just as they are called for – the things that come first give place to those that follow, and in so doing are treasured up again to be forthcoming when I want them. All of this happens when I repeat a thing from memory.

13. All these things, each one of which came into memory in its own particular way, are stored up separately and under the general categories of understanding. For example, light and all colors and forms of bodies came in through the eyes; sounds of all kinds by the ears; all smells by the passages of the nostrils; all flavors by the gate of the mouth; by the sensation of the whole body, there is brought in what is hard or soft, hot or cold, smooth or rough, heavy or light, whether external or internal to the body. The vast cave of memory, with its numerous and mysterious recesses, receives all these things and stores them up, to be recalled and brought forth when required. Each experience enters by its own door, and is stored up in the memory. And yet the things themselves do not enter it, but only the images of the things perceived are there for thought to remember. And who can tell how these images are formed, even if it is evident which of the senses brought which perception in and stored it up? For even when I am in darkness and silence I can bring out colors in my memory if I wish, and discern between black and white and the other shades as I wish; and at the same time, sounds do not break in and disturb what is drawn in by my eyes, and which I am considering, because the sounds which are also there are stored up, as it were, apart. And these too I can summon if I please and they are immediately present in memory. And though my tongue is at rest and my throat silent, yet I can sing as I will; and those images of color, which are as truly present as before, do not interpose themselves or interrupt while another treasure which had flowed in through the ears is being thought about. Similarly all the other things that were brought in and heaped up by all the other senses, I can recall at my pleasure. And I distinguish the scent of lilies from that of violets while actually smelling nothing; and I prefer honey to mead, a smooth thing to a rough, even though I am neither tasting nor handling them, but only remembering them.

14. All this I do within myself, in that huge hall of my memory. For in it, heaven, earth, and sea are present to me, and whatever I can cogitate about them – except what I have forgotten. There also I meet myself and recall myself²⁰ – what, when, or where I did a thing, and how I felt when I did it. There are all the things that I remember, either having experienced them myself or been told about them by others. Out of the same storehouse, with these past impressions, I can construct now this, now that, image of things that I either have experienced or have believed on

²⁰The notion of the soul's immediate self-knowledge is a basic conception in Augustine's psychology and epistemology; cf. the refutation of skepticism, *Si fallor, sum* in *On Free Will*, II, 3:7; see also the *City of God*, XI, 26.

the basis of experience – and from these I can further construct future actions, events, and hopes; and I can meditate on all these things as if they were present. “I will do this or that” – I say to myself in that vast recess of my mind, with its full store of so many and such great images – “and this or that will follow upon it.” “O that this or that could happen!” “God prevent this or that.” I speak to myself in this way; and when I speak, the images of what I am speaking about are present out of the same store of memory; and if the images were absent I could say nothing at all about them.

15. Great is this power of memory, exceedingly great, O my God – a large and boundless inner hall! Who has plumbed the depths of it? Yet it is a power of my mind, and it belongs to my nature. But I do not myself grasp all that I am. Thus the mind is far too narrow to contain itself. But where can that part of it be which it does not contain? Is it outside and not in itself? How can it be, then, that the mind cannot grasp itself? A great marvel rises in me; astonishment seizes me. Men go forth to marvel at the heights of mountains and the huge waves of the sea, the broad flow of the rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the orbits of the stars, and yet they neglect to marvel at themselves. Nor do they wonder how it is that, when I spoke of all these things, I was not looking at them with my eyes – and yet I could not have spoken about them had it not been that I was actually seeing within, in my memory, those mountains and waves and rivers and stars which I have seen, and that ocean which I believe in – and with the same vast spaces between them as when I saw them outside me. But when I saw them outside me, I did not take them into me by seeing them; and the things themselves are not inside me, but only their images. And yet I knew through which physical sense each experience had made an impression on me.

CHAPTER IX

16. And yet this is not all that the unlimited capacity of my memory stores up. In memory, there are also all that one has learned of the liberal sciences, and has not forgotten – removed still further, so to say, into an inner place which is not a place. Of these things it is not the images that are retained, but the things themselves. For what literature and logic are, and what I know about how many different kinds of questions there are – all these are stored in my memory as they are, so that I have not taken in the image and left the thing outside. It is not as though a sound had sounded and passed away like a voice heard by the ear which leaves a trace by which it can be called into memory again, as if it were still sounding in mind while it did so no longer outside. Nor is it the same as an odor which, even after it has passed and vanished into the wind, affects the sense of smell – which then conveys into the memory the *image* of the smell which is what we recall and re-create; or like food which, once in the belly, surely now has no taste and yet does have a kind of taste in the memory; or like anything that is felt by the body through the sense of touch, which still remains as an image in the memory after the external object is removed. For these things themselves are not put into the memory. Only the images of them are gathered with a marvelous quickness and stored, as it were, in the most wonderful filing system, and are thence produced in a marvelous way by the act of remembering.

CHAPTER X

17. But now when I hear that there are three kinds of questions – “Whether a thing is? What it is? Of what kind it is?” – I do indeed retain the images of the sounds of which these words are

composed and I know that those sounds pass through the air with a noise and now no longer exist. But the things themselves which were signified by those sounds I never could reach by any sense of the body nor see them at all except by my mind. And what I have stored in my memory was not their signs, but the things signified.

How they got into me, let them tell who can. For I examine all the gates of my flesh, but I cannot find the door by which any of them entered. For the eyes say, “If they were colored, we reported that.” The ears say, “If they gave any sound, we gave notice of that.” The nostrils say, “If they smell, they passed in by us.” The sense of taste says, “If they have no flavor, don’t ask me about them.” The sense of touch says, “If it had no bodily mass, I did not touch it, and if I never touched it, I gave no report about it.”

Whence and how did these things enter into my memory? I do not know. For when I first learned them, it was not that I believed them on the credit of another man’s mind, but I recognized them in my own; and I saw them as true, took them into my mind and laid them up, so to say, where I could get at them again whenever I willed. There they were, then, even before I learned them, but they were not in my memory. Where were they, then? How does it come about that when they were spoken of, I could acknowledge them and say, “So it is, it is true,” unless they were already in the memory, though far back and hidden, as it were, in the more secret caves, so that unless they had been drawn out by the teaching of another person, I should perhaps never have been able to think of them at all?

CHAPTER XI

18. Thus we find that learning those things whose images we do not take in by our senses, but which we intuit within ourselves without images and as they actually are, is nothing else except the gathering together of those same things which the memory already contains – but in an indiscriminate and confused manner – and putting them together by careful observation as they are at hand in the memory; so that whereas they formerly lay hidden, scattered, or neglected, they now come easily to present themselves to the mind which is now familiar with them. And how many things of this sort my memory has stored up, which have already been discovered and, as I said, laid up for ready reference. These are the things we may be said to have learned and to know. Yet, if I cease to recall them even for short intervals of time, they are again so submerged – and slide back, as it were, into the further reaches of the memory – that they must be drawn out again as if new from the same place (for there is nowhere else for them to have gone) and must be collected [*cogenda*] so that they can become known. In other words, they must be gathered up [*colligenda*] from their dispersion. This is where we get the word *cogitate* [*cogitare*]. For *cogo* [collect] and *cogito* [to go on collecting] have the same relation to each other as *ago* [do] and *agito* [do frequently], and *facio* [make] and *factito* [make frequently]. But the mind has properly laid claim to this word [*cogitate*] so that not everything that is gathered together anywhere, but only what is collected and gathered together in the mind, is properly said to be “cogitated.”

CHAPTER XII

19. The memory also contains the principles and the unnumbered laws of numbers and dimensions. None of these has been impressed on the memory by a physical sense, because they

have neither color nor sound, nor taste, nor sense of touch. I have heard the sound of the words by which these things are signified when they are discussed: but the sounds are one thing, the things another. For the sounds are one thing in Greek, another in Latin; but the things themselves are neither Greek nor Latin nor any other language. I have seen the lines of the craftsmen, the finest of which are like a spider's web, but mathematical lines are different. They are not the images of such things as the eye of my body has showed me. The man who knows them does so without any cogitation of physical objects whatever, but intuits them within himself. I have perceived with all the senses of my body the numbers we use in counting; but the numbers by which we count are far different from these. They are not the images of these; they simply are. Let the man who does not see these things mock me for saying them; and I will pity him while he laughs at me.

CHAPTER XIII

20. All these things I hold in my memory, and I remember how I learned them. I also remember many things that I have heard quite falsely urged against them, which, even if they are false, yet it is not false that I have remembered them. And I also remember that I have distinguished between the truths and the false objections, and now I see that it is one thing to distinguish these things and another to remember that I did distinguish them when I have cogitated on them. I remember, then, both that I have often understood these things and also that I am now storing away in my memory what I distinguish and comprehend of them so that later on I may remember just as I understand them now. Therefore, I remember that I remembered, so that if afterward I call to mind that I once was able to remember these things it will be through the power of memory that I recall it.

CHAPTER XIV

21. This same memory also contains the feelings of my mind; not in the manner in which the mind itself experienced them, but very differently according to a power peculiar to memory. For without being joyous now, I can remember that I once was joyous, and without being sad, I can recall my past sadness. I can remember past fears without fear, and former desires without desire. Again, the contrary happens. Sometimes when I am joyous I remember my past sadness, and when sad, remember past joy.

This is not to be marveled at as far as the body is concerned; for the mind is one thing and the body another.²¹ If, therefore, when I am happy, I recall some past bodily pain, it is not so strange. But even as this memory is experienced, it is identical with the mind – as when we tell someone to remember something we say, “See that you bear this in mind”; and when we forget a thing, we say, “It did not enter my mind” or “It slipped my mind.” Thus we call memory itself mind.

Since this is so, how does it happen that when I am joyful I can still remember past sorrow? Thus the mind has joy, and the memory has sorrow; and the mind is joyful from the joy that is in it, yet

²¹Again, the mind-body dualism typical of the Augustinian tradition. Cf. E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1940), pp. 173-188; and E. Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure* (Sheed & Ward, New York, 1938), ch. XI.

the memory is not sad from the sadness that is in it. Is it possible that the memory does not belong to the mind? Who will say so? The memory doubtless is, so to say, the belly of the mind: and joy and sadness are like sweet and bitter food, which when they are committed to the memory are, so to say, passed into the belly where they can be stored but no longer tasted. It is ridiculous to consider this an analogy; yet they are not utterly unlike.

22. But look, it is from my memory that I produce it when I say that there are four basic emotions of the mind: desire, joy, fear, sadness. Whatever kind of analysis I may be able to make of these, by dividing each into its particular species, and by defining it, I still find what to say in my memory and it is from my memory that I draw it out. Yet I am not moved by any of these emotions when I call them to mind by remembering them. Moreover, before I recalled them and thought about them, they were there in the memory; and this is how they could be brought forth in remembrance. Perhaps, therefore, just as food is brought up out of the belly by rumination, so also these things are drawn up out of the memory by recall. But why, then, does not the man who is thinking about the emotions, and is thus recalling them, feel in the mouth of his reflection the sweetness of joy or the bitterness of sadness? Is the comparison unlike in this because it is not complete at every point? For who would willingly speak on these subjects, if as often as we used the term sadness or fear, we should thereby be compelled to be sad or fearful? And yet we could never speak of them if we did not find them in our memories, not merely as the sounds of the names, as their images are impressed on it by the physical senses, but also the notions of the things themselves – which we did not receive by any gate of the flesh, but which the mind itself recognizes by the experience of its own passions, and has entrusted to the memory; or else which the memory itself has retained without their being entrusted to it.

CHAPTER XV

23. Now whether all this is by means of images or not, who can rightly affirm? For I name a stone, I name the sun, and those things themselves are not present to my senses, but their images are present in my memory. I name some pain of the body, yet it is not present when there is no pain; yet if there were not some such image of it in my memory, I could not even speak of it, nor should I be able to distinguish it from pleasure. I name bodily health when I am sound in body, and the thing itself is indeed present in me. At the same time, unless there were some image of it in my memory, I could not possibly call to mind what the sound of this name signified. Nor would sick people know what was meant when health was named, unless the same image were preserved by the power of memory, even though the thing itself is absent from the body. I can name the numbers we use in counting, and it is not their images but themselves that are in my memory. I name the image of the sun, and this too is in my memory. For I do not recall the image of that image, but that image itself, for the image itself is present when I remember it. I name memory and I know what I name. But where do I know it, except in the memory itself? Is it also present to itself by its image, and not by itself?

CHAPTER XVI

24. When I name forgetfulness, and understand what I mean by the name, how could I understand it if I did not remember it? And if I refer not to the sound of the name, but to the thing which the term signifies, how could I know what that sound signified if I had forgotten

what the name means? When, therefore, I remember memory, then memory is present to itself by itself, but when I remember forgetfulness then both memory and forgetfulness are present together – the memory by which I remember the forgetfulness which I remember. But what is forgetfulness except the privation of memory? How, then, is that present to my memory which, when it controls my mind, I cannot remember? But if what we remember we store up in our memory; and if, unless we remembered forgetfulness, we could never know the thing signified by the term when we heard it – then, forgetfulness is contained in the memory. It is present so that we do not forget it, but since it is present, we do forget.

From this it is to be inferred that when we remember forgetfulness, it is not present to the memory through itself, but through its image; because if forgetfulness were present through itself, it would not lead us to remember, but only to forget. Now who will someday work this out? Who can understand how it is?

25. Truly, O Lord, I toil with this and labor in myself. I have become a troublesome field that requires hard labor and heavy sweat. For we are not now searching out the tracts of heaven, or measuring the distances of the stars or inquiring about the weight of the earth. It is I myself – I, the mind – who remember. This is not much to marvel at, if what I myself am is not far from me. And what is nearer to me than myself? For see, I am not able to comprehend the force of my own memory, though I could not even call my own name without it. But what shall I say, when it is clear to me that I remember forgetfulness? Should I affirm that what I remember is not in my memory? Or should I say that forgetfulness is in my memory to the end that I should not forget? Both of these views are most absurd. But what third view is there? How can I say that the image of forgetfulness is retained by my memory, and not forgetfulness itself, when I remember it? How can I say this, since for the image of anything to be imprinted on the memory the thing itself must necessarily have been present first by which the image could have been imprinted? Thus I remember Carthage; thus, also, I remember all the other places where I have been. And I remember the faces of men whom I have seen and things reported by the other senses. I remember the health or sickness of the body. And when these objects were present, my memory received images from them so that they remain present in order for me to see them and reflect upon them in my mind, if I choose to remember them in their absence. If, therefore, forgetfulness is retained in the memory through its image and not through itself, then this means that it itself was once present, so that its image might have been imprinted. But when it was present, how did it write its image on the memory, since forgetfulness, by its presence, blots out even what it finds already written there? And yet in some way or other, even though it is incomprehensible and inexplicable, I am still quite certain that I also remember forgetfulness, by which we remember that something is blotted out.

CHAPTER XVII

26. Great is the power of memory. It is a true marvel, O my God, a profound and infinite multiplicity! And this is the mind, and this I myself am. What, then, am I, O my God? Of what nature am I? A life various, and manifold, and exceedingly vast. Behold in the numberless halls and caves, in the innumerable fields and dens and caverns of my memory, full without measure of numberless kinds of things – present there either through images as all bodies are; or present in the things themselves as are our thoughts; or by some notion or observation as our emotions

are, which the memory retains even though the mind feels them no longer, as long as whatever is in the memory is also in the mind – through all these I run and fly to and fro. I penetrate into them on this side and that as far as I can and yet there is nowhere any end.

So great is the power of memory, so great the power of life in man whose life is mortal! What, then, shall I do, O you my true life, my God? I will pass even beyond this power of mine that is called memory – I will pass beyond it, that I may come to you, O lovely Light. And what are you saying to me? See, I soar by my mind toward you, who remain above me. I will also pass beyond this power of mine that is called memory, desiring to reach you where you can be reached, and wishing to cleave to you where it is possible to cleave to you. For even beasts and birds possess memory, or else they could never find their lairs and nests again, nor display many other things they know and do by habit. Indeed, they could not even form their habits except by their memories. I will therefore pass even beyond memory that I may reach Him who has differentiated me from the four-footed beasts and the fowls of the air by making me a wiser creature. Thus I will pass beyond memory; but where shall I find you, who are the true Good and the steadfast Sweetness? But where shall I find you? If I find you without memory, then I shall have no memory of you; and how could I find you at all, if I do not remember you?

CHAPTER XVIII

27. For the woman who lost her small coin²² and searched for it with a light would never have found it unless she had remembered it. For when it was found, how could she have known whether it was the same coin, if she had not remembered it? I remember having lost and found many things, and I have learned this from that experience: that when I was searching for any of them and was asked: “Is this it? Is that it?” I answered, “No,” until finally what I was seeking was shown to me. But if I had not remembered it – whatever it was – even though it was shown to me, I still would not have found it because I could not have recognized it. And this is the way it always is when we search for and find anything that is lost. Still, if anything is accidentally lost from sight – not from memory, as a visible body might be – its image is retained within, and the thing is searched for until it is restored to sight. And when the thing is found, it is recognized by the image of it which is within. And we do not say that we have found what we have lost unless we can recognize it, and we cannot recognize it unless we remember it. But all the while the thing lost to the sight was retained in the memory.

CHAPTER XIX

28. But what happens when the memory itself loses something, as when we forget anything and try to recall it? Where, finally, do we search, but in the memory itself? And there, if by chance one thing is offered for another, we refuse it until we meet with what we are looking for; and when we do, we recognize that this is it. But we could not do this unless we recognized it, nor could we have recognized it unless we remembered it. Yet we had indeed forgotten it.

Perhaps the whole of it had not slipped out of our memory; but a part was retained by which the other lost part was sought for, because the memory realized that it was not operating as smoothly

²²Luke 15:8.

as usual and was being held up by the crippling of its habitual working; hence, it demanded the restoration of what was lacking.

For example, if we see or think of some man we know, and, having forgotten his name, try to recall it – if some other thing presents itself, we cannot tie it into the effort to remember, because it was not habitually thought of in association with him. It is consequently rejected, until something comes into the mind on which our knowledge can rightly rest as the familiar and sought-for object. And where does this name come back from, save from the memory itself? For even when we recognize it by another's reminding us of it, still it is from the memory that this comes, for we do not believe it as something new; but when we recall it, we admit that what was said was correct. But if the name had been entirely blotted out of the mind, we should not be able to recollect it even when reminded of it. For we have not entirely forgotten anything if we can remember that we have forgotten it. For a lost notion, one that we have entirely forgotten, we cannot even search for.

CHAPTER XX

29. How, then, do I seek you, O Lord? For when I seek you, my God, I seek a happy life. I will seek you that my soul may live.²³ For my body lives by my soul, and my soul lives by you. How, then, do I seek a happy life, since happiness is not mine till I can rightly say: "It is enough. This is it." How do I seek it? Is it by remembering, as though I had forgotten it and still knew that I had forgotten it? Do I seek it in longing to learn of it as though it were something unknown, which either I had never known or had so completely forgotten as not even to remember that I had forgotten it? Is not the happy life the thing that all desire, and is there anyone who does not desire it at all?²⁴ But where would they have gotten the knowledge of it, that they should so desire it? Where have they seen it that they should so love it? It is somehow true that we have it, but how I do not know.

There is, indeed, a sense in which when anyone has his desire he is happy. And then there are some who are happy in hope. These are happy in an inferior degree to those that are actually happy; yet they are better off than those who are happy neither in actuality nor in hope. But even these, if they had not known happiness in some degree, would not then desire to be happy. And yet it is most certain that they do so desire. How they come to know happiness, I cannot tell, but they have it by some kind of knowledge unknown to me, for I am very much in doubt as to whether it is in the memory. For if it is in there, then we have been happy once on a time – either each of us individually or all of us in that man who first sinned and in whom also we all died and from whom we are all born in misery. How this is, I do not now ask; but I do ask whether the happy life is in the memory. For if we did not know it, we should not love it. We hear the name of it, and we all acknowledge that we desire the thing, for we are not delighted with the name only. For when a Greek hears it spoken in Latin, he does not feel delighted, for he does not know what has been spoken. But we are as delighted as he would be in turn if he heard it in Greek, because the thing itself is neither Greek nor Latin, this happiness which Greeks and Latins and men of all the other tongues long so earnestly to obtain. It is, then, known to all; and if all could

²³Cf. Isa. 55:3.

²⁴Cf. the early dialogue "On the Happy Life" in Vol. I of *The Fathers of the Church* (New York, 1948).

with one voice be asked whether they wished to be happy, there is no doubt they would all answer that they would. And this would not be possible unless the thing itself, which we name “happiness,” were held in the memory.

CHAPTER XXI

30. But is it the same kind of memory as one who having seen Carthage remembers it? No, for the happy life is not visible to the eye, since it is not a physical object. Is it the sort of memory we have for numbers? No, for the man who has these in his understanding does not keep striving to attain more. Now we know something about the happy life and therefore we love it, but still we wish to go on striving for it that we may be happy. Is the memory of happiness, then, something like the memory of eloquence? No, for although some, when they hear the term eloquence, call the thing to mind, even if they are not themselves eloquent – and further, there are many people who would like to be eloquent, from which it follows that they must know something about it – nevertheless, these people have noticed through their senses that others are eloquent and have been delighted to observe this and long to be this way themselves. But they would not be delighted if it were not some interior knowledge; and they would not desire to be delighted unless they had been delighted. But as for a happy life, there is no physical perception by which we experience it in others.

Do we remember happiness, then, as we remember joy? It may be so, for I remember my joy even when I am sad, just as I remember a happy life when I am miserable. And I have never, through physical perception, either seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or touched my joy. But I have experienced it in my mind when I rejoiced; and the knowledge of it clung to my memory so that I can call it to mind, sometimes with disdain and at other times with longing, depending on the different kinds of things I now remember that I rejoiced in. For I have been bathed with a certain joy even by unclean things, which I now detest and execrate as I call them to mind. At other times, I call to mind with longing good and honest things, which are not any longer near at hand, and I am therefore saddened when I recall my former joy.

31. Where and when did I ever experience my happy life that I can call it to mind and love it and long for it? It is not I alone or even a few others who wish to be happy, but absolutely everybody. Unless we knew happiness by a knowledge that is certain, we should not wish for it with a will which is so certain. Take this example: If two men were asked whether they wished to serve as soldiers, one of them might reply that he would, and the other that he would not; but if they were asked whether they wished to be happy, both of them would unhesitatingly say that they would. But the first one would wish to serve as a soldier and the other would not wish to serve, both from no other motive than to be happy. Is it, perhaps, that one finds his joy in this and another in that? Thus they agree in their wish for happiness just as they would also agree, if asked, in wishing for joy. Is this joy what they call a happy life? Although one could choose his joy in this way and another in that, all have one goal which they strive to attain, namely, to have joy. This joy, then, being something that no one can say he has not experienced, is therefore found in the memory and it is recognized whenever the phrase “a happy life” is heard.

CHAPTER XXII

32. Forbid it, O Lord, put it far from the heart of your servant, who confesses to you – far be it from me to think I am happy because of any and all the joy I have. For there is a joy not granted to the wicked but only to those who worship you thankfully – and this joy you yourself art. The happy life is this – to rejoice to you, in you, and for you. This it is and there is no other. But those who think there is another follow after other joys, and not the true one. But their will is still not moved except by some image or shadow of joy.

CHAPTER XXIII

33. Is it, then, uncertain that all men wish to be happy, since those who do not wish to find their joy in you – which is alone the happy life – do not actually desire the happy life? Or, is it rather that all desire this, but because “the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh,” so that they “prevent you from doing what you would,”²⁵ you fall to doing what you are able to do and are content with that. For you do not want to do what you cannot do urgently enough to make you able to do it.

Now I ask all men whether they would rather rejoice in truth or in falsehood. They will no more hesitate to answer, “In truth,” than to say that they wish to be happy. For a happy life is joy in the truth. Yet this is joy in you, who are the Truth, O God my Light, “the health of my countenance and my God.”²⁶ All wish for this happy life; all wish for this life which is the only happy one: joy in the truth is what all men wish.

I have had experience with many who wished to deceive, but not one who wished to be deceived.²⁷ Where, then, did they ever know about this happy life, except where they knew also what the truth is? For they love it, too, since they are not willing to be deceived. And when they love the happy life, which is nothing else but joy in the truth, then certainly they also love the truth. And yet they would not love it if there were not some knowledge of it in the memory.

Why, then, do they not rejoice in it? Why are they not happy? Because they are so fully preoccupied with other things which do more to make them miserable than those which would make them happy, which they remember so little about. Yet there is a little light in men. Let them walk – let them walk in it, lest the darkness overtake them.

34. Why, then, does truth generate hatred, and why does your servant who preaches the truth come to be an enemy to them who also love the happy life, which is nothing else than joy in the truth – unless it be that truth is loved in such a way that those who love something else besides her wish that to be the truth which they do love. Since they are unwilling to be deceived, they are unwilling to be convinced that they have been deceived. Therefore, they hate the truth for the sake of whatever it is that they love in place of the truth. They love truth when she shines on them; and hate her when she rebukes them. And since they are not willing to be deceived, but do wish to deceive, they love truth when she reveals herself and hate her when she reveals them. On this account, she will so repay them that those who are unwilling to be exposed by her she will

²⁵Gal. 5:17.

²⁶Ps. 42:11.

²⁷Cf. *Enchiridion*, VI, 19ff.

indeed expose against their will, and yet will not disclose herself to them.

Thus, thus, truly thus: the human mind so blind and sick, so base and ill-mannered, desires to lie hidden, but does not wish that anything should be hidden from it. And yet the opposite is what happens – the mind itself is not hidden from the truth, but the truth is hidden from it. Yet even so, for all its wretchedness, it still prefers to rejoice in truth rather than in known falsehoods. It will, then, be happy only when without other distractions it comes to rejoice in that single Truth through which all things else are true.

CHAPTER XXIV

35. Behold how great a territory I have explored in my memory seeking you, O Lord! And in it all I have still not found you. Nor have I found anything about you, except what I had already retained in my memory from the time I learned of you. For where I found Truth, there found I my God, who is the Truth. From the time I learned this I have not forgotten. And thus since the time I learned of you, you have dwelt in my memory, and it is there that I find you whenever I call you to remembrance, and delight in you. These are my holy delights, which you have bestowed on me in your mercy, mindful of my poverty.

CHAPTER XXV

36. But where in my memory do you abide, O Lord? Where do you dwell there? What sort of lodging have you made for yourself there? What kind of sanctuary have you built for yourself? You have done this honor to my memory to take up your abode in it, but I must consider further in what part of it you do abide. For in calling you to mind, I soared beyond those parts of memory which the beasts also possess, because I did not find you there among the images of corporeal things. From there I went on to those parts where I had stored the remembered affections of my mind, and I did not find you there. And I entered into the inmost seat of my mind, which is in my memory, since the mind remembers itself also – and you were not there. For just as you are not a bodily image, nor the emotion of a living creature (such as we feel when we rejoice or are grief-stricken, when we desire, or fear, or remember, or forget, or anything of that kind), so neither are you the mind itself. For you are the Lord God of the mind and of all these things that are mutable; but you abide immutable over all. Yet you have elected to dwell in my memory from the time I learned of you. But why do I now inquire about the part of my memory you do dwell in, as if indeed there were separate parts in it? Assuredly, you dwell in it, since I have remembered you from the time I learned of you, and I find you in my memory when I call you to mind.

CHAPTER XXVI

37. Where, then, did I find you so as to be able to learn of you? For you were not in my memory before I learned of you. Where, then, did I find you so as to be able to learn of you – save in yourself beyond me.²⁸ Place there is none. We go “backward” and “forward” and there is no

²⁸When he is known at all, God is known as the Self-evident. This is, of course, not a doctrine of innate ideas but rather of the necessity, and reality, of divine illumination as the *dynamic source* of all our knowledge of divine reality. Cf. Coplestone, *op. cit.*, ch. IV, and Cushman, *op. cit.*

place. Everywhere and at once, O Truth, you guide all who consult you, and simultaneously answer all even though they consult you on quite different things. You answer clearly, though all do not hear in clarity. All take counsel of you on whatever point they wish, though they do not always hear what they wish. He is your best servant who does not look to hear from you what he himself wills, but who wills rather to will what he hears from you.

CHAPTER XXVII

38. Belatedly I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, belatedly I loved you. For see, you were within and I was without, and I sought you out there. Unlovely, I rushed heedlessly among the lovely things you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you. These things kept me far from you; even though they were not at all unless they were in you. You did call and cry aloud, and did force open my deafness. You did gleam and shine, and did chase away my blindness. You did breathe fragrant odors and I drew in my breath; and now I pant for you. I tasted, and now I hunger and thirst. You did touch me, and I burned for your peace.

CHAPTER XXVIII

39. When I come to be united to you with all my being, then there will be no more pain and toil for me, and my life shall be a real life, being wholly filled by you. But since he whom you fill is the one you lift up, I am still a burden to myself because I am not yet filled by you. Joys of sorrow contend with sorrows of joy, and on which side the victory lies I do not know.

Woe is me! Lord, have pity on me; my evil sorrows contend with my good joys, and on which side the victory lies I do not know. Woe is me! Lord, have pity on me. Woe is me! Behold, I do not hide my wounds. You are the Physician, I am the sick man; you are merciful, I need mercy. Is not the life of man on earth an ordeal? Who is he that wishes for vexations and difficulties? You command them to be endured, not to be loved. For no man loves what he endures, though he may love to endure. Yet even if he rejoices to endure, he would prefer that there were nothing for him to endure. In adversity, I desire prosperity; in prosperity, I fear adversity. What middle place is there, then, between these two, where human life is not an ordeal? There is woe in the prosperity of this world; there is woe in the fear of misfortune; there is woe in the distortion of joy. There is woe in the adversities of this world – a second woe, and a third, from the desire of prosperity – because adversity itself is a hard thing to bear and makes shipwreck of endurance. Is not the life of man upon the earth an ordeal, and that without surcease?

CHAPTER XXIX

40. My whole hope is in your exceeding great mercy and that alone. Give what you command and command what you wilt. You command continence from us, and when I knew, as it is said, that no one could be continent unless God gave it to him, even this was a point of wisdom to know whose gift it was.²⁹ For by continence we are bound up and brought back together in the One, whereas before we were scattered abroad among the many.³⁰ For he loves you too little

²⁹Cf. Wis. 8:21.

³⁰Cf. *Enneads*, VI, 9:4.

who loves along with you anything else that he does not love for your sake, O Love, who do burn forever and are never quenched. O Love, O my God, enkindle me! You command continence; give what you command, and command what you wilt.

CHAPTER XXX

41. Obviously you command that I should be continent from “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”³¹ you command me to abstain from fornication, and as for marriage itself, you have counseled something better than what you do allow. And since you gave it, it was done – even before I became a minister of your sacrament. But there still exist in my memory – of which I have spoken so much – the images of such things as my habits had fixed there. These things rush into my thoughts with no power when I am awake; but in sleep they rush in not only so as to give pleasure, but even to obtain consent and what very closely resembles the deed itself. Indeed, the illusion of the image prevails to such an extent, in both my soul and my flesh, that the illusion persuades me when sleeping to what the reality cannot do when I am awake. Am I not myself at such a time, O Lord my God? And is there so much of a difference between myself awake and myself in the moment when I pass from waking to sleeping, or return from sleeping to waking?

Where, then, is the power of reason which resists such suggestions when I am awake – for even if the things themselves be forced upon it I remain unmoved? Does reason cease when the eyes close? Is it put to sleep with the bodily senses? But in that case how does it come to pass that even in slumber we often resist, and with our conscious purposes in mind, continue most chastely in them, and yield no assent to such allurements? Yet there is at least this much difference: that when it happens otherwise in dreams, when we wake up, we return to peace of conscience. And it is by this difference between sleeping and waking that we discover that it was not we who did it, while we still feel sorry that in some way it was done in us.

42. Is not your hand, O Almighty God, able to heal all the diseases of my soul and, by your more and more abundant grace, to quench even the lascivious motions of my sleep? You will increase your gifts in me more and more, O Lord, that my soul may follow me to you, wrenched free from the sticky glue of lust so that it is no longer in rebellion against itself, even in dreams; that it neither commits nor consents to these debasing corruptions which come through sensual images and which result in the pollution of the flesh. For it is no great thing for the Almighty, who is “able to do . . . more than we can ask or think,”³² to bring it about that no such influence – not even one so slight that a nod might restrain it – should afford gratification to the feelings of a chaste person even when sleeping. This could come to pass not only in this life but even at my present age. But what I am still in this way of wickedness I have confessed unto my good Lord, rejoicing with trembling in what you have given me and grieving in myself for that in which I am still imperfect. I am trusting that you will perfect your mercies in me, to the fullness of that peace which both my inner and outward being shall have with you when death is swallowed up in victory.³³

³¹John 2:16.

³²Eph. 3:20.

³³1 Cor. 15:54.

CHAPTER XXXI

43. There is yet another “evil of the day”³⁴ to which I wish I were sufficient. By eating and drinking we restore the daily losses of the body until that day when you destroy both food and stomach, when you will destroy this emptiness with an amazing fullness and will clothe this corruptible with an eternal incorruption. But now the necessity of habit is sweet to me, and against this sweetness must I fight, lest I be enthralled by it. Thus I carry on a daily war by fasting, constantly “bringing my body into subjection,”³⁵ after which my pains are banished by pleasure. For hunger and thirst are actual pain. They consume and destroy like fever does, unless the medicine of food is at hand to relieve us. And since this medicine at hand comes from the comfort we receive in your gifts (by means of which land and water and air serve our infirmity), even our calamity is called pleasure.

44. This much you have taught me: that I should learn to take food as medicine. But during that time when I pass from the pinch of emptiness to the contentment of fullness, it is in that very moment that the snare of appetite lies baited for me. For the passage itself is pleasant; there is no other way of passing thither, and necessity compels us to pass. And while health is the reason for our eating and drinking, yet a perilous delight joins itself to them as a handmaid; and indeed, she tries to take precedence in order that I may want to do for her sake what I say I want to do for health’s sake. They do not both have the same limit either. What is sufficient for health is not enough for pleasure. And it is often a matter of doubt whether it is the needful care of the body that still calls for food or whether it is the sensual snare of desire still wanting to be served. In this uncertainty my unhappy soul rejoices, and uses it to prepare an excuse as a defense. It is glad that it is not clear as to what is sufficient for the moderation of health, so that under the pretense of health it may conceal its projects for pleasure. These temptations I daily endeavor to resist and I summon your right hand to my help and cast my perplexities onto you, for I have not yet reached a firm conclusion in this matter.

45. I hear the voice of my God commanding: “Let not your heart be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness.”³⁶ Drunkenness is far from me. You will have mercy that it does not come near me. But “surfeiting” sometimes creeps upon your servant. You will have mercy that it may be put far from me. For no man can be continent unless you give it.³⁷ Many things that we pray for you give us, and whatever good we receive before we prayed for it, we receive it from you, so that we might afterward know that we did receive it from you. I never was a drunkard, but I have known drunkards made into sober men by you. It was also your doing that those who never were drunkards have not been – and likewise, it was from you that those who have been might not remain so always. And it was likewise from you that both might know from whom all this came.

³⁴Cf. Matt. 6:34.

³⁵1 Cor. 9:27.

³⁶Cf. Luke 21:34.

³⁷Cf. Wis. 8:21.

I heard another voice of yours: “Do not follow your lusts and refrain yourself from your pleasures.”³⁸ And by your favor I have also heard this saying in which I have taken much delight: “Neither if we eat are we the better; nor if we eat not are we the worse.”³⁹ This is to say that neither shall the one make me to abound, nor the other to be wretched. I heard still another voice: “For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. . . . I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”⁴⁰ See here a soldier of the heavenly army; not the sort of dust we are. But remember, O Lord, “that we are dust”⁴¹ and that you did create man out of the dust,⁴² and that he “was lost, and is found.”⁴³ Of course, he [the apostle Paul] could not do all this by his own power. He was of the same dust – he whom I loved so much and who spoke of these things through the afflatus of your inspiration: “I can,” he said, “do all things through him who strengthens me.” Strengthen me, that I too may be able. Give what you command, and command what you wilt. This man [Paul] confesses that he received the gift of grace and that, when he glories, he glories in the Lord. I have heard yet another voice praying that he might receive. “Take from me,” he said, “the greediness of the belly.”⁴⁴ And from this it appears, O my holy God, that you do give it, when what you command to be done is done.

46. You have taught me, good Father, that “to the pure all things are pure”⁴⁵; but “it is evil for that man who gives offense in eating”⁴⁶; and that “every creature of yours is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving”⁴⁷; and that “meat does not commend us to God”⁴⁸; and that “no man should judge us in meat or in drink.”⁴⁹ “Let not him who eats despise him who eats not, and let him that does not eat judge not him who does eat.”⁵⁰ These things I have learned, thanks and praise be to you, O my God and Master, who knock at my ears and enlighten my heart. Deliver me from all temptation!

It is not the uncleanness of meat that I fear, but the uncleanness of an incontinent appetite. I know that permission was granted Noah to eat every kind of flesh that was good for food; that Elijah was fed with flesh; that John, blessed with a wonderful abstinence, was not polluted by the living creatures (that is, the locusts) on which he fed. And I also know that Esau was deceived by his hungering after lentils and that David blamed himself for desiring water, and that our King was tempted not by flesh but by bread. And, thus, the people in the wilderness truly deserved their reproof, not because they desired meat, but because in their desire for food they murmured

³⁸Ecclus. 18:30.

³⁹1 Cor. 8:8.

⁴⁰Phil. 4:11-13.

⁴¹Ps. 103:14.

⁴²Cf. Gen. 3:19.

⁴³Luke 15:24.

⁴⁴Ecclus. 23:6.

⁴⁵Titus 1:15.

⁴⁶Rom. 14:20.

⁴⁷1 Tim. 4:4.

⁴⁸1 Cor. 8:8.

⁴⁹Cf. Col. 2:16.

⁵⁰Rom. 14:3.

against the Lord.

47. Set down, then, in the midst of these temptations, I strive daily against my appetite for food and drink. For it is not the kind of appetite I am able to deal with by cutting it off once for all, and thereafter not touching it, as I was able to do with fornication. The bridle of the throat, therefore, must be held in the mean between slackness and tightness. And who, O Lord, is he who is not in some degree carried away beyond the bounds of necessity? Whoever he is, he is great; let him magnify your name. But I am not such a one, “for I am a sinful man.”⁵¹ Yet I too magnify your name, for he who has “overcome the world”⁵² intercedes with you for my sins, numbering me among the weak members of his body; for your eyes did see what was imperfect in him, and in your book all shall be written down.⁵³

CHAPTER XXXII

48. I am not much troubled by the allurements of odors. When they are absent, I do not seek them; when they are present, I do not refuse them; and I am always prepared to go without them. At any rate, I appear thus to myself; it is quite possible that I am deceived. For there is a lamentable darkness in which my capabilities are concealed, so that when my mind inquires into itself concerning its own powers, it does not readily venture to believe itself, because what already is in it is largely concealed unless experience brings it to light. Thus no man ought to feel secure in this life, the whole of which is called an ordeal, ordered so that the man who could be made better from having been worse may not also from having been better become worse. Our sole hope, our sole confidence, our only assured promise, is your mercy.

CHAPTER XXXIII

49. The delights of the ear drew and held me much more powerfully, but you did unbind and liberate me. In those melodies which your words inspire when sung with a sweet and trained voice, I still find repose; yet not so as to cling to them, but always so as to be able to free myself as I wish. But it is because of the words which are their life that they gain entry into me and strive for a place of proper honor in my heart; and I can hardly assign them a fitting one. Sometimes, I seem to myself to give them more respect than is fitting, when I see that our minds are more devoutly and earnestly inflamed in piety by the holy words when they are sung than when they are not. And I recognize that all the diverse affections of our spirits have their appropriate measures in the voice and song, to which they are stimulated by I know not what secret correlation. But the pleasures of my flesh – to which the mind ought never to be surrendered nor by them enervated – often beguile me while physical sense does not attend on reason, to follow her patiently, but having once gained entry to help the reason, it strives to run on before her and be her leader. Thus in these things I sin unknowingly, but I come to know it afterward.

⁵¹Luke 5:8.

⁵²John 16:33.

⁵³Cf. Ps. 139:16.

50. On the other hand, when I avoid very earnestly this kind of deception, I err out of too great austerity. Sometimes I go to the point of wishing that all the melodies of the pleasant songs to which David's Psalter is adapted should be banished both from my ears and from those of the Church itself. In this mood, the safer way seemed to me the one I remember was once related to me concerning Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, who required the readers of the psalm to use so slight an inflection of the voice that it was more like speaking than singing.

However, when I call to mind the tears I shed at the songs of your Church at the outset of my recovered faith, and how even now I am moved, not by the singing but by what is sung (when they are sung with a clear and skillfully modulated voice), I then come to acknowledge the great utility of this custom. Thus I vacillate between dangerous pleasure and healthful exercise. I am inclined – though I pronounce no irrevocable opinion on the subject – to approve of the use of singing in the church, so that by the delights of the ear the weaker minds may be stimulated to a devotional mood.⁵⁴ Yet when it happens that I am more moved by the singing than by what is sung, I confess myself to have sinned wickedly, and then I would rather not have heard the singing. See now what a condition I am in! Weep with me, and weep for me, those of you who can so control your inward feelings that good results always come forth. As for you who do not act this way at all, such things do not concern you. But do you, O Lord, my God, give ear; look and see, and have mercy upon me; and heal me – you, in whose sight I am become an enigma to myself; this itself is my weakness.

CHAPTER XXXIV

51. There remain the delights of these eyes of my flesh, about which I must make my confession in the hearing of the ears of your temple, brotherly and pious ears. Thus I will finish the list of the temptations of carnal appetite which still assail me – groaning and desiring as I am to be clothed upon with my house from heaven.⁵⁵

The eyes delight in fair and varied forms, and bright and pleasing colors. Let these not take possession of my soul! Rather let God possess it, he who did make all these things very good indeed. He is still my good, and not these. The pleasures of sight affect me all the time I am awake. There is no rest from them given me, as there is from the voices of melody, which I can occasionally find in silence. For daylight, that queen of the colors, floods all that we look upon everywhere I go during the day. It flits about me in manifold forms and soothes me even when I am busy about other things, not noticing it. And it presents itself so forcibly that if it is suddenly withdrawn it is looked for with longing, and if it is long absent the mind is saddened.

52. O Light, which Tobit saw even with his eyes closed in blindness, when he taught his son the way of life – and went before him himself in the steps of love and never went astray⁵⁶; or that Light which Isaac saw when his fleshly “eyes were dim, so that he could not see”⁵⁷ because of old age, and it was permitted him unknowingly to bless his sons, but in the blessing of them to

⁵⁴Cf. the evidence for Augustine's interest and proficiency in music in his essay *De musica*, written a decade earlier.

⁵⁵Cf. 2 Cor. 5:2.

⁵⁶Cf. Tobit, chs. 2 to 4.

⁵⁷Gen. 27:1; cf. Augustine's *Sermon IV*, 20:21f.

know them; or that Light which Jacob saw, when he too, blind in old age yet with an enlightened heart, threw light on the nation of men yet to come – presignified in the persons of his own sons – and laid his hands mystically crossed upon his grandchildren by Joseph (not as their father, who saw them from without, but as though he were within them), and distinguished them aright⁵⁸: this is the true Light; it is one, and all are one who see and love it.

But that corporeal light, of which I was speaking, seasons the life of the world for her blind lovers with a tempting and fatal sweetness. Those who know how to praise you for it, “O God, Creator of Us All,” take it up in your hymn,⁵⁹ and are not taken over by it in their sleep. Such a man I desire to be. I resist the seductions of my eyes, lest my feet be entangled as I go forward in your way; and I raise my invisible eyes to you, that you would be pleased to “pluck my feet out of the net.”⁶⁰ you do continually pluck them out, for they are easily ensnared. You cease not to pluck them out, but I constantly remain fast in the snares set all around me. However, you who “keep Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”⁶¹

53. What numberless things there are: products of the various arts and manufactures in our clothes, shoes, vessels, and all such things; besides such things as pictures and statuary – and all these far beyond the necessary and moderate use of them or their significance for the life of piety – which men have added for the delight of the eye, copying the outward forms of the things they make; but inwardly forsaking Him by whom they were made and destroying what they themselves have been made to be!

And I, O my God and my Joy, I also raise a hymn to you for all these things, and offer a sacrifice of praise to my Sanctifier, because those beautiful forms which pass through the medium of the human soul into the artist’s hands come from that beauty which is above our minds, which my soul sighs for day and night. But the craftsmen and devotees of these outward beauties discover the norm by which they judge them from that higher beauty, but not the measure of their use. Still, even if they do not see it, it is there nevertheless, to guard them from wandering astray, and to keep their strength for you, and not dissipate it in delights that pass into boredom. And for myself, though I can see and understand this, I am still entangled in my own course with such beauty, but you will rescue me, O Lord, you will rescue me, “for your loving-kindness is before my eyes.”⁶² For I am captivated in my weakness but you in your mercy do rescue me: sometimes without my knowing it, because I had only lightly fallen; at other times, the rescue is painful because I was stuck fast.

CHAPTER XXXV

54. Besides this there is yet another form of temptation still more complex in its peril. For in addition to the fleshly appetite which strives for the gratification of all senses and pleasures – in which its slaves perish because they separate themselves from you – there is also a certain vain

⁵⁸Cf. Gen., ch. 48.

⁵⁹Again, Ambrose, *Deus, creator omnium*, an obvious favorite of Augustine's. See above, Bk. IX, Ch. XII, 32.

⁶⁰Ps. 25:15.

⁶¹Ps. 121:4.

⁶²Ps. 26:3.

and curious longing in the soul, rooted in the same bodily senses, which is cloaked under the name of knowledge and learning; not having pleasure in the flesh, but striving for new experiences through the flesh. This longing – since its origin is our appetite for learning, and since the sight is the chief of our senses in the acquisition of knowledge – is called in the divine language “the lust of the eyes.”⁶³ For seeing is a function of the eyes; yet we also use this word for the other senses as well, when we exercise them in the search for knowledge. We do not say, “Listen how it glows,” “Smell how it glistens,” “Taste how it shines,” or “Feel how it flashes,” since all of these are said to be *seen*. And we do not simply say, “See how it shines,” which only the eyes can perceive; but we also say, “See how it sounds, see how it smells, see how it tastes, see how hard it is.” Thus, as we said before, the whole round of sensory experience is called “the lust of the eyes” because the function of seeing, in which the eyes have the principal role, is applied by analogy to the other senses when they are seeking after any kind of knowledge.

55. From this, then, one can the more clearly distinguish whether it is pleasure or curiosity that is being pursued by the senses. For pleasure pursues objects that are beautiful, melodious, fragrant, savory, soft. But curiosity, seeking new experiences, will even seek out the contrary of these, not with the purpose of experiencing the discomfort that often accompanies them, but out of a passion for experimenting and knowledge.

For what pleasure is there in the sight of a lacerated corpse, which makes you shudder? And yet if there is one lying close by we flock to it, as if to be made sad and pale. People fear lest they should see such a thing even in sleep, just as they would if, when awake, someone compelled them to go and see it or if some rumor of its beauty had attracted them.

This is also the case with the other senses; it would be tedious to pursue a complete analysis of it. This malady of curiosity is the reason for all those strange sights exhibited in the theater. It is also the reason why we proceed to search out the secret powers of nature – those which have nothing to do with our destiny – which do not profit us to know about, and concerning which men desire to know only for the sake of knowing. And it is with this same motive of perverted curiosity for knowledge that we consult the magical arts. Even in religion itself, this prompting drives us to make trial of God when signs and wonders are eagerly asked of him – not desired for any saving end, but only to make trial of him.

56. In such a wilderness so vast, crammed with snares and dangers, behold how many of them I have lopped off and cast from my heart, as you, O God of my salvation, have enabled me to do. And yet, when would I dare to say, since so many things of this sort still buzz around our daily lives – when would I dare to say that no such motive prompts my seeing or creates a vain curiosity in me? It is true that now the theaters never attract me, nor do I now care to inquire about the courses of the stars, and my soul has never sought answers from the departed spirits. All sacrilegious oaths I abhor. And yet, O Lord my God, to whom I owe all humble and single-hearted service, with what subtle suggestion the enemy still influences me to require some sign from thee! But by our King, and by Jerusalem, our pure and chaste homeland, I beseech you that where any consenting to such thoughts is now far from me, so may it always be farther and farther. And when I entreat you for the salvation of any man, the end I aim at is something more

⁶³1 John 2:16.

than the entreating: let it be that as you do what you wilt, you do also give me the grace willingly to follow your lead.

57. Now, really, in how many of the most minute and trivial things my curiosity is still daily tempted, and who can keep the tally on how often I succumb? How often, when people are telling idle tales, we begin by tolerating them lest we should give offense to the sensitive; and then gradually we come to listen willingly! I do not nowadays go to the circus to see a dog chase a rabbit, but if by chance I pass such a race in the fields, it quite easily distracts me even from some serious thought and draws me after it – not that I turn aside with my horse, but with the inclination of my mind. And unless, by showing me my weakness, you do speedily warn me to rise above such a sight to you by a deliberate act of thought – or else to despise the whole thing and pass it by – then I become absorbed in the sight, vain creature that I am.

How is it that when I am sitting at home a lizard catching flies, or a spider entangling them as they fly into her webs, oftentimes arrests me? Is the feeling of curiosity not the same just because these are such tiny creatures? From them I proceed to praise you, the wonderful Creator and Disposer of all things; but it is not this that first attracts my attention. It is one thing to get up quickly and another thing not to fall – and of both such things my life is full and my only hope is in your exceeding great mercy. For when this heart of ours is made the depot of such things and is overrun by the throng of these abounding vanities, then our prayers are often interrupted and disturbed by them. Even while we are in your presence and direct the voice of our hearts to your ears, such a great business as this is broken off by the inroads of I know not what idle thoughts.

CHAPTER XXXVI

58. Shall we, then, also reckon this vain curiosity among the things that are to be but lightly esteemed? Shall anything restore us to hope except your complete mercy since you have begun to change us? You know to what extent you have already changed me, for first of all you did heal me of the lust for vindicating myself, so that you might then forgive all my remaining iniquities and heal all my diseases, and “redeem my life from corruption and crown me with loving-kindness and tender mercies, and satisfy my desires with good things.”⁶⁴ It was you who did restrain my pride with your fear, and bowed my neck to your “yoke.”⁶⁵ And now I bear the yoke and it is “light” to me, because you did promise it to be so, and have made it to be so. And so in truth it was, though I knew it not when I feared to take it up.

59. But, O Lord – you who alone reign without pride, because you alone are the true Lord, who have no Lord – has this third kind of temptation left me, or can it leave me during this life: the desire to be feared and loved of men, with no other view than that I may find in it a joy that is no joy? It is, rather, a wretched life and an unseemly ostentation. It is a special reason why we do not love you, nor devotedly fear you. Therefore “you resist the proud but give grace to the humble.”⁶⁶ you thunder down on the ambitious designs of the world, and “the foundations of the

⁶⁴Cf. Ps. 103:3-5.

⁶⁵Cf. Matt. 11:30.

⁶⁶1 Peter 5:5.

hills” tremble.⁶⁷

And yet certain offices in human society require the officeholder to be loved and feared of men, and through this the adversary of our true blessedness presses hard upon us, scattering everywhere his snares of “well done, well done”; so that while we are eagerly picking them up, we may be caught unawares and split off our joy from your truth and fix it on the deceits of men. In this way we come to take pleasure in being loved and feared, not for your sake but in your stead. By such means as this, the adversary makes men like himself, that he may have them as his own, not in the harmony of love, but in the fellowship of punishment – the one who aspired to exalt his throne in the north,⁶⁸ that in the darkness and the cold men might have to serve him, mimicking you in perverse and distorted ways.

But see, O Lord, we are your little flock. Possess us, stretch your wings above us, and let us take refuge under them. Be you our glory; let us be loved for your sake, and let your word be feared in us. Those who desire to be commended by the men whom you condemn will not be defended by men when you judge, nor will they be delivered when you do condemn them. But when – not as a sinner is praised in the wicked desires of his soul nor when the unrighteous man is blessed in his unrighteousness – a man is praised for some gift that you have given him, and he is more gratified at the praise for himself than because he possesses the gift for which he is praised, such a one is praised while you do condemn him. In such a case the one who praised is truly better than the one who was praised. For the gift of God in man was pleasing to the one, while the other was better pleased with the gift of man than with the gift of God.

CHAPTER XXXVII

60. By these temptations we are daily tried, O Lord; we are tried unceasingly. Our daily “furnace” is the human tongue.⁶⁹ And also in this respect you command us to be continent. Give what you command and command what you wilt. In this matter, you know the groans of my heart and the rivers of my eyes, for I am not able to know for certain how far I am clean of this plague; and I stand in great fear of my “secret faults,”⁷⁰ which your eyes perceive, though mine do not. For in respect of the pleasures of my flesh and of idle curiosity, I see how far I have been able to hold my mind in check when I abstain from them either by voluntary act of the will or because they simply are not at hand; for then I can inquire of myself how much more or less frustrating it is to me not to have them. This is also true about riches, which are sought for in order that they may minister to one of these three “lusts,” or two, or the whole complex of them. The mind is able to see clearly if, when it has them, it despises them so that they may be cast aside and it may prove itself.

But if we desire to test our power of doing without praise, must we then live wickedly or lead a life so atrocious and abandoned that everyone who knows us will detest us? What greater madness than this can be either said or conceived? And yet if praise, both by custom and right, is

⁶⁷Cf. Ps. 18:7, 13.

⁶⁸Cf. Isa. 14:12-14.

⁶⁹Cf. Prov. 27:21.

⁷⁰Cf. Ps. 19:12.

the companion of a good life and of good works, we should as little forgo its companionship as the good life itself. But unless a thing is absent I do not know whether I should be contented or troubled at having to do without it.

61. What is it, then, that I am confessing to you, O Lord, concerning this sort of temptation? What else, than that I am delighted with praise, but more with the truth itself than with praise. For if I were to have any choice whether, if I were mad or utterly in the wrong, I would prefer to be praised by all men or, if I were steadily and fully confident in the truth, would prefer to be blamed by all, I see which I should choose. Yet I wish I were unwilling that the approval of others should add anything to my joy for any good I have. Yet I admit that it does increase it; and, more than that, dispraise diminishes it. Then, when I am disturbed over this wretchedness of mine, an excuse presents itself to me, the value of which you know, O God, for it renders me uncertain. For since it is not only continence that you have enjoined on us – that is, what things to hold back our love from – but righteousness as well – that is, what to bestow our love upon – and have wished us to love not only you, but also our neighbor, it often turns out that when I am gratified by intelligent praise I seem to myself to be gratified by the competence or insight of my neighbor; or, on the other hand, I am sorry for the defect in him when I hear him dispraise either what he does not understand or what is good. For I am sometimes grieved at the praise I get, either when those things that displease me in myself are praised in me, or when lesser and trifling goods are valued more highly than they should be. But, again, how do I know whether I feel this way because I am unwilling that he who praises me should differ from me concerning myself not because I am moved with any consideration for him, but because the good things that please me in myself are more pleasing to me when they also please another? For in a way, I am not praised when my judgment of myself is not praised, since either those things which are displeasing to me are praised, or those things which are less pleasing to me are more praised. Am I not, then, quite uncertain of myself in this respect?

62. Behold, O Truth, it is in you that I see that I ought not to be moved at my own praises for my own sake, but for the sake of my neighbor's good. And whether this is actually my way, I truly do not know. On this score I know less of myself than you do. I beseech you now, O my God, to reveal myself to me also, that I may confess to my brethren, who are to pray for me in those matters where I find myself weak.

Let me once again examine myself the more diligently. If, in my own praise, I am moved with concern for my neighbor, why am I less moved if some other man is unjustly dispraised than when it happens to me? Why am I more irritated at that reproach which is cast on me than at one which is, with equal injustice, cast upon another in my presence? Am I ignorant of this also? Or is it still true that I am deceiving myself, and do not keep the truth before you in my heart and tongue? Put such madness far from me, O Lord, lest my mouth be to me "the oil of sinners, to anoint my head."⁷¹

⁷¹Cf. Ps. 141:5.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

63. “I am needy and poor.”⁷² Still, I am better when in secret groanings I displease myself and seek your mercy until what is lacking in me is renewed and made complete for that peace which the eye of the proud does not know. The reports that come from the mouth and from actions known to men have in them a most perilous temptation to the love of praise. This love builds up a certain complacency in one’s own excellence, and then goes around collecting solicited compliments. It tempts me, even when I inwardly reprove myself for it, and this precisely because it is reproved. For a man may often glory vainly in the very scorn of vainglory – and in this case it is not any longer the scorn of vainglory in which he glories, for he does not truly despise it when he inwardly glories in it.

CHAPTER XXXIX

64. Within us there is yet another evil arising from the same sort of temptation. By it they become empty who please themselves in themselves, although they do not please or displease or aim at pleasing others. But in pleasing themselves they displease you very much, not merely taking pleasure in things that are not good as if they were good, but taking pleasure in your good things as if they were their own; or even as if they were yours but still as if they had received them through their own merit; or even as if they had them through your grace, still without this grace with their friends, but as if they envied that grace to others. In all these and similar perils and labors, you perceive the agitation of my heart, and I would rather feel my wounds being cured by you than not inflicted by me on myself.

CHAPTER XL

65. Where have you not accompanied me, O Truth, teaching me both what to avoid and what to desire, when I have submitted to you what I could understand about matters here below, and have sought your counsel about them?

With my external senses I have viewed the world as I was able and have noticed the life which my body derives from me and from these senses of mine. From that stage I advanced inwardly into the recesses of my memory – the manifold chambers of my mind, marvelously full of unmeasured wealth. And I reflected on this and was afraid, and could understand none of these things without you and found you to be none of them. Nor did I myself discover these things – I who went over them all and labored to distinguish and to value everything according to its dignity, accepting some things upon the report of my senses and questioning about others which I thought to be related to my inner self, distinguishing and numbering the reporters themselves; and in that vast storehouse of my memory, investigating some things, depositing other things, taking out still others. Neither was I myself when I did this – that is, that ability of mine by which I did it – nor was it you, for you are that never-failing light from which I took counsel about them all; whether they were what they were, and what was their real value. In all this I heard you teaching and commanding me. And this I often do – and this is a delight to me – and as far as I can get relief from my necessary duties, I resort to this kind of pleasure. But in all

⁷²Ps. 109:22.

these things which I review when I consult you, I still do not find a secure place for my soul save in you, in whom my scattered members may be gathered together and nothing of me escape from you. And sometimes you introduce me to a most rare and inward feeling, an inexplicable sweetness. If this were to come to perfection in me I do not know to what point life might not then arrive. But still, by these wretched weights of mine, I relapse into these common things, and am sucked in by my old customs and am held. I sorrow much, yet I am still closely held. To this extent, then, the burden of habit presses us down. I can exist in this fashion but I do not wish to do so. In that other way I wish I were, but cannot be – in both ways I am wretched.

CHAPTER XLI

66. And now I have thus considered the infirmities of my sins, under the headings of the three major “lusts,” and I have called your right hand to my aid. For with a wounded heart I have seen your brightness, and having been beaten back I cried: “Who can attain to it? I am cut off from before your eyes.”⁷³ you are the Truth, who preside over all things, but I, because of my greed, did not wish to lose you. But still, along with you, I wished also to possess a lie – just as no one wishes to lie in such a way as to be ignorant of what is true. By this I lost you, for you will not condescend to be enjoyed along with a lie.

CHAPTER XLII

67. Whom could I find to reconcile me to you? Should I have approached the angels? What kind of prayer? What kind of rites? Many who were striving to return to you and were not able of themselves have, I am told, tried this and have fallen into a longing for curious visions and deserved to be deceived. Being exalted, they sought you in their pride of learning, and they thrust themselves forward rather than beating their breasts.⁷⁴ And so by a likeness of heart, they drew to themselves the princes of the air,⁷⁵ their conspirators and companions in pride, by whom they were deceived by the power of magic. Thus they sought a mediator by whom they might be cleansed, but there was none. For the mediator they sought was the devil, disguising himself as an angel of light.⁷⁶ And he allured their proud flesh the more because he had no fleshly body.

They were mortal and sinful, but you, O Lord, to whom they arrogantly sought to be reconciled, are immortal and sinless. But a mediator between God and man ought to have something in him like God and something in him like man, lest in being like man he should be far from God, or if only like God he should be far from man, and so should not be a mediator. That deceitful mediator, then, by whom, by your secret judgment, human pride deserves to be deceived, had one thing in common with man, that is, his sin. In another respect, he would seem to have something in common with God, for not being clothed with the mortality of the flesh, he could boast that he was immortal. But since “the wages of sin is death,”⁷⁷ what he really has in common with men is that, together with them, he is condemned to death.

⁷³Ps. 31:22.

⁷⁴Cf. the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Luke 18:9-14.

⁷⁵Cf. Eph. 2:2.

⁷⁶2 Cor. 11:14.

⁷⁷Rom. 6:23.

CHAPTER XLIII

68. But the true Mediator, whom you in your secret mercy have revealed to the humble, and have sent to them so that through his example they also might learn the same humility – that “Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus,”⁷⁸ appeared between mortal sinners and the immortal Just One. He was mortal as men are mortal; he was righteous as God is righteous; and because the reward of righteousness is life and peace, he could, through his righteousness united with God, cancel the death of justified sinners, which he was willing to have in common with them. Hence he was manifested to holy men of old, to the end that they might be saved through faith in his Passion to come, even as we through faith in his Passion which is past. As man he was Mediator, but as the Word he was not something in between the two; because he was equal to God, and God with God, and, with the Holy Spirit, one God.

69. How have you loved us, O good Father, who did not spare your only Son, but did deliver him up for us wicked ones!⁷⁹ How have you loved us, for whom he who did not count it robbery to be equal with you “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”⁸⁰! He alone was “free among the dead.”⁸¹ He alone had power to lay down his life and power to take it up again, and for us he became to you both Victor and Victim; and Victor because he was the Victim. For us, he was to you both Priest and Sacrifice, and Priest because he was the Sacrifice. Out of slaves, he makes us your sons, because he was born of you and did serve us. Rightly, then, is my hope fixed strongly on him, that you will “heal all my diseases”⁸² through him, who sits at your right hand and makes intercession for us.⁸³ Otherwise I should utterly despair. For my infirmities are many and great; indeed, they are very many and very great. But your medicine is still greater. Otherwise, we might think that your word was removed from union with man, and despair of ourselves, if it had not been that he was “made flesh and dwelt among us.”⁸⁴

70. Terrified by my sins and the load of my misery, I had resolved in my heart and considered flight into the wilderness. But you did forbid me, and you did strengthen me, saying that “since Christ died for all, they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them.”⁸⁵ Behold, O Lord, I cast all my care on you, that I may live and “behold wondrous things out of your law.”⁸⁶ you know my incompetence and my infirmities; teach me and heal me. Your only Son – he “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”⁸⁷ – has redeemed me with his blood. Let not the proud speak evil of me, because I keep my ransom before my mind, and eat and drink and share my food and drink. For, being poor, I desire

⁷⁸1 Tim. 2:5.

⁷⁹Cf. Rom. 8:32.

⁸⁰Phil. 2:6-8.

⁸¹Cf. Ps. 88:5; see Ps. 87:6 (Vulgate).

⁸²Ps. 103:3.

⁸³Cf. Rom. 8:34.

⁸⁴John 1:14.

⁸⁵2 Cor. 5:15.

⁸⁶Ps. 119:18.

⁸⁷Col. 2:3.

to be satisfied from him, together with those who eat and are satisfied: “and they shall praise the Lord that seek Him.”⁸⁸

⁸⁸Cf. Ps. 21:27 (Vulgate).

BOOK ELEVEN – Creator, Creation, and Time

The eternal Creator and the Creation in time. Augustine ties together his memory of his past life, his present experience, and his ardent desire to comprehend the mystery of creation. This leads him to the questions of the mode and time of creation. He ponders the mode of creation and shows that it was *de nihilo* and involved no alteration in the being of God. He then considers the question of the beginning of the world and time and shows that time and creation are co-temporal. But what is time? To this Augustine devotes a brilliant analysis of the subjectivity of time and the relation of all temporal process to the abiding eternity of God. From this, he prepares to turn to a detailed interpretation of Gen. 1:1, 2.

CHAPTER I

1. Is it possible, O Lord, that, since you are in eternity, you are ignorant of what I am saying to you? Or, do you see in time an event at the time it occurs? If not, then why am I recounting such a tale of things to you? Certainly not in order to acquaint you with them through me; but, instead, that through them I may stir up my own love and the love of my readers toward you, so that all may say, “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.” I have said this before¹ and will say it again: “For love of your love I do it.” So also we pray – and yet Truth tells us, “Your Father knows what things you need before you ask him.”² Consequently, we lay bare our feelings before you, that, through our confessing to you our plight and your mercies toward us, you may go on to free us altogether, as you have already begun; and that we may cease to be wretched in ourselves and blessed in you – since you have called us to be poor in spirit, meek, mourners, hungering and athirst for righteousness, merciful and pure in heart.³ Thus I have told you many things, as I could find ability and will to do so, since it was your will in the first place that I should confess to you, O Lord my God – for “you are good and your mercy endures forever.”⁴

CHAPTER II

2. But how long would it take for the voice of my pen to tell enough of your exhortations and of all your terrors and comforts and leadings by which you did bring me to preach your Word and to administer your sacraments to your people? And even if I could do this sufficiently, the drops of time⁵ are very precious to me and I have for a long time been burning with the desire to meditate on your law, and to confess in your presence my knowledge and ignorance of it – from the first streaks of your light in my mind and the remaining darkness, until my weakness shall be swallowed up in your strength. And I do not wish to see those hours drained into anything else which I can find free from the necessary care of the body, the exercise of the mind, and the

¹In the very first sentence of *Confessions*, Bk. I, Ch. I. Here we have a basic and recurrent motif of the *Confessions* from beginning to end: the celebration and praise of the greatness and goodness of God – Creator and Redeemer. The repetition of it here connects this concluding section of the *Confessions*, Bks. XI-XIII, with the preceding part.

²Matt. 6:8.

³The “virtues” of the Beatitudes, the reward for which is blessedness; cf. Matt. 5:1-11.

⁴Ps. 118:1; cf. Ps. 136.

⁵An interesting symbol of time's ceaseless passage; the reference is to a water clock (*clepsydra*).

service we owe to our fellow men – and what we give even if we do not owe it.

3. O Lord my God, hear my prayer and let your mercy attend my longing. It does not burn for itself alone but longs as well to serve the cause of fraternal love. You see in my heart that this is so. Let me offer the service of my mind and my tongue – and give me what I may in turn offer back to you. For “I am needy and poor”; you are rich to all who call upon you – you who, in your freedom from care, care for us. Trim away from my lips, inwardly and outwardly, all rashness and lying. Let your Scriptures be my chaste delight. Let me not be deceived in them, nor deceive others from them. O Lord, hear and pity! O Lord my God, light of the blind, strength of the weak – and also the light of those who see and the strength of the strong – hearken to my soul and hear it crying from the depths.⁶ Unless your ears attend us even in the depths, where should we go? To whom should we cry?

“Yours is the day and the night is yours as well.”⁷ At your bidding the moments fly by. Grant me in them, then, an interval for my meditations on the hidden things of your law, nor close the door of your law against us who knock. You have not willed that the deep secrets of all those pages should have been written in vain. Those forests are not without their stags which keep retired within them, ranging and walking and feeding, lying down and ruminating.⁸ Perfect me, O Lord, and reveal their secrets to me. Behold, your voice is my joy; your voice surpasses in abundance of delights. Give me what I love, for I do love it. And this too is your gift. Abandon not your gifts and despise not your “grass” which thirsts for you.⁹ Let me confess to you everything that I shall have found in your books and “let me hear the voice of your praise.”¹⁰ Let me drink from you and “consider the wondrous things out of your law”¹¹ – from the very beginning, when you made heaven and earth, and thenceforward to the everlasting reign of your Holy City with you.

4. O Lord, have mercy on me and hear my petition. For my prayer is not for earthly things, neither gold nor silver and precious stones, nor gorgeous apparel, nor honors and power, nor fleshly pleasures, nor of bodily necessities in this life of our pilgrimage: all of these things are “added” to those who seek your Kingdom and your righteousness.¹²

Observe, O God, from whence comes my desire. The unrighteous have told me of delights but not such as those in your law, O Lord. Behold, this is the spring of my desire. See, O Father, look and see – and approve! Let it be pleasing in your mercy’s sight that I should find favor with you – that the secret things of your Word may be opened to me when I knock. I beg this of you by our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, the Man of your right hand, the Son of Man; whom you made strong for your purpose as Mediator between you and us; through whom you did seek us when we were not seeking you, but did seek us so that we might seek you; your Word, through whom you made all things, and me among them; your only Son, through whom you have called your faithful people to adoption, and me among them. I beseech it of you through him who sits at your

⁶Cf. Ps. 130:1, *De profundis*.

⁷Ps. 74:16.

⁸This metaphor is probably from Ps. 29:9.

⁹A repetition of the metaphor above, Bk. IX, Ch. VII, 16.

¹⁰Ps. 26:7.

¹¹Ps. 119:18.

¹²Cf. Matt. 6:33.

right hand and makes intercession for us, “in whom are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”¹³ It is he I seek in your books. Moses wrote of him. He tells us so himself; the Truth tells us so.

CHAPTER III

5. Let me hear and understand how in the beginning you made heaven and earth.¹⁴ Moses wrote of this; he wrote and passed on – moving from you to you – and he is now no longer before me. If he were, I would lay hold on him and ask him and entreat him solemnly that in your name he would open out these things to me, and I would lend my bodily ears to the sounds that came forth out of his mouth. If, however, he spoke in the Hebrew language, the sounds would beat on my senses in vain, and nothing would touch my mind; but if he spoke in Latin, I would understand what he said. But how should I then know whether what he said was true? If I knew even this much, would it be that I knew it from him? Indeed, within me, deep inside the chambers of my thought, Truth itself – neither Hebrew, nor Greek, nor Latin, nor barbarian, without any organs of voice and tongue, without the sound of syllables – would say, “He speaks the truth,” and I should be assured by this. Then I would confidently say to that man of yours, “You speak the truth.”¹⁵ However, since I cannot inquire of Moses, I beseech you, O Truth, from whose fullness he spoke truth; I beseech you, my God, forgive my sins, and as you gave your servant the gift to speak these things, grant me also the gift to understand them.

CHAPTER IV

6. Look around; there are the heaven and the earth. They cry aloud that they were made, for they change and vary. Whatever there is that has not been made, and yet has being, has nothing in it that was not there before. This having something not already existent is what it means to be changed and varied. Heaven and earth thus speak plainly that they did not make themselves: “We are, because we have been made; we did not exist before we came to be so that we could have made ourselves!” And the voice with which they speak is simply their visible presence. It was you, O Lord, who made these things. You are beautiful; thus they are beautiful. You are good, thus they are good. You art; thus they are. But they are not as beautiful, nor as good, nor as truly real as you their Creator art. Compared with you, they are neither beautiful nor good, nor do they even exist. These things we know, thanks be to you. Yet our knowledge is ignorance when it is compared with your knowledge.

CHAPTER V

7. But *how* did you make the heaven and the earth, and what was the tool of such a mighty work as yours? For it was not like a human worker fashioning body from body, according to the fancy

¹³Col. 2:3.

¹⁴Augustine was profoundly stirred, in mind and heart, by the great mystery of creation and the Scriptural testimony about it. In addition to this long and involved analysis of time and creation which follows here, he returned to the story in Genesis repeatedly: e.g., *De Genesi contra Manicheos*; *De Genesi ad litteram, liber imperfectus* (both written *before* the *Confessions*); *De Genesi ad litteram, libri XII* and *De civitate Dei*, XI-XII (both written *after* the *Confessions*).

¹⁵The final test of truth, for Augustine, is self-evidence and the final source of truth is the indwelling Logos.

of his mind, able somehow or other to impose on it a form which the mind perceived in itself by its inner eye (yet how should even he be able to do this, if you had not made that mind?). He imposes the form on something already existing and having some sort of being, such as clay, or stone or wood or gold or such like (and where would these things come from if you had not furnished them?). For you made his body for the artisan, and you made the mind which directs the limbs; you made the matter from which he makes anything; you did create the capacity by which he understands his art and sees within his mind what he may do with the things before him; you gave him his bodily sense by which, as if he had an interpreter, he may communicate from mind to matter what he proposes to do and report back to his mind what has been done, that the mind may consult with the Truth which presides over it as to whether what is done is well done.

All these things praise you, the Creator of them all. But how did you make them? How, O God, did you make the heaven and earth? For truly, neither in heaven nor on earth did you make heaven and earth – nor in the air nor in the waters, since all of these also belong to the heaven and the earth. Nowhere in the whole world did you make the whole world, because there was no place where it could be made before it was made. And you did not hold anything in your hand from which to fashion the heaven and the earth,¹⁶ for where couldst you have gotten what you had not made in order to make something with it? Is there, indeed, anything at all except because you are? Thus you did speak and they were made,¹⁷ and by your Word you did make them all.

CHAPTER VI

8. But how did you speak? Was it in the same manner in which the voice came from the cloud saying, “This is my beloved Son”¹⁸? For that voice sounded forth and died away; it began and ended. The syllables sounded and passed away, the second after the first, the third after the second, and thence in order, till the very last after all the rest; and silence after the last. From this it is clear and plain that it was the action of a creature, itself in time, which sounded that voice, obeying your eternal will. And what these words were which were formed at that time the outer ear conveyed to the conscious mind, whose inner ear lay attentively open to your eternal Word. But it compared those words which sounded in time with your eternal word sounding in silence and said: “This is different; quite different! These words are far below me; they are not even real, for they fly away and pass, but the Word of my God remains above me forever.” If, then, in words that sound and fade away you did say that heaven and earth should be made, and thus *made* heaven and earth, then there was already some kind of corporeal creature *before* heaven and earth by whose motions in time that voice might have had its occurrence in time. But there was nothing corporeal before the heaven and the earth; or if there was, then it is certain that already, without a time-bound voice, you had created whatever it was out of which you did make the time-bound voice by which you did say, “Let the heaven and the earth be made!” For whatever it was out of which such a voice was made simply did not exist at all until it was made

¹⁶Cf. the notion of creation in Plato's *Timaeus* (29D-30C; 48E-50C), in which the Demiurgos (craftsman) fashions the universe from pre-existent matter (το υποδοχη) and imposes as much form as the Receptacle will receive. The notion of the world fashioned from pre-existent matter of some sort was a universal idea in Greco-Roman cosmology.

¹⁷Cf. Ps. 33:9.

¹⁸Matt. 3:17.

by you. Was it decreed by your Word that a body might be made from which such words might come?

CHAPTER VII

9. You do call us, then, to understand the Word – the God who is God with you – which is spoken eternally and by which all things are spoken eternally. For what was first spoken was not finished, and then something else spoken until the whole series was spoken; but all things, at the same time and forever. For, otherwise, we should have time and change and not a true eternity, nor a true immortality.

This I know, O my God, and I give thanks. I know, I confess to you, O Lord, and whoever is not ungrateful for certain truths knows and blesses you along with me. We know, O Lord, this much we know: that in the same proportion as anything is not what it was, and is what it was not, in that very same proportion it passes away or comes to be. But there is nothing in your Word that passes away or returns to its place; for it is truly immortal and eternal. And, therefore, unto the Word coeternal with you, at the same time and always you say all that you say. And whatever you say shall be made is made, and you makes nothing otherwise than by speaking. Still, not all the things that you do make by speaking are made at the same time and always.

CHAPTER VIII

10. Why is this, I ask of you, O Lord my God? I see it after a fashion, but I do not know how to express it, unless I say that everything that begins to be and then ceases to be begins and ceases when it is known in your eternal Reason that it ought to begin or cease – in your eternal Reason where nothing begins or ceases. And this is your Word, which is also “the Beginning,” because it also speaks to us.¹⁹ Thus, in the gospel, he spoke through the flesh; and this sounded in the outward ears of men so that it might be believed and sought for within, and so that it might be found in the eternal Truth, in which the good and only Master teaches all his disciples.²⁰ There, O Lord, I hear your voice, the voice of one speaking to me, since he who teaches us speaks to us. But he that doth not teach us doth not really speak to us even when he speaks. Yet who is it that teaches us unless it be the Truth immutable? For even when we are instructed by means of the mutable creation, we are thereby led to the Truth immutable. There we learn truly as we stand and hear him, and we rejoice greatly “because of the bridegroom’s voice,”²¹ restoring us to the source whence our being comes. And therefore, unless the Beginning remained immutable, there would then not be a place to which we might return when we had wandered away. But when we return from error, it is through our gaining knowledge that we return. In order for us to gain knowledge he teaches us, since he is the Beginning, and speaks to us.

¹⁹Cf. the Vulgate of John 8:25.

²⁰Cf. Augustine's emphasis on Christ as true Teacher in *De Magistro*.

²¹Cf. John 3:29.

CHAPTER IX

11. In this Beginning, O God, you have made heaven and earth – through your Word, your Son, your Power, your Wisdom, your Truth: all wondrously speaking and wondrously creating. Who shall comprehend such things and who shall tell of it? What is it that shines through me and strikes my heart without injury, so that I both shudder and burn? I shudder because I am unlike it; I burn because I am like it. It is Wisdom itself that shines through me, clearing away my fog, which so readily overwhelms me so that I faint in it, in the darkness and burden of my punishment. For my strength is brought down in neediness, so that I cannot endure even my blessings until you, O Lord, who have been gracious to all my iniquities, also heal all my infirmities – for it is you who “shall redeem my life from corruption, and crown me with loving-kindness and tender mercy, and shall satisfy my desire with good things so that my youth shall be renewed like the eagle’s.”²² For by this hope we are saved, and through patience we await your promises. Let him that is able hear you speaking to his inner mind. I will cry out with confidence because of your own oracle, “How wonderful are your works, O Lord; in wisdom you have made them all.”²³ And this Wisdom is the Beginning, and in that Beginning you have made heaven and earth.

CHAPTER X

12. Now, are not those still full of their old carnal nature²⁴ who ask us: “What was God doing *before* he made heaven and earth? For if he was idle,” they say, “and doing nothing, then why did he not continue in that state forever – doing nothing, as he had always done? If any new motion has arisen in God, and a new will to form a creature, which he had never before formed, how can that be a true eternity in which an act of will occurs that was not there before? For the will of God is not a created thing, but comes before the creation – and this is true because nothing could be created unless the will of the Creator came before it. The will of God, therefore, pertains to his very Essence. Yet if anything has arisen in the Essence of God that was not there before, then that Essence cannot truly be called eternal. But if it was the eternal will of God that the creation should come to be, why, then, is not the creation itself also from eternity?”²⁵

CHAPTER XI

13. Those who say these things do not yet understand you, O Wisdom of God, O Light of souls. They do not yet understand how the things are made that are made by and in you. They endeavor to comprehend eternal things, but their heart still flies about in the past and future motions of created things, and is still unstable. Who shall hold it and fix it so that it may come to rest for a little; and then, by degrees, glimpse the glory of that eternity which abides forever; and then,

²²Cf. Ps. 103:4, 5 (mixed text).

²³Ps. 104:24.

²⁴*Pleni vetustatis suae*. In *Sermon CCLXVII*, 2 (*PL* 38, c. 1230), Augustine has a similar usage. Speaking of those who pour new wine into old containers, he says: *Carnalitas vetustas est, gratia novitas est*, “Carnality is the old nature; grace is the new”; cf. Matt. 9:17.

²⁵The notion of the eternity of this world was widely held in Greek philosophy, in different versions, and was incorporated into the Manichean rejection of the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* which Augustine is citing here. He returns to the question, and his answer to it, again in *De civitate Dei*, XI, 4-8.

comparing eternity with the temporal process in which nothing abides, they may see that they are incommensurable? They would see that a long time does not become long, except from the many separate events that occur in its passage, which cannot be simultaneous. In the Eternal, on the other hand, nothing passes away, but the whole is simultaneously present. But no temporal process is wholly simultaneous. Therefore, let it²⁶ see that all time past is forced to move on by the incoming future; that all the future follows from the past; and that all, past and future, is created and issues out of that which is forever present. Who will hold the heart of man that it may stand still and see how the eternity which always stands still is itself neither future nor past but expresses itself in the times that are future and past? Can my hand do this, or can the hand of my mouth bring about so difficult a thing even by persuasion?

CHAPTER XII

14. How, then, shall I respond to him who asks, “What was God doing *before* he made heaven and earth?” I do not answer, as a certain one is reported to have done facetiously (shrugging off the force of the question). “He was preparing hell,” he said, “for those who pry too deep.” It is one thing to see the answer; it is another to laugh at the questioner – and for myself I do not answer these things thus. More willingly would I have answered, “I do not know what I do not know,” than cause one who asked a deep question to be ridiculed – and by such tactics gain praise for a worthless answer.

Rather, I say that you, our God, are the Creator of every creature. And if in the term “heaven and earth” every creature is included, I make bold to say further: “Before God made heaven and earth, he did not make anything at all. For if he did, what did he make unless it were a creature?” I do indeed wish that I knew all that I desire to know to my profit as surely as I know that no creature was made before any creature was made.

CHAPTER XIII

15. But if the roving thought of someone should wander over the images of past time, and wonder that you, the Almighty God, the All-creating and All-sustaining, the Architect of heaven and earth, did for ages unnumbered abstain from so great a work before you did actually do it, let him awake and consider that he wonders at illusions. For in what temporal medium could the unnumbered ages that you did not make pass by, since you are the Author and Creator of all the ages? Or what periods of time would those be that were not made by you? Or how could they have already passed away if they had not already been? Since, therefore, you are the Creator of all times, if there was any time *before* you made heaven and earth, why is it said that you were abstaining from working? For you made that very time itself, and periods could not pass by *before* you made the whole temporal procession. But if there was no time *before* heaven and earth, how, then, can it be asked, “What were you doing then?” For there was no “then” when there was no time.

16. Nor do you precede any given period of time by another period of time. Else you would not precede all periods of time. In the eminence of your ever-present eternity, you precede all times

²⁶The unstable “heart” of those who confuse time and eternity.

past, and extend beyond all future times, for they are still to come – and when they have come, they will be past. But “you are always the Selfsame and your years shall have no end.”²⁷ your years neither go nor come; but ours both go and come in order that all separate moments may come to pass. All your years stand together as one, since they are abiding. Nor do your years past exclude the years to come because your years do not pass away. All these years of ours shall be with you, when all of them shall have ceased to be. Your years are but a day, and your day is not recurrent, but always today. Your “today” yields not to tomorrow and does not follow yesterday. Your “today” is eternity. Therefore, you did generate the Coeternal, to whom you did say, “This day I have begotten you.”²⁸ You made all time and before all times you are, and there was never a time when there was no time.

CHAPTER XIV

17. There was no time, therefore, when you had not made anything, because you had made time itself. And there are no times that are coeternal with you, because you do abide forever; but if times should abide, they would not be times.

For what is time? Who can easily and briefly explain it? Who can even comprehend it in thought or put the answer into words? Yet is it not true that in conversation we refer to nothing more familiarly or knowingly than time? And surely we understand it when we speak of it; we understand it also when we hear another speak of it.

What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know. Yet I say with confidence that I know that if nothing passed away, there would be no past time; and if nothing were still coming, there would be no future time; and if there were nothing at all, there would be no present time.

But, then, how is it that there are the two times, past and future, when even the past is now no longer and the future is now not yet? But if the present were always present, and did not pass into past time, it obviously would not be time but eternity. If, then, time present – if it be time – comes into existence only because it passes into time past, how can we say that even this is, since the cause of its being is that it will cease to be? Thus, can we not truly say that time *is* only as it tends toward nonbeing?

CHAPTER XV

18. And yet we speak of a long time and a short time; but never speak this way except of time past and future. We call a hundred years ago, for example, a long time past. In like manner, we should call a hundred years hence a long time to come. But we call ten days ago a short time past; and ten days hence a short time to come. But in what sense is something long or short that is nonexistent? For the past is not now, and the future is not yet. Therefore, let us not say, “It *is* long”; instead, let us say of the past, “It *was* long,” and of the future, “It *will be* long.” And yet, O Lord, my Light, shall not your truth make mockery of man even here? For that long time past:

²⁷Cf. Ps. 102:27.

²⁸Ps. 2:7.

was it long when it was already past, or when it was still present? For it might have been long when there was a period that could be long, but when it was past, it no longer was. In that case, that which was not at all could not be long. Let us not, therefore, say, “Time past was long,” for we shall not discover what it was that was long because, since it is past, it no longer exists. Rather, let us say that “time *present* was long, because when it was present it *was* long.” For then it had not yet passed on so as not to be, and therefore it still was in a state that could be called long. But after it passed, it ceased to be long simply because it ceased to be.

19. Let us, therefore, O human soul, see whether present time can be long, for it has been given you to feel and measure the periods of time. How, then, will you answer me?

Is a hundred years when present a long time? But, first, see whether a hundred years can be present at once. For if the first year in the century is current, then it is present time, and the other ninety and nine are still future. Therefore, they are not yet. But, then, if the second year is current, one year is already past, the second present, and all the rest are future. And thus, if we fix on any middle year of this century as present, those before it are past, those after it are future. Therefore, a hundred years cannot be present all at once.

Let us see, then, whether the year that is now current can be present. For if its first month is current, then the rest are future; if the second, the first is already past, and the remainder are not yet. Therefore, the current year is not present all at once. And if it is not present as a whole, then the year is not present. For it takes twelve months to make the year, from which each individual month which is current is itself present one at a time, but the rest are either past or future.

20. Thus it comes out that time present, which we found was the only time that could be called “long,” has been cut down to the space of scarcely a single day. But let us examine even that, for one day is never present as a whole. For it is made up of twenty-four hours, divided between night and day. The first of these hours has the rest of them as future, and the last of them has the rest as past; but any of those between has those that preceded it as past and those that succeed it as future. And that one hour itself passes away in fleeting fractions. The part of it that has fled is past; what remains is still future. If any fraction of time be conceived that cannot now be divided even into the most minute momentary point, this alone is what we may call time present. But this flies so rapidly from future to past that it cannot be extended by any delay. For if it is extended, it is then divided into past and future. But the present has no extension²⁹ whatever.

Where, therefore, is that time which we may call “long”? Is it future? Actually we do not say of the future, “It is long,” for it has not yet come to be, so as to be long. Instead, we say, “It will be long.” *When* will it be? For since it is future, it will not be long, for what may be long is not yet. It will be long only when it passes from the future which is not as yet, and will have begun to be present, so that there can be something that may be long. But in that case, time present cries aloud, in the words we have already heard, that it cannot be “long.”

²⁹*Spatium*, which means extension either in space or time.

CHAPTER XVI

21. And yet, O Lord, we do perceive intervals of time, and we compare them with each other, and we say that some are longer and others are shorter. We even measure how much longer or shorter this time may be than that time. And we say that this time is twice as long, or three times as long, while this other time is only just as long as that other. But we measure the passage of time when we measure the intervals of perception. But who can measure times past which now are no longer, or times future which are not yet – unless perhaps someone will dare to say that what does not exist can be measured? Therefore, while time is passing, it can be perceived and measured; but when it is past, it cannot, since it is not.

CHAPTER XVII

22. I am seeking the truth, O Father; I am not affirming it. O my God, direct and rule me.

Who is there who will tell me that there are not three times – as we learned when boys and as we have also taught boys – time past, time present, and time future? Who can say that there is only time present because the other two do not exist? Or do they also exist; but when, from the future, time becomes present, it proceeds from some secret place; and when, from times present, it becomes past, it recedes into some secret place? For where have those men who have foretold the future seen the things foretold, if then they were not yet existing? For what does not exist cannot be seen. And those who tell of things past could not speak of them as if they were true, if they did not see them in their minds. These things could in no way be discerned if they did not exist. There are therefore times present and times past.

CHAPTER XVIII

23. Give me leave, O Lord, to seek still further. O my Hope, let not my purpose be confounded. For if there are times past and future, I wish to know where they are. But if I have not yet succeeded in this, I still know that wherever they are, they are not there as future or past, but as present. For if they are there as future, they are there as “not yet”; if they are there as past, they are there as “no longer.” Wherever they are and whatever they are they exist therefore only as present. Although we tell of past things as true, they are drawn out of the memory – not the things themselves, which have already passed, but words constructed from the images of the perceptions which were formed in the mind, like footprints in their passage through the senses. My childhood, for instance, which is no longer, still exists in time past, which does not now exist. But when I call to mind its image and speak of it, I see it in the present because it is still in my memory. Whether there is a similar explanation for the foretelling of future events – that is, of the images of things which are not yet seen as if they were already existing – I confess, O my God, I do not know. But this I certainly do know: that we generally think ahead about our future actions, and this premeditation is in time present; but that the action which we premeditate is not yet, because it is still future. When we shall have started the action and have begun to do what we were premeditating, then that action will be in time present, because then it is no longer in time future.

24. Whatever may be the manner of this secret foreseeing of future things, nothing can be seen

except what exists. But what exists now is not future, but present. When, therefore, they say that future events are seen, it is not the events themselves, for they do not exist as yet (that is, they are still in time future), but perhaps, instead, their causes and their signs are seen, which already do exist. Therefore, to those already beholding these causes and signs, they are not future, but present, and from them future things are predicted because they are conceived in the mind. These conceptions, however, exist *now*, and those who predict those things see these conceptions before them in time present.

Let me take an example from the vast multitude and variety of such things. I see the dawn; I predict that the sun is about to rise. What I see is in time present, what I predict is in time future – not that the sun is future, for it already exists; but its rising is future, because it is not yet. Yet I could not predict even its rising, unless I had an image of it in my mind; as, indeed, I do even now as I speak. But that dawn which I see in the sky is not the rising of the sun (though it does precede it), nor is it a conception in my mind. These two³⁰ are seen in time present, in order that the event which is in time future may be predicted.

Future events, therefore, are not yet. And if they are not yet, they do not exist. And if they do not exist, they cannot be seen at all, but they can be predicted from things present, which now are and are seen.

CHAPTER XIX

25. Now, therefore, O Ruler of your creatures, what is the mode by which you teach souls those things which are still future? For you have taught your prophets. How do you, to whom nothing is future, teach future things – or rather teach things present from the signs of things future? For what does not exist certainly cannot be taught. This way of yours is too far from my sight; it is too great for me, I cannot attain to it.³¹ But I shall be enabled by you, when you will grant it, O sweet Light of my secret eyes.

CHAPTER XX

26. But even now it is manifest and clear that there are neither times future nor times past. Thus it is not properly said that there are three times, past, present, and future. Perhaps it might be said rightly that there are three times: a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future. For these three do coexist somehow in the soul, for otherwise I could not see them. The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation.³² If we are allowed to speak of these things so, I see three times, and I grant that there are three. Let it still be said, then, as our misapplied custom has it: “There are three times, past, present, and future.” I shall not be troubled by it, nor argue, nor object – always provided that what is said is understood, so that neither the future nor the past is said to exist now. There are but few things about which we

³⁰The breaking light and the image of the rising sun.

³¹Cf. Ps. 139:6.

³²*Memoria, contuitus, and expectatio*: a pattern that corresponds vaguely to the *movement* of Augustine's thought in the *Confessions*: from direct experience back to the supporting memories and forward to the outreach of hope and confidence in God's provident grace.

speak properly – and many more about which we speak improperly – though we understand one another’s meaning.

CHAPTER XXI

27. I have said, then, that we measure periods of time as they pass so that we can say that this time is twice as long as that one or that this is just as long as that, and so on for the other fractions of time which we can count by measuring.

So, then, as I was saying, we measure periods of time as they pass. And if anyone asks me, “How do you know this?”, I can answer: “I know because we measure. We could not measure things that do not exist, and things past and future do not exist.” But how do we measure present time since it has no extension? It is measured while it passes, but when it has passed it is not measured; for then there is nothing that could be measured. But whence, and how, and whither does it pass while it is being measured? Whence, but from the future? Which way, save through the present? Whither, but into the past? Therefore, from what is not yet, through what has no length, it passes into what is now no longer. But what do we measure, unless it is a time of some length? For we cannot speak of single, and double, and triple, and equal, and all the other ways in which we speak of time, except in terms of the length of the periods of time. But in what “length,” then, do we measure passing time? Is it in the future, from which it passes over? But what does not yet exist cannot be measured. Or, is it in the present, through which it passes? But what has no length we cannot measure. Or is it in the past into which it passes? But what is no longer we cannot measure.

CHAPTER XXII

28. My soul burns ardently to understand this most intricate enigma. O Lord my God, O good Father, I beseech you through Christ, do not close off these things, both the familiar and the obscure, from my desire. Do not bar it from entering into them; but let their light dawn by your enlightening mercy, O Lord. Of whom shall I inquire about these things? And to whom shall I confess my ignorance of them with greater profit than to you, to whom these studies of mine (ardently longing to understand your Scriptures) are not a bore? Give me what I love, for I do love it; and this you have given me. O Father, who truly know how to give good gifts to your children, give this to me. Grant it, since I have undertaken to understand it, and hard labor is my lot until you open it. I beseech you, through Christ and in his name, the Holy of Holies, let no man interrupt me. “For I have believed, and therefore do I speak.”³³ This is my hope; for this I live: that I may contemplate the joys of my Lord.³⁴ Behold, you have made my days grow old, and they pass away – and how I do not know.

We speak of this time and that time, and these times and those times: “How long ago since he said this?” “How long ago since he did this?” “How long ago since I saw that?” “This syllable is twice as long as that single short syllable.” These words we say and hear, and we are understood and we understand. They are quite commonplace and ordinary, and still the meaning of these

³³Cf. Ps. 116:10.

³⁴Cf. Matt. 25:21, 23.

very same things lies deeply hid and its discovery is still to come.

CHAPTER XXIII

29. I once heard a learned man say that the motions of the sun, moon, and stars constituted time; and I did not agree. For why should not the motions of all bodies constitute time? What if the lights of heaven should cease, and a potter's wheel still turn round: would there be no time by which we might measure those rotations and say either that it turned at equal intervals, or, if it moved now more slowly and now more quickly, that some rotations were longer and others shorter? And while we were saying this, would we not also be speaking in time? Or would there not be in our words some syllables that were long and others short, because the first took a longer time to sound, and the others a shorter time? O God, grant men to see in a small thing the notions that are common³⁵ to all things, both great and small. Both the stars and the lights of heaven are "for signs and seasons, and for days and years."³⁶ This is doubtless the case, but just as I should not say that the circuit of that wooden wheel was a day, neither would that learned man say that there was, therefore, no time.

30. I thirst to know the power and the nature of time, by which we measure the motions of bodies, and say, for example, that this motion is twice as long as that. For I ask, since the word "day" refers not only to the length of time that the sun is above the earth (which separates day from night), but also refers to the sun's entire circuit from east all the way around to east – on account of which we can say, "So many days have passed" (the nights being included when we say, "So many days," and their lengths not counted separately) – since, then, the day is ended by the motion of the sun and by his passage from east to east, I ask whether the motion itself is the day, or whether the day is the period in which that motion is completed; or both? For if the sun's passage is the day, then there would be a day even if the sun should finish his course in as short a period as an hour. If the motion itself is the day, then it would not be a day if from one sunrise to another there were a period no longer than an hour. But the sun would have to go round twenty-four times to make just one day. If it is both, then that could not be called a day if the sun ran his entire course in the period of an hour; nor would it be a day if, while the sun stood still, as much time passed as the sun usually covered during his whole course, from morning to morning. I shall, therefore, not ask any more what it is that is called a day, but rather what time is, for it is by time that we measure the circuit of the sun, and would be able to say that it was finished in half the period of time that it customarily takes if it were completed in a period of only twelve hours. If, then, we compare these periods, we could call one of them a single and the other a double period, as if the sun might run his course from east to east sometimes in a single period and sometimes in a double period.

Let no man tell me, therefore, that the motions of the heavenly bodies constitute time. For when the sun stood still at the prayer of a certain man in order that he might gain his victory in battle, the sun stood still but time went on. For in as long a span of time as was sufficient the battle was fought and ended.³⁷

³⁵*Communes notitias*, the universal principles of "common sense." This idea became a basic category in scholastic epistemology.

³⁶Gen. 1:14.

³⁷Cf. Josh. 10:12-14.

I see, then, that time is a certain kind of extension. But do I see it, or do I only seem to? You, O Light and Truth, will show me.

CHAPTER XXIV

31. do you command that I should agree if anyone says that time is “the motion of a body”? You do not so command. For I hear that no body is moved but in time; this you tell me. But that the motion of a body itself is time I do not hear; you do not say so. For when a body is moved, I measure by time how long it was moving from the time when it began to be moved until it stopped. And if I did not see when it began to be moved, and if it continued to move so that I could not see when it stopped, I could not measure the movement, except from the time when I began to see it until I stopped. But if I look at it for a long time, I can affirm only that the time is long but not how long it may be. This is because when we say, “How long?”, we are speaking comparatively as: “This is as long as that,” or, “This is twice as long as that”; or other such similar ratios. But if we were able to observe the point in space where and from which the body, which is moved, comes and the point to which it is moved; or if we can observe its parts moving as in a wheel, we can say how long the movement of the body took or the movement of its parts from this place to that. Since, therefore, the motion of a body is one thing, and the norm by which we measure how long it takes is another thing, we cannot see which of these two is to be called time. For, although a body is sometimes moved and sometimes stands still, we measure not only its motion but also its rest as well; and both by time! Thus we say, “It stood still as long as it moved,” or, “It stood still twice or three times as long as it moved” – or any other ratio which our measuring has either determined or imagined, either roughly or precisely, according to our custom. Therefore, time is not the motion of a body.

CHAPTER XXV

32. And I confess to you, O Lord, that I am still ignorant as to what time is. And again I confess to you, O Lord, that I know that I am speaking all these things in time, and that I have already spoken of time a long time, and that “very long” is not long except when measured by the duration of time. How, then, do I know this, when I do not know what time is? Or, is it possible that I do not know how I can express what I do know? Alas for me! I do not even know the extent of my own ignorance. Behold, O my God, in your presence I do not lie. As my heart is, so I speak. You shall light my candle; you, O Lord my God, will enlighten my darkness.³⁸

CHAPTER XXVI

33. Does not my soul most truly confess to you that I do measure intervals of time? But what is it that I thus measure, O my God, and how is it that I do not know what I measure? I measure the motion of a body by time, but the time itself I do not measure. But, truly, could I measure the motion of a body – how long it takes, how long it is in motion from this place to that – unless I could measure the time in which it is moving?

³⁸Cf. Ps. 18:28.

How, then, do I measure this time itself? Do we measure a longer time by a shorter time, as we measure the length of a crossbeam in terms of cubits?³⁹ Thus, we can say that the length of a long syllable is measured by the length of a short syllable and thus say that the long syllable is double. So also we measure the length of poems by the length of the lines, and the length of the line by the length of the feet, and the length of the feet by the length of the syllable, and the length of the long syllables by the length of the short ones. We do not measure by pages – for in that way we would measure space rather than time – but when we speak the words as they pass by we say: “It is a long stanza, because it is made up of so many verses; they are long verses because they consist of so many feet; they are long feet because they extend over so many syllables; this is a long syllable because it is twice the length of a short one.”

But no certain measure of time is obtained this way; since it is possible that if a shorter verse is pronounced slowly, it may take up more time than a longer one if it is pronounced hurriedly. The same would hold for a stanza, or a foot, or a syllable. From this it appears to me that time is nothing other than extendedness;⁴⁰ but extendedness of what I do not know. This is a marvel to me. The extendedness may be of the mind itself. For what is it I measure, I ask you, O my God, when I say either, roughly, “This time is longer than that,” or, more precisely, “This is *twice* as long as that.” I know that I am measuring time. But I am not measuring the future, for it is not yet; and I am not measuring the present because it is extended by no length; and I am not measuring the past because it no longer is. What is it, therefore, that I am measuring? Is it time in its passage, but not time past [*praetereuntia tempora, non praeterita*]? This is what I have been saying.

CHAPTER XXVII

34. Press on, O my mind, and attend with all your power. God is our Helper: “it is he that has made us and not we ourselves.”⁴¹ Give heed where the truth begins to dawn.⁴² Suppose now that a bodily voice begins to sound, and continues to sound – on and on – and then ceases. Now there is silence. The voice is past, and there is no longer a sound. It was future before it sounded, and could not be measured because it was not yet; and now it cannot be measured because it is no longer. Therefore, while it was sounding, it might have been measured because then there was something that could be measured. But even then it did not stand still, for it was in motion and was passing away. Could it, on that account, be any more readily measured? For while it was passing away, it was being extended into some interval of time in which it might be measured, since the present has no length. Supposing, though, that it might have been measured – then also suppose that another voice had begun to sound and is still sounding without any interruption to break its continued flow. We can measure it only while it is sounding, for when it has ceased to sound it will be already past and there will not be anything there that can be measured. Let us measure it exactly; and let us say how much it is. But while it is sounding, it cannot be measured except from the instant when it began to sound, down to the final moment when it left off. For we measure the time interval itself from some beginning point to some end. This is why a voice

³⁹*Cubitum*, literally the distance between the elbow and the tip of the middle finger; in the imperial system of weights and measures it was 17.5 inches.

⁴⁰*Distentionem*, “spread-out-ness”; cf. Descartes’ notion of *res extensae*, and its relation to time.

⁴¹Ps. 100:3.

⁴²Here Augustine begins to summarize his own answers to the questions he has raised in his analysis of time.

that has not yet ended cannot be measured, so that one could say how long or how briefly it will continue. Nor can it be said to be equal to another voice or single or double in comparison to it or anything like this. But when it is ended, it is no longer. How, therefore, may it be measured? And yet we measure times; not those which are not yet, nor those which no longer are, nor those which are stretched out by some delay, nor those which have no limit. Therefore, we measure neither times future nor times past, nor times present, nor times passing by; and yet we do measure times.

35. *Deus Creator omnium*⁴³: this verse of eight syllables alternates between short and long syllables. The four short ones – that is, the first, third, fifth, and seventh – are single in relation to the four long ones – that is, the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth. Each of the long ones is double the length of each of the short ones. I affirm this and report it, and common sense perceives that this indeed is the case. By common sense, then, I measure a long syllable by a short one, and I find that it is twice as long. But when one sounds after another, if the first be short and the latter long, how can I hold the short one and how can I apply it to the long one as a measure, so that I can discover that the long one is twice as long, when, in fact, the long one does not begin to sound until the short one leaves off sounding? That same long syllable I do not measure as present, since I cannot measure it until it is ended; but its ending is its passing away.

What is it, then, that I can measure? Where is the short syllable by which I measure? Where is the long one that I am measuring? Both have sounded, have flown away, have passed on, and are no longer. And still I measure, and I confidently answer – as far as a trained ear can be trusted – that this syllable is single and that syllable double. And I could not do this unless they both had passed and were ended. Therefore I do not measure them, for they do not exist any more. But I measure something in my memory which remains fixed.

36. It is in you, O mind of mine, that I measure the periods of time. Do not shout me down that it exists [objectively]; do not overwhelm yourself with the turbulent flood of your impressions. In you, as I have said, I measure the periods of time. I measure as time present the impression that things make on you as they pass by and what remains after they have passed by – I do not measure the things themselves which have passed by and left their impression on you. This is what I measure when I measure periods of time. Either, then, these are the periods of time or else I do not measure time at all.

What are we doing when we measure silence, and say that this silence has lasted as long as that voice lasts? Do we not project our thought to the measure of a sound, as if it were then sounding, so that we can say something concerning the intervals of silence in a given span of time? For, even when both the voice and the tongue are still, we review – in thought – poems and verses, and discourse of various kinds or various measures of motions, and we specify their time spans – how long this is in relation to that – just as if we were speaking them aloud. If anyone wishes to utter a prolonged sound, and if, in forethought, he has decided how long it should be, that man has already in silence gone through a span of time, and committed his sound to memory. Thus he begins to speak and his voice sounds until it reaches the predetermined end. It has truly sounded and will go on sounding. But what is already finished has already sounded and what remains will

⁴³The same hymn of Ambrose quoted above, Bk. IX, Ch. XII, 39, and analyzed again in *De musica*, VI, 2:2.

still sound. Thus it passes on, until the present intention carries the future over into the past. The past increases by the diminution of the future until by the consumption of all the future all is past.⁴⁴

CHAPTER XXVIII

37. But how is the future diminished or consumed when it does not yet exist? Or how does the past, which exists no longer, increase, unless it is that in the mind in which all this happens there are three functions? For the mind expects, it attends, and it remembers; so that what it expects passes into what it remembers by way of what it attends to. Who denies that future things do not exist as yet? But still there is already in the mind the expectation of things still future. And who denies that past things now exist no longer? Still there is in the mind the memory of things past. Who denies that time present has no length, since it passes away in a moment? Yet, our attention has a continuity and it is through this that what is present may proceed to become absent. Therefore, future time, which is nonexistent, is not long; but “a long future” is “a long expectation of the future.” Nor is time past, which is now no longer, long; a “long past” is “a long memory of the past.”

38. I am about to repeat a psalm that I know. Before I begin, my attention encompasses the whole, but once I have begun, as much of it as becomes past while I speak is still stretched out in my memory. The span of my action is divided between my memory, which contains what I have repeated, and my expectation, which contains what I am about to repeat. Yet my attention is continually present with me, and through it what was future is carried over so that it becomes past. The more this is done and repeated, the more the memory is enlarged – and expectation is shortened – until the whole expectation is exhausted. Then the whole action is ended and passed into memory. And what takes place in the entire psalm takes place also in each individual part of it and in each individual syllable. This also holds in the even longer action of which that psalm is only a portion. The same holds in the whole life of man, of which all the actions of men are parts. The same holds in the whole age of the sons of men, of which all the lives of men are parts.

CHAPTER XXIX

39. But “since your loving-kindness is better than life itself,”⁴⁵ observe how my life is but a stretching out, and how your right hand has upheld me in my Lord, the Son of Man, the Mediator between you, the One, and us, the many – in so many ways and by so many means. Thus through him I may lay hold upon him in whom I am also laid hold upon; and I may be gathered up from my old way of life to follow that One and to forget that which is behind, no longer stretched out but now pulled together again – stretching forth not to what shall be and shall pass away but to those things that *are* before me. Not distractedly now, but intently, I follow on for the prize of my heavenly calling,⁴⁶ where I may hear the sound of your praise and contemplate your delights, which neither come to be nor pass away.

⁴⁴This theory of time is worth comparing with its most notable restatement in modern poetry, in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and especially "Burnt Norton."

⁴⁵Ps. 63:3.

⁴⁶Cf. Phil. 3:12-14.

But now my years are spent in mourning.⁴⁷ And you, O Lord, are my comfort, my eternal Father. But I have been torn between the times, the order of which I do not know, and my thoughts, even the inmost and deepest places of my soul, are mangled by various commotions until I shall flow together into you, purged and molten in the fire of your love.

CHAPTER XXX

40. And I will be immovable and fixed in you, and your truth will be my mold. And I shall not have to endure the questions of those men who, as if in a morbid disease, thirst for more than they can hold and say, “What did God make before he made heaven and earth?” or, “How did it come into his mind to make something when he had never before made anything?” Grant them, O Lord, to consider well what they are saying; and grant them to see that where there is no time they cannot say “never.” When, therefore, he is said “never to have made” something – what is this but to say that it was made in no time at all? Let them therefore see that there could be no time without a created world, and let them cease to speak vanity of this kind. Let them also be stretched out to those things which are before them, and understand that you, the eternal Creator of all times, are before all times and that no times are coeternal with you; nor is any creature, even if there is a creature “above time.”

CHAPTER XXXI

41. O Lord my God, what a chasm there is in your deep secret! How far short of it have the consequences of my sins cast me? Heal my eyes, that I may enjoy your light. Surely, if there is a mind that so greatly abounds in knowledge and foreknowledge, to which all things past and future are as well known as one psalm is well known to me, that mind would be an exceeding marvel and altogether astonishing. For whatever is past and whatever is yet to come would be no more concealed from him than the past and future of that psalm were hidden from me when I was chanting it: how much of it had been sung from the beginning and what and how much still remained till the end. But far be it from you, O Creator of the universe, and Creator of our souls and bodies – far be it from you that you should merely know all things past and future. Far, far more wonderfully, and far more mysteriously you know them. For it is not as the feelings of one singing familiar songs, or hearing a familiar song in which, because of his expectation of words still to come and his remembrance of those that are past, his feelings are varied and his senses are divided. This is not the way that anything happens to you, who are unchangeably eternal, that is, the truly eternal Creator of minds. As in the beginning you knew both the heaven and the earth without any change in your knowledge, so you did make heaven and earth in their beginnings without any division in your action.⁴⁸ Let him who understands this confess to you; and let him who does not understand also confess to thee! Oh, exalted as you are, still the humble in heart are your dwelling place! For you lift them who are cast down and they fall not for whom you are the Most High.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Cf. Ps. 31:10.

⁴⁸Note here the preparation for the transition from this analysis of time in Bk. XI to the exploration of the mystery of creation in Bks. XII and XIII.

⁴⁹*Celsitudo*, an honorific title, somewhat like "Your Highness."

BOOK TWELVE – Truth and Interpretation

The mode of creation and the truth of Scripture. Augustine explores the relation of the visible and formed matter of heaven and earth to the prior matrix from which it was formed. This leads to an intricate analysis of “unformed matter” and the primal “possibility” from which God created, itself created *de nihilo*. He finds a reference to this in the misconstrued Scriptural phrase “the heaven of heavens.” Realizing that his interpretation of Gen. 1:1, 2, is not self-evidently the only possibility, Augustine turns to an elaborate discussion of the multiplicity of perspectives in hermeneutics and, in the course of this, reviews the various possibilities of true interpretation of his Scripture text. He emphasizes the importance of tolerance where there are plural options, and confidence where basic Christian faith is concerned.

CHAPTER I

1. My heart is deeply stirred, O Lord, when in this poor life of mine the words of your Holy Scripture strike upon it. This is why the poverty of the human intellect expresses itself in an abundance of language. Inquiry is more loquacious than discovery. Demanding takes longer than obtaining; and the hand that knocks is more active than the hand that receives. But we have the promise, and who shall break it? “If God be for us, who can be against us?”¹ “Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for everyone that asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him that knocks, it shall be opened.”² These are your own promises, and who need fear to be deceived when truth promises?

CHAPTER II

2. In lowliness my tongue confesses to your exaltation, for you made heaven and earth. This heaven which I see, and this earth on which I walk – from which came this “earth” that I carry about me – you did make.

But where is that heaven of heavens, O Lord, of which we hear in the words of the psalm, “The heaven of heavens is the Lord’s, but the earth he has given to the children of men”?³ Where is the heaven that we cannot see, in relation to which all that we can see is earth? For this whole corporeal creation has been beautifully formed – though not everywhere in its entirety – and our earth is the lowest of these levels. Still, compared with that heaven of heavens, even the heaven of our own earth is only earth. Indeed, it is not absurd to call each of those two great bodies⁴

¹Rom. 8:31.

²Matt. 7:7, 8.

³Vulgate, Ps. 113:16 (cf. Ps. 115:16, K.J.; see also Ps. 148:4, both Vulgate and K.J.): *Caelum caeli domino*, etc. Augustine finds a distinction here for which the Hebrew text gives no warrant. The Hebrew is a typical nominal sentence and means simply “The heavens are the heavens of Yahweh”; cf. the Soncino edition of The Psalms, edited by A. Cohen; cf. also R.S.V., Ps. 115:16. The LXX reading (ο ουρανοζ του ουρανου) seems to rest on a variant Hebrew text. This idiomatic construction does not mean “the heavens of the heavens” (as it is too literally translated in the LXX), but rather “highest heaven.” This is a familiar way, in Hebrew, of emphasizing a superlative (e.g., “King of kings,” “Song of songs”). The singular thing can be described superlatively only in terms of itself!

⁴Earth and sky.

“earth” in comparison with that ineffable heaven which is the Lord’s, and not for the sons of men.

CHAPTER III

3. And truly this earth was invisible and unformed,⁵ and there was an inexpressibly profound abyss⁶ above which there was no light since it had no form. You did command it written that “darkness was on the face of the deep.”⁷ What else is darkness except the absence of light? For if there had been light, where would it have been except by being over all, showing itself rising aloft and giving light? Therefore, where there was no light as yet, why was it that darkness was present, unless it was that light was absent? Darkness, then, was heavy upon it, because the light from above was absent; just as there is silence where there is no sound. And what is it to have silence anywhere but simply not to have sound? have you not, O Lord, taught this soul which confesses to you? have you not thus taught me, O Lord, that before you did form and separate this formless matter there was *nothing*: neither color, nor figure, nor body, nor spirit? Yet it was not absolutely nothing; it was a certain formlessness without any shape.

CHAPTER IV

4. What, then, should that formlessness be called so that somehow it might be indicated to those of sluggish mind, unless we use some word in common speech? But what can be found anywhere in the world nearer to a total formlessness than the earth and the abyss? Because of their being on the lowest level, they are less beautiful than are the other and higher parts, all translucent and shining. Therefore, why may I not consider the formlessness of matter – which you did create without shapely form, from which to make this shapely world – as fittingly indicated to men by the phrase, “The earth invisible and unformed”?

CHAPTER V

5. When our thought seeks something for our sense to fasten to [in this concept of unformed matter], and when it says to itself, “It is not an intelligible form, such as life or justice, since it is the material for bodies; and it is not a former perception, for there is nothing in the invisible and unformed which can be seen and felt” – while human thought says such things to itself, it may be attempting either to know by being ignorant or by knowing how not to know.

CHAPTER VI

6. But if, O Lord, I am to confess to you, by my mouth and my pen, the whole of what you have taught me concerning this unformed matter, I must say first of all that when I first heard of such

⁵It is interesting that Augustine should have preferred the *invisibilis et incomposita* of the Old Latin version of Gen. 1:2 over the *inanis et vacua* of the Vulgate, which was surely accessible to him. Since this is to be a key phrase in the succeeding exegesis this reading can hardly have been the casual citation of the old and familiar version. Is it possible that Augustine may have had the sensibilities and associations of his readers in mind – for many of them may have not known Jerome's version or, at least, not very well?

⁶*Abysus*, literally, the unplumbed depths of the sea, and as a constant meaning here, “the depths beyond measure.”

⁷Gen. 1:2.

matter and did not understand it – and those who told me of it could not understand it either – I conceived of it as having countless and varied forms. Thus, I did not think about it rightly. My mind in its agitation used to turn up all sorts of foul and horrible “forms”; but still they were “forms.” And still I called it formless, not because it was unformed, but because it had what seemed to me a kind of form that my mind turned away from, as bizarre and incongruous, before which my human weakness was confused. And even what I did conceive of as unformed was so, not because it was deprived of all form, but only as it compared with more beautiful forms. Right reason, then, persuaded me that I ought to remove altogether all vestiges of form whatever if I wished to conceive matter that was wholly unformed; and this I could not do. For I could more readily imagine that what was deprived of all form simply did not exist than I could conceive of anything between form and nothing – something which was neither formed nor nothing, something that was unformed and nearly nothing.

Thus my mind ceased to question my spirit – filled as it was with the images of formed bodies, changing and varying them according to its will. And so I applied myself to the bodies themselves and looked more deeply into their mutability, by which they cease to be what they had been and begin to be what they were not. This transition from form to form I had regarded as involving something like a formless condition, though not actual nothingness.⁸

But I desired to know, not to guess. And, if my voice and my pen were to confess to you all the various knots you have untied for me about this question, who among my readers could endure to grasp the whole of the account? Still, despite this, my heart will not cease to give honor to you or to sing your praises concerning those things which it is not able to express.⁹

For the mutability of mutable things carries with it the possibility of all those forms into which mutable things can be changed. But this mutability – what is it? Is it soul? Is it body? Is it the external appearance of soul or body? Could it be said, “Nothing was something,” and “That which is, is not”? If this were possible, I would say that this was it, and in some such manner it must have been in order to receive these visible and composite forms.¹⁰

CHAPTER VII

7. Whence and how was this, unless it came from you, from whom all things are, in so far as they are? But the farther something is from you, the more unlike you it is – and this is not a matter of distance or place.

Thus it was that you, O Lord, who are not one thing in one place and another thing in another place but the Selfsame, and the Selfsame, and the Selfsame – “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty”¹¹ – thus it was that in the beginning, and through your Wisdom which is from you

⁸Augustine may not have known the Platonic doctrine of nonbeing (cf. *Sophist*, 236C-237B), but he clearly is deeply influenced here by Plotinus; cf. *Enneads*, II, 4:8f., where matter is analyzed as a substratum without quantity or quality; and 4:15: “Matter, then, must be described as τὸ ἀπεῖρον (the indefinite). . . . Matter is indeterminateness and nothing else.” In short, *materia informis* is sheer possibility; not anything and not nothing!

⁹*Dictare*: was Augustine dictating his *Confessions*? It is very probable.

¹⁰*Visibiles et compositas*, the opposite of “invisible and unformed.”

¹¹Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8.

and born of your substance, you did create something and that out of nothing.¹² For you did create the heaven and the earth – not out of yourself, for then they would be equal to your only Son and thereby to you. And there is no sense in which it would be right that anything should be equal to you that was not of you. But what else besides you was there out of which you might create these things, O God, one Trinity, and trine Unity?¹³ And, therefore, it was out of nothing at all that you did create the heaven and earth – something great and something small – for you are Almighty and Good, and able to make all things good: even the great heaven and the small earth. You were, and there was nothing else from which you did create heaven and earth: these two things, one near you, the other near to nothing; the one to which only you are superior, the other to which nothing else is inferior.

CHAPTER VIII

8. That heaven of heavens was yours, O Lord, but the earth which you did give to the sons of men to be seen and touched was not then in the same form as that in which we now see it and touch it. For then it was invisible and unformed and there was an abyss over which there was no light. The darkness was truly *over* the abyss, that is, more than just *in* the abyss. For this abyss of waters which now is visible has even in its depths a certain light appropriate to its nature, perceptible in some fashion to fishes and the things that creep about on the bottom of it. But then the entire abyss was almost nothing, since it was still altogether unformed. Yet even there, there was something that had the possibility of being formed. For you, O Lord, had made the world out of unformed matter, and this you did make out of nothing and did make it into almost nothing. From it you have then made these great things which we, the sons of men, marvel at. For this corporeal heaven is truly marvelous, this firmament between the water and the waters which you did make on the second day after the creation of light, saying, “Let it be done,” and it was done.¹⁴ This firmament you did call heaven, that is, the heaven of this earth and sea which you made on the third day, giving a visible shape to the unformed matter which you had made before all the days. For even before any day you had already made a heaven, but that was the heaven of this heaven: for in the beginning you had made heaven and earth.

But this earth itself which you had made was unformed matter; it was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss. Out of this invisible and unformed earth, out of this formlessness which is almost nothing, you did then make all these things of which the changeable world consists – and yet does not fully consist in itself¹⁵ – for its very changeableness appears in this, that its times and seasons can be observed and numbered. The periods of time are measured by the changes of things, while the forms, whose matter is the invisible earth of which we have spoken, are varied and altered.

¹²*De nihilo.*

¹³*Trina unitas.*

¹⁴Cf. Gen. 1:6.

¹⁵*Constat et non constat*, the created earth really exists but never is self-sufficient.

CHAPTER IX

9. And therefore the Spirit, the Teacher of your servant,¹⁶ when he mentions that “in the beginning you made heaven and earth,” says nothing about times and is silent as to the days. For, clearly, that heaven of heavens which you did create in the beginning is in some way an intellectual creature, although in no way coeternal with you, O Trinity. Yet it is nonetheless a partaker in your eternity. Because of the sweetness of its most happy contemplation of you, it is greatly restrained in its own mutability and cleaves to you without any lapse from the time in which it was created, surpassing all the rolling change of time. But this shapelessness – this earth invisible and unformed – was not numbered among the days itself. For where there is no shape or order there is nothing that either comes or goes, and where this does not occur there certainly are no days, nor any vicissitude of duration.

CHAPTER X

10. O Truth, O Light of my heart, let not my own darkness speak to me! I had fallen into that darkness and was darkened thereby. But in it, even in its depths, I came to love you. I went astray and still I remembered you. I heard your voice behind me, bidding me return, though I could scarcely hear it for the tumults of my boisterous passions. And now, behold, I am returning, burning and thirsting after your fountain. Let no one hinder me; here will I drink and so have life. Let me not be my own life; for of myself I have lived badly. I was death to myself; in you I have revived. Speak to me; converse with me. I have believed your books, and their words are very deep.

CHAPTER XI

11. You have told me already, O Lord, with a strong voice in my inner ear, that you are eternal and alone have immortality. You are not changed by any shape or motion, and your will is not altered by temporal process, because no will that changes is immortal. This is clear to me, in your sight; let it become clearer and clearer, I beseech you. In that light let me abide soberly under your wings.

Thou have also told me, O Lord, with a strong voice in my inner ear, that you have created all natures and all substances, which are not what you are yourself; and yet they do exist. Only that which is nothing at all is not from you, and that motion of the will away from you, who are, toward something that exists only in a lesser degree – such a motion is an offense and a sin. No one’s sin either hurts you or disturbs the order of your rule, either first or last. All this, in your sight, is clear to me. Let it become clearer and clearer, I beseech you, and in that light let me abide soberly under your wings.

12. Likewise, you have told me, with a strong voice in my inner ear, that this creation – whose delight you alone art – is not coeternal with you. With a most persevering purity it draws its support from you and nowhere and never betrays its own mutability, for you are ever present with it; and it cleaves to you with its entire affection, having no future to expect and no past that

¹⁶Moses.

it remembers; it is varied by no change and is extended by no time.

O blessed one – if such there be – clinging to your blessedness! It is blest in you, its everlasting Inhabitant and its Light. I cannot find a term that I would judge more fitting for “the heaven of the heavens of the Lord” than “Your house” – which contemplates your delights without any declination toward anything else and which, with a pure mind in most harmonious stability, joins all together in the peace of those saintly spirits who are citizens of your city in those heavens that are above this visible heaven.

13. From this let the soul that has wandered far away from you understand – if now it thirsts for you; if now its tears have become its bread, while daily they say to it, “Where is your God?”¹⁷; if now it requests of you just one thing and seeks after this: that it may dwell in your house all the days of its life (and what is its life but you? And what are your days but your eternity, like your years which do not fail, since you are the Selfsame?) – from this, I say, let the soul understand (as far as it can) how far above all times you are in your eternity; and how your house has never wandered away from you; and, although it is not coeternal with you, it continually and unfailingly clings to you and suffers no vicissitudes of time. This, in your sight, is clear to me; may it become clearer and clearer to me, I beseech you, and in this light may I abide soberly under your wings.

14. Now I do not know what kind of formlessness there is in these mutations of these last and lowest creatures. Yet who will tell me, unless it is someone who, in the emptiness of his own heart, wanders about and begins to be dizzy in his own fancies? Who except such a one would tell me whether, if all form were diminished and consumed, formlessness alone would remain, through which a thing was changed and turned from one species into another, so that sheer formlessness would then be characterized by temporal change? And surely this could not be, because without motion there is no time, and where there is no form there is no change.

CHAPTER XII

15. These things I have considered as you have given me ability, O my God, as you have excited me to knock, and as you have opened to me when I knock. Two things I find which you have made, not within intervals of time, although neither is coeternal with you. One of them is so formed that, without any wavering in its contemplation, without any interval of change – mutable but not changed – it may fully enjoy your eternity and immutability. The other is so formless that it could not change from one form to another (either of motion or of rest), and so time has no hold upon it. But you did not leave this formless, for, before any “day” in the beginning, you did create heaven and earth – these are the two things of which I spoke.

But “the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss.” By these words its formlessness is indicated to us – so that by degrees they may be led forward who cannot wholly conceive of the privation of all form without arriving at nothing. From this formlessness a second heaven might be created and a second earth – visible and well formed, with the ordered beauty of the waters, and whatever else is recorded as created (though not without days) in the formation

¹⁷Ps. 42:3, 10.

of this world. And all this because such things are so ordered that in them the changes of time may take place through the ordered processes of motion and form.

CHAPTER XIII

16. Meanwhile this is what I understand, O my God, when I hear your Scripture saying, “In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth, but the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss.” It does not say on what day you did create these things. Thus, for the time being I understand that “heaven of heavens” to mean the intelligible heaven, where to understand is to know all at once – not “in part,” not “darkly,” not “through a glass” – but as a simultaneous whole, in full sight, “face to face.”¹⁸ It is not this thing now and then another thing, but (as we said) knowledge all at once without any temporal change. And by the invisible and unformed earth, I understand that which suffers no temporal vicissitude. Temporal change customarily means having one thing now and another later; but where there is no form there can be no distinction between this or that. It is, then, by means of these two – one thing well formed in the beginning and another thing wholly unformed, the one heaven (that is, the heaven of heavens) and the other one earth (but the earth invisible and unformed) – it is by means of these two notions that I am able to understand why your Scripture said, without mention of days, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” For it immediately indicated which earth it was speaking about. When, on the second day, the firmament is recorded as having been created and called heaven, this suggests to us which heaven it was that he was speaking about earlier, without specifying a day.

CHAPTER XIV

17. Marvelous is the depth of your oracles. Their surface is before us, inviting the little ones; and yet wonderful is their depth, O my God, marvelous is their depth! It is a fearful thing to look into them: an awe of honor and a tremor of love. Their enemies I hate vehemently. Oh, if you would slay them with your two-edged sword, so that they should not be enemies! For I would prefer that they should be slain to themselves, that they might live to you. But see, there are others who are not critics but praisers of the book of Genesis; they say: “The Spirit of God who wrote these things by his servant Moses did not wish these words to be understood like this. He did not wish to have it understood as you say, but as we say.” To them, O God of us all, yourself being the judge, I give answer.

CHAPTER XV

18. “Will you say that these things are false which Truth tells me, with a loud voice in my inner ear, about the very eternity of the Creator: that his essence is changed in no respect by time and that his will is not distinct from his essence? Thus, he doth not will one thing now and another thing later, but he wills once and for all everything that he wills – not again and again; and not now this and now that. Nor does he will afterward what he did not will before, nor does he cease to will what he had willed before. Such a will would be mutable and no mutable thing is eternal. But our God is eternal.

¹⁸Cor. 13:12.

“Again, he tells me in my inner ear that the expectation of future things is turned to sight when they have come to pass. And this same sight is turned into memory when they have passed. Moreover, all thought that varies thus is mutable, and nothing mutable is eternal. But our God is eternal.” These things I sum up and put together, and I conclude that my God, the eternal God, has not made any creature by any new will, and his knowledge does not admit anything transitory.

19. “What, then, will you say to this, you objectors? Are these things false?” “No,” they say. “What then? Is it false that every entity already formed and all matter capable of receiving form is from him alone who is supremely good, because he is supreme?” “We do not deny this, either,” they say. “What then? Do you deny this: that there is a certain sublime created order which cleaves with such a chaste love to the true and truly eternal God that, although it is not coeternal with him, yet it does not separate itself from him, and does not flow away into any mutation of change or process but abides in true contemplation of him alone?” If you, O God, do show yourself to him who loves you as you have commanded – and are sufficient for him – then, such a one will neither turn himself away from you nor turn away toward himself. This is “the house of God.” It is not an earthly house and it is not made from any celestial matter; but it is a spiritual house, and it partakes in your eternity because it is without blemish forever. For you have made it steadfast forever and ever; you have given it a law which will not be removed. Still, it is not coeternal with you, O God, since it is not without beginning – it was created.

20. For, although we can find no time before it (for wisdom was created before all things),¹⁹ this is certainly not that Wisdom which is absolutely coeternal and equal with you, our God, its Father, the Wisdom through whom all things were created and in whom, in the beginning, you did create the heaven and earth. This is truly the created Wisdom, namely, the intelligible nature which, in its contemplation of light, is light. For this is also called wisdom, even if it is a created wisdom. But the difference between the Light that lightens and that which is enlightened is as great as is the difference between the Wisdom that creates and that which is created. So also is the difference between the Righteousness that justifies and the righteousness that is made by justification. For we also are called your righteousness, for a certain servant of yours says, “That we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”²⁰ Therefore, there is a certain created wisdom that was created before all things: the rational and intelligible mind of that chaste city of yours. It is our mother which is above and is free²¹ and “eternal in the heavens”²² – but in what heavens except those which praise you, the “heaven of heavens”? This also is the “heaven of heavens” which is the Lord’s – although we find no time before it, since what has been created before all things also precedes the creation of time. Still, the eternity of the Creator himself is before it, from whom it took its beginning as created, though not in time (since time as yet was not), even though time belongs to its created nature.

¹⁹Cf. Eccles. 1:4.

²⁰2 Cor. 5:21.

²¹Cf. Gal. 4:26.

²²2 Cor. 5:1.

21. Thus it is that the intelligible heaven came to be from you, our God, but in such a way that it is quite another being than you art; it is not the Selfsame. Yet we find that time is not only not *before* it, but not even *in* it, thus making it able to behold your face forever and not ever be turned aside. Thus, it is varied by no change at all. But there is still in it that mutability in virtue of which it could become dark and cold, if it did not, by cleaving to you with a supernal love, shine and glow from you like a perpetual noon. O house full of light and splendor! “I have loved your beauty and the place of the habitation of the glory of my Lord,”²³ your builder and possessor. In my wandering let me sigh for you; this I ask of him who made you, that he should also possess me in you, seeing that he has also made me. “I have gone astray like a lost sheep²⁴; yet upon the shoulders of my Shepherd, who is your builder, I have hoped that I may be brought back to you.”²⁵

22. “What will you say to me now, you objectors to whom I spoke, who still believe that Moses was the holy servant of God, and that his books were the oracles of the Holy Spirit? Is it not in this ‘house of God’ – not coeternal with God, yet in its own mode ‘eternal in the heavens’ – that you vainly seek for temporal change? You will not find it there. It rises above all extension and every revolving temporal period, and it rises to what is forever good and cleaves fast to God.”

“It is so,” they reply. “What, then, about those things which my heart cried out to my God, when it heard, within, the voice of his praise? What, then, do you contend is false in them? Is it because matter was unformed, and since there was no form there was no order? But where there was no order there could have been no temporal change. Yet even this ‘almost nothing,’ since it was not altogether nothing, was truly from him from whom everything that exists is in whatever state it is.” “This also,” they say, “we do not deny.”

CHAPTER XVI

23. Now, I would like to discuss a little further, in your presence, O my God, with those who admit that all these things are true that your Truth has indicated to my mind. Let those who deny these things bark and drown their own voices with as much clamor as they please. I will endeavor to persuade them to be quiet and to permit your word to reach them. But if they are unwilling, and if they repel me, I ask of you, O my God, that you should not be silent to me.²⁶ Speak truly in my heart; if only you would speak thus, I would send them away, blowing up the dust and raising it in their own eyes. As for myself I will enter into my closet²⁷ and there sing to you the songs of love, groaning with groanings that are unutterable now in my pilgrimage,²⁸ and remembering Jerusalem with my heart uplifted to Jerusalem my country, Jerusalem my mother²⁹; and to you yourself, the Ruler of the source of Light, its Father, Guardian, Husband; its chaste

²³Cf. Ps. 26:8.

²⁴Ps. 119:176.

²⁵To “the house of God.”

²⁶Cf. Ps. 28:1.

²⁷*Cubile*, i.e., the heart.

²⁸Cf. Rom. 8:26.

²⁹The heavenly Jerusalem of Gal. 4:26, which had become a favorite Christian symbol of the peace and blessedness of heaven; cf. the various versions of the hymn “Jerusalem, My Happy Home” in Julian’s *Dictionary of Hymnology*, pp. 580-583. The original text is found in the *Liber meditationum*, erroneously ascribed to Augustine himself.

and strong delight, its solid joy and all its goods ineffable – and all of this at the same time, since you are the one supreme and true Good! And I will not be turned away until you have brought back together all that I am from this dispersion and deformity to the peace of that dearest mother, where the first fruits of my spirit are to be found and from which all these things are promised me which you do conform and confirm forever, O my God, my Mercy. But as for those who do not say that all these things which are true are false, who still honor your Scripture set before us by the holy Moses, who join us in placing it on the summit of authority for us to follow, and yet who oppose us in some particulars, I say this: “Be you, O God, the judge between my confessions and their gainsaying.”

CHAPTER XVII

24. For they say: “Even if these things are true, still Moses did not refer to these two things when he said, by divine revelation, ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.’ By the term ‘heaven’ he did not mean that spiritual or intelligible created order which always beholds the face of God. And by the term ‘earth’ he was not referring to unformed matter.”

“What then do these terms mean?”

They reply, “That man [Moses] meant what we mean; this is what he was saying in those terms.” “What is that?”

“By the terms of heaven and earth,” they say, “he wished first to indicate universally and briefly this whole visible world; then after this, by an enumeration of the days, he could point out, one by one, all the things that it has pleased the Holy Spirit to reveal in this way. For the people to whom he spoke were rude and carnal, so that he judged it prudent that only those works of God which were visible should be mentioned to them.”

But they do agree that the phrases, “The earth was invisible and unformed,” and “The darkened abyss,” may not inappropriately be understood to refer to this unformed matter – and that out of this, as it is subsequently related, all the visible things which are known to all were made and set in order during those specified “days.”

25. But now, what if another one should say, “This same formlessness and chaos of matter was first mentioned by the name of heaven and earth because, out of it, this visible world – with all its entities which clearly appear in it and which we are accustomed to be called by the name of heaven and earth – was created and perfected”? And what if still another should say: “The invisible and visible nature is quite fittingly called heaven and earth. Thus, the whole creation which God has made in his wisdom – that is, in the beginning – was included under these two terms. Yet, since all things have been made, not from the essence of God, but from nothing; and because they are not the same reality that God is; and because there is in them all a certain mutability, whether they abide as the eternal house of God abides or whether they are changed as the soul and body of man are changed – then the common matter of all things invisible and visible (still formless but capable of receiving form) from which heaven and earth were to be created (that is, the creature already fashioned, invisible as well as visible) – all this was spoken of in the same terms by which the invisible and unformed earth and the darkness over the abyss

would be called. There was this difference, however: that the invisible and unformed earth is to be understood as having corporeal matter before it had any manner of form; but the darkness over the abyss was *spiritual* matter, before its unlimited fluidity was harnessed, and before it was enlightened by Wisdom.”

26. And if anyone wished, he might also say, “The entities already perfected and formed, invisible and visible, are not signified by the terms ‘heaven and earth,’ when it reads, ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth’; instead, the unformed beginning of things, the matter capable of receiving form and being made was called by these terms – because the chaos was contained in it and was not yet distinguished by qualities and forms, which have now been arranged in their own orders and are called heaven and earth: the former a spiritual creation, the latter a physical creation.”

CHAPTER XVIII

27. When all these things have been said and considered, I am unwilling to contend about words, for such contention is profitable for nothing but the subverting of the hearer.³⁰ But the law is profitable for edification if a man use it lawfully: for the end of the law “is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.”³¹ And our Master knew it well, for it was on these two commandments that he hung all the Law and the Prophets. And how would it harm me, O my God, you Light of my eyes in secret, if while I am ardently confessing these things – since many different things may be understood from these words, all of which may be true – what harm would be done if I should interpret the meaning of the sacred writer differently from the way some other man interprets? Indeed, all of us who read are trying to trace out and understand what our author wished to convey; and since we believe that he speaks truly we dare not suppose that he has spoken anything that we either know or suppose to be false. Therefore, since every person tries to understand in the Holy Scripture what the writer understood, what harm is done if a man understands what you, the Light of all truth-speaking minds, show him to be true, although the author he reads did not understand this aspect of the truth even though he did understand the truth in a different meaning?³²

CHAPTER XIX³³

28. For it is certainly true, O Lord, that you did create the heaven and the earth. It is also true that “the beginning” is your wisdom in which you did create all things. It is likewise true that this visible world has its own great division (the heaven and the earth) and these two terms include all entities that have been made and created. It is further true that everything mutable confronts

³⁰Cf. 2 Tim. 2:14.

³¹1 Tim. 1:5.

³²This is the basis of Augustine's defense of allegory as both legitimate and profitable in the interpretation of Scripture. He did not mean that there is a plurality of literal truths in Scripture but a multiplicity of perspectives on truth which amounted to different levels and interpretations of truth. This gave Augustine the basis for a positive tolerance of varying interpretations which did hold fast to the essential common premises about God's primacy as Creator; cf. M. Pontet, *L'Exégèse de Saint Augustin prédicateur* (Lyons, 1944), chs. II and III.

³³In this chapter, Augustine summarizes what he takes to be the Christian consensus on the questions he has explored about the relation of the intellectual and corporeal creations.

our minds with a certain lack of form, whereby it receives form, or whereby it is capable of taking form. It is true, yet again, that what cleaves to the changeless form so closely that even though it is mutable it is not changed is not subject to temporal process. It is true that the formlessness which is almost nothing cannot have temporal change in it. It is true that that from which something is made can, in a manner of speaking, be called by the same name as the thing that is made from it. Thus that formlessness of which heaven and earth were made might be called “heaven and earth.” It is true that of all things having form nothing is nearer to the unformed than the earth and the abyss. It is true that not only every created and formed thing but also everything capable of creation and of form were created by you, from whom all things are.³⁴ It is true, finally, that everything that is formed from what is formless was formless before it was formed.

CHAPTER XX

29. From all these truths, which are not doubted by those to whom you have granted insight in such things in their inner eye and who believe unshakably that your servant Moses spoke in the spirit of truth – from all these truths, then, one man takes the sense of “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” to mean, “In his Word, coeternal with himself, God made both the intelligible and the tangible, the spiritual and the corporeal creation.” Another takes it in a different sense, that “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” means, “In his Word, coeternal with himself, God made the universal mass of this corporeal world, with all the observable and known entities that it contains.” Still another finds a different meaning, that “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” means, “In his Word, coeternal with himself, God made the unformed matter of the spiritual and corporeal creation.” Another can take the sense that “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” means, “In his Word, coeternal with himself, God made the unformed matter of the physical creation, in which heaven and earth were as yet indistinguished; but now that they have come to be separated and formed, we can now perceive them both in the mighty mass of this world.”³⁵ Another takes still a further meaning, that “In the beginning God created heaven and earth” means, “In the very beginning of creating and working, God made that unformed matter which contained, undifferentiated, heaven and earth, from which both of them were formed, and both now stand out and are observable with all the things that are in them.”

CHAPTER XXI

30. Again, regarding the interpretation of the following words, one man selects for himself, from all the various truths, the interpretation that “the earth was invisible and unformed and darkness was over the abyss” means, “That corporeal entity which God made was as yet the formless matter of physical things without order and without light.” Another takes it in a different sense, that “But the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss” means, “This totality called heaven and earth was as yet unformed and lightless matter, out of which the corporeal heaven and the corporeal earth were to be made, with all the things in them that are known to our physical senses.” Another takes it still differently and says that “But the earth was

³⁴Cf. 1 Cor. 8:6.

³⁵*Mole mundi.*

invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss” means, “This totality called heaven and earth was as yet an unformed and lightless matter, from which were to be made that intelligible heaven (which is also called ‘the heaven of heavens’) and the earth (which refers to the whole physical entity, under which term may be included this corporeal heaven) – that is, He made the intelligible heaven from which every invisible and visible creature would be created.” He takes it in yet another sense who says that “But the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss” means, “The Scripture does not refer to that formlessness by the term ‘heaven and earth’; that formlessness itself already existed. This it called the invisible ‘earth’ and the unformed and lightless ‘abyss,’ from which – as it had said before – God made the heaven and the earth (namely, the spiritual and the corporeal creation).” Still another says that “But the earth was invisible and formless, and darkness was over the abyss” means, “There was already an unformed matter from which, as the Scripture had already said, God made heaven and earth, namely, the entire corporeal mass of the world, divided into two very great parts, one superior, the other inferior, with all those familiar and known creatures that are in them.”

CHAPTER XXII

31. Now suppose that someone tried to argue against these last two opinions as follows: “If you will not admit that this formlessness of matter appears to be called by the term ‘heaven and earth,’ then there was something that God had not made out of which he did make heaven and earth. And Scripture has not told us that God made *this* matter, unless we understand that it is implied in the term ‘heaven and earth’ (or the term ‘earth’ alone) when it is said, ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and earth.’ Thus, in what follows – ‘the earth was invisible and unformed’ – even though it pleased Moses thus to refer to unformed matter, yet we can only understand by it that which God himself has made, as it stands written in the previous verse, ‘God made heaven and earth.’” Those who maintain either one or the other of these two opinions which we have set out above will answer to such objections: “We do not deny at all that this unformed matter was created by God, from whom all things are, and are very good – because we hold that what is created and endowed with form is a higher good; and we also hold that what is made capable of being created and endowed with form, though it is a lesser good, is still a good. But the Scripture has not said specifically that God made this formlessness – any more than it has said it specifically of many other things, such as the orders of ‘cherubim’ and ‘seraphim’ and those others of which the apostle distinctly speaks: ‘thrones,’ ‘dominions,’ ‘principalities,’ ‘powers’³⁶ – yet it is clear that God made all of these. If in the phrase ‘He made heaven and earth’ all things are included, what are we to say about the waters upon which the Spirit of God moved? For if they are understood as included in the term ‘earth,’ then how can unformed matter be meant by the term ‘earth’ when we see the waters so beautifully formed? Or, if it be taken thus, why, then, is it written that out of the same formlessness the firmament was made and called heaven, and yet is it not specifically written that the waters were made? For these waters, which we perceive flowing in so beautiful a fashion, are not formless and invisible. But if they received that beauty at the time God said of them, ‘Let the waters which are under the firmament be gathered together,’³⁷ thus indicating that their gathering together was the same thing as their reception of form, what, then, is to be said about the waters that are *above* the firmament?

³⁶Cf. Col. 1:16.

³⁷Gen. 1:9.

Because if they are unformed, they do not deserve to have a seat so honorable, and yet it is not written by what specific word they were formed. If, then, Genesis is silent about anything that God has made, which neither sound faith nor unerring understanding doubts that God has made, let not any sober teaching dare to say that these waters were coeternal with God because we find them mentioned in the book of Genesis and do not find it mentioned when they were created. If Truth instructs us, why may we not interpret that unformed matter which the Scripture calls the earth – invisible and unformed – and the lightless abyss as having been made by God from nothing; and thus understand that they are not coeternal with him, although the narrative fails to tell us precisely when they were made?”

CHAPTER XXIII

32. I have heard and considered these theories as well as my weak apprehension allows, and I confess my weakness to you, O Lord, though already you know it. Thus I see that two sorts of disagreements may arise when anything is related by signs, even by trustworthy reporters. There is one disagreement about the truth of the things involved; the other concerns the meaning of the one who reports them. It is one thing to inquire as to what is true about the formation of the Creation. It is another thing, however, to ask what that excellent servant of your faith, Moses, would have wished for the reader and hearer to understand from these words. As for the first question, let all those depart from me who imagine that Moses spoke things that are false. But let me be united with them in you, O Lord, and delight myself in you with those who feed on your truth in the bond of love. Let us approach together the words of your book and make diligent inquiry in them for your meaning through the meaning of your servant by whose pen you have given them to us.

CHAPTER XXIV

33. But in the midst of so many truths which occur to the interpreters of these words (understood as they can be in different ways), which one of us can discover that single interpretation which warrants our saying confidently that Moses thought *thus* and that in this narrative he wishes *this* to be understood, as confidently as he would say that *this* is true, whether Moses thought the one or the other. For see, O my God, I am your servant, and I have vowed in this book an offering of confession to you,³⁸ and I beseech you that by your mercy I may pay my vow to you. Now, see, could I assert that Moses meant nothing else than *this* [i.e., my interpretation] when he wrote, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” as confidently as I can assert that you in your immutable Word have created all things, invisible and visible? No, I cannot do this because it is not as clear to me that *this* was in his mind when he wrote these things, as I see it to be certain in your truth. For his thoughts might be set upon the very beginning of the creation when he said, “In the beginning”; and he might have wished it understood that, in this passage, “heaven and earth” refers to no formed and perfect entity, whether spiritual or corporeal, but each of them only newly begun and still formless. Whichever of these possibilities has been mentioned I can see that it might have been said truly. But which of them he did actually intend to express in these words I do not clearly see. However, whether it was one of these or some other meaning which I have not mentioned that this great man saw in his mind when he used

³⁸Note how this reiterates a constant theme in the *Confessions* as a whole; a further indication that Bk. XII is an integral part of the single whole.

these words I have no doubt whatever that he saw it truly and expressed it suitably.

CHAPTER XXV

34. Let no man fret me now by saying, “Moses did not mean what *you* say, but what *I* say.” Now if he asks me, “How do you know that Moses meant what you deduce from his words?”, I ought to respond calmly and reply as I have already done, or even more fully if he happens to be untrained. But when he says, “Moses did not mean what *you* say, but what *I* say,” and then does not deny what either of us says but allows that *both* are true – then, O my God, life of the poor, in whose breast there is no contradiction, pour your soothing balm into my heart that I may patiently bear with people who talk like this! It is not because they are godly men and have seen in the heart of your servant what they say, but rather they are proud men and have not considered Moses’ meaning, but only love their own – not because it is true but because it is their own. Otherwise they could equally love another true opinion, as I love what they say when what they speak is true – not because it is theirs but because it is true, and therefore not theirs but true. And if they love an opinion because it is true, it becomes both theirs and mine, since it is the common property of all lovers of the truth.³⁹ But I neither accept nor approve of it when they contend that Moses did not mean what I say but what they say – and this because, even if it were so, such rashness is born not of knowledge, but of impudence. It comes not from vision but from vanity.

And therefore, O Lord, your judgments should be held in awe, because your truth is neither mine nor his nor anyone else’s; but it belongs to all of us whom you have openly called to have it in common; and you have warned us not to hold on to it as our own special property, for if we do we lose it. For if anyone arrogates to himself what you have bestowed on all to enjoy, and if he desires something for his own that belongs to all, he is forced away from what is common to all to what is, indeed, his very own – that is, from truth to falsehood. For he who tells a lie speaks of his own thought.⁴⁰

35. Hear, O God, best judge of all! O Truth itself, hear what I say to this disputant. Hear it, because I say it in your presence and before my brethren who use the law rightly to the end of love. Hear and give heed to what I shall say to him, if it pleases you.

For I would return this brotherly and peaceful word to him: “If we both see that what you say is true, and if we both say that what I say is true, where is it, I ask you, that we see this? Certainly, I do not see it in you, and you do not see it in me, but both of us see it in the unchangeable truth itself, which is above our minds.”⁴¹ If, then, we do not disagree about the true light of the Lord our God, why do we disagree about the thoughts of our neighbor, which we cannot see as clearly as the immutable Truth is seen? If Moses himself had appeared to us and said, “This is what I meant,” it would not be in order that we should see it but that we should believe him. Let us not, then, “go beyond what is written and be puffed up for the one against the other.”⁴² Let us,

³⁹Cf. *De libero arbitrio*, II, 8:20, 10:28.

⁴⁰Cf. John 8:44.

⁴¹The essential thesis of the *De Magistro*; it has important implications both for Augustine’s epistemology and for his theory of Christian nurture; cf. the *De catechizandis rudibus*.

⁴²1 Cor. 4:6.

instead, “love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, and our neighbor as ourself.”⁴³ Unless we believe that whatever Moses meant in these books he meant to be ordered by these two precepts of love, we shall make God a liar, if we judge of the soul of his servant in any other way than as he has taught us. See now, how foolish it is, in the face of so great an abundance of true opinions which can be elicited from these words, rashly to affirm that Moses especially intended only one of these interpretations; and then, with destructive contention, to violate love itself, on behalf of which he had said all the things we are endeavoring to explain!

CHAPTER XXVI

36. And yet, O my God, you exaltation of my humility and rest of my toil, who hear my confessions and forgive my sins, since you command me to love my neighbor as myself, I cannot believe that you gave your most faithful servant Moses a lesser gift than I should wish and desire for myself from you, if I had been born in his time, and if you had placed me in the position where, by the use of my heart and my tongue, those books might be produced which so long after were to profit all nations throughout the whole world – from such a great pinnacle of authority – and were to surmount the words of all false and proud teachings. If I had been Moses – and we all come from the same mass,⁴⁴ and what is man that you are mindful of him?⁴⁵ – if I had been Moses at the time that he was, and if I had been ordered by you to write the book of Genesis, I would surely have wished for such a power of expression and such an art of arrangement to be given me, that those who cannot as yet understand *how* God creates would still not reject my words as surpassing their powers of understanding. And I would have wished that those who are already able to do this would find fully contained in the laconic speech of your servant whatever truths they had arrived at in their own thought; and if, in the light of the Truth, some other man saw some further meaning, that too would be found congruent to my words.

CHAPTER XXVII

37. For just as a spring dammed up is more plentiful and affords a larger supply of water for more streams over wider fields than any single stream led off from the same spring over a long course – so also is the narration of your minister: it is intended to benefit many who are likely to discourse about it and, with an economy of language, it overflows into various streams of clear truth, from which each one may draw out for himself that particular truth which he can about these topics – this one that truth, that one another truth, by the broader survey of various interpretations. For some people, when they read or hear these words,⁴⁶ think that God, like some sort of man or like some sort of huge body, by some new and sudden decision, produced outside himself and at a certain distance two great bodies: one above, the other below, within which all created things were to be contained. And when they hear, “God said, ‘Let such and such be done,’ and it was done,” they think of words begun and ended, sounding in time and then passing away, followed by the coming into being of what was commanded. They think of other things of

⁴³Cf. Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; see also Matt. 22:37, 39.

⁴⁴Cf. Rom. 9:21.

⁴⁵Cf. Ps. 8:4.

⁴⁶"In the beginning God created," etc.

the same sort which their familiarity with the world suggests to them.

In these people, who are still little children and whose weakness is borne up by this humble language as if on a mother's breast, their faith is built up healthfully and they come to possess and to hold as certain the conviction that God made all entities that their senses perceive all around them in such marvelous variety. And if one despises these words as if they were trivial, and with proud weakness stretches himself beyond his fostering cradle, he will, alas, fall away wretchedly. Have pity, O Lord God, lest those who pass by trample on the unfledged bird,⁴⁷ and send your angel who may restore it to its nest, that it may live until it can fly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

38. But others, to whom these words are no longer a nest but, rather, a shady thicket, spy the fruits concealed in them and fly around rejoicing and search among them and pluck them with cheerful chirpings: For when they read or hear these words, O God, they see that all times past and times future are transcended by your eternal and stable permanence, and they see also that there is no temporal creature that is not of your making. By your will, since it is the same as your being, you have created all things, not by any mutation of will and not by any will that previously was nonexistent – and not out of yourself, but in your own likeness, you did make from nothing the form of all things. This was an unlikeness which was capable of being formed by your likeness through its relation to you, the One, as each thing has been given form appropriate to its kind according to its preordained capacity. Thus, all things were made very good, whether they remain around you or whether, removed in time and place by various degrees, they cause or undergo the beautiful changes of natural process.

They see these things and they rejoice in the light of your truth to whatever degree they can.

39. Again, one of these men⁴⁸ directs his attention to the verse, “In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth,” and he beholds Wisdom as the true “beginning,” because it also speaks to us. Another man directs his attention to the same words, and by “beginning” he understands simply the commencement of creation, and interprets it thus: “In the beginning he made,” as if it were the same thing as to say, “At the first moment, God made . . .” And among those who interpret “In the beginning” to mean that in your wisdom you have created the heaven and earth, one believes that the matter out of which heaven and earth were to be created is what is referred to by the phrase “heaven and earth.” But another believes that these entities were already formed and distinct. Still another will understand it to refer to one formed entity – a spiritual one, designated by the term “heaven” – and to another unformed entity of corporeal matter, designated by the term “earth.” But those who understand the phrase “heaven and earth” to mean the yet unformed matter from which the heaven and the earth were to be formed do not take it in a simple sense: one man regards it as that from which the intelligible and tangible creations are both produced; and another only as that from which the tangible, corporeal world is produced, containing in its vast bosom these visible and observable entities. Nor are they in simple accord who believe that “heaven and earth” refers to the created things already set in order and

⁴⁷An echo of Job 39:13-16.

⁴⁸The thicket denizens mentioned above.

arranged. One believes that it refers to the invisible and visible world; another, only to the visible world, in which we admire the luminous heavens and the darkened earth and all the things that they contain.

CHAPTER XXIX

40. But he who understands “In the beginning he made” as if it meant, “At first he made,” can truly interpret the phrase “heaven and earth” as referring only to the “matter” of heaven and earth, namely, of the prior universal, which is the intelligible and corporeal creation. For if he would try to interpret the phrase as applying to the universe already formed, it then might rightly be asked of him, “If God first made this, what then did he do afterward?” And, after the universe, he will find nothing. But then he must, however unwillingly, face the question, How is this the first if there is nothing afterward? But when he said that God made matter first formless and then formed, he is not being absurd if he is able to discern what precedes by eternity, and what proceeds in time; what comes from choice, and what comes from origin. In eternity, God is before all things; in the temporal process, the flower is before the fruit; in the act of choice, the fruit is before the flower; in the case of origin, sound is before the tune. Of these four relations, the first and last that I have referred to are understood with much difficulty. The second and third are very easily understood. For it is an uncommon and lofty vision, O Lord, to behold your eternity immutably making mutable things, and thereby standing always before them. Whose mind is acute enough to be able, without great labor, to discover how the sound comes before the tune? For a tune is a formed sound; and an unformed thing may exist, but a thing that does not exist cannot be formed. In the same way, matter is prior to what is made from it. It is not prior because it makes its product, for it is itself made; and its priority is not that of a time interval. For in time we do not first utter formless sounds without singing and then adapt or fashion them into the form of a song, as wood or silver from which a chest or vessel is made. Such materials precede in time the forms of the things which are made from them. But in singing this is not so. For when a song is sung, its sound is heard at the same time. There is not first a formless sound, which afterward is formed into a song; but just as soon as it has sounded it passes away, and you cannot find anything of it which you could gather up and shape. Therefore, the song is absorbed in its own sound and the “sound” of the song is its “matter.” But the sound is formed in order that it may be a tune. This is why, as I was saying, the matter of the sound is prior to the form of the tune. It is not “before” in the sense that it has any power of making a sound or tune. Nor is the sound itself the composer of the tune; rather, the sound is sent forth from the body and is ordered by the soul of the singer, so that from it he may form a tune. Nor is the sound first in time, for it is given forth together with the tune. Nor is it first in choice, because a sound is no better than a tune, since a tune is not merely a sound but a beautiful sound. But it is first in origin, because the tune is not formed in order that it may become a sound, but the sound is formed in order that it may become a tune.

From this example, let him who is able to understand see that the matter of things was first made and was called “heaven and earth” because out of it the heaven and earth were made. This primal formlessness was not made first in time, because the form of things gives rise to time; but now, in time, it is intuited together with its form. And yet nothing can be related of this unformed matter unless it is regarded as if it were the first in the time series though the last in value – because things formed are certainly superior to things unformed – and it is preceded by the

eternity of the Creator, so that from nothing there might be made that from which something might be made.

CHAPTER XXX

41. In this discord of true opinions let Truth itself bring concord, and may our God have mercy on us all, that we may use the law rightly to the end of the commandment which is pure love. Thus, if anyone asks me which of these opinions was the meaning of your servant Moses, these would not be my confessions did I not confess to you that I do not know. Yet I do know that those opinions are true – with the exception of the carnal ones – about which I have said what I thought was proper. Yet those little ones of good hope are not frightened by these words of your Book, for they speak of high things in a lowly way and of a few basic things in many varied ways. But let all of us, whom I acknowledge to see and speak the truth in these words, love one another and also love you, our God, O Fountain of Truth – as we will if we thirst not after vanity but for the Fountain of Truth. Indeed, let us so honor this servant of yours, the dispenser of this Scripture, full of your Spirit, so that we will believe that when you did reveal yourself to him, and he wrote these things down, he intended through them what will chiefly minister both for the light of truth and to the increase of our fruitfulness.

CHAPTER XXXI

42. Thus, when one man says, “Moses meant what I mean,” and another says, “No, he meant what I do,” I think that I speak more faithfully when I say, “Why could he not have meant both if both opinions are true?” And if there should be still a third truth or a fourth one, and if anyone should seek a truth quite different in those words, why would it not be right to believe that Moses saw all these different truths, since through him the one God has tempered the Holy Scriptures to the understanding of many different people, who should see truths in it even if they are different? Certainly – and I say this fearlessly and from my heart – if I were to write anything on such a supreme authority, I would prefer to write it so that, whatever of truth anyone might apprehend from the matter under discussion, my words should re-echo in the several minds rather than that they should set down one true opinion so clearly on one point that I should exclude the rest, even though they contained no falsehood that offended me. Therefore, I am unwilling, O my God, to be so headstrong as not to believe that this man [Moses] has received at least this much from you. Surely when he was writing these words, he saw fully and understood all the truth we have been able to find in them, and also much besides that we have not been able to discern, or are not yet able to find out, though it is there in them still to be found.

CHAPTER XXXII

43. Finally, O Lord – who are God and not flesh and blood – if any man sees anything less, can anything lie hid from “Your good Spirit” who shall “lead me into the land of uprightness,”⁴⁹ which you yourself, through those words, were revealing to future readers, even though he through whom they were spoken fixed on only one among the many interpretations that might have been found? And if this is so, let it be agreed that the meaning he saw is more exalted than

⁴⁹Cf. Ps. 143:10.

the others. But to us, O Lord, either point out the same meaning or any other true one, as it pleases you. Thus, whether you makes known to us what you made known to that man of yours, or some other meaning by the agency of the same words, still do you feed us and let error not deceive us. Behold, O Lord, my God, how much we have written concerning these few words – how much, indeed! What strength of mind, what length of time, would suffice for all your books to be interpreted in this fashion?⁵⁰ Allow me, therefore, in these concluding words to confess more briefly to you and select some one, true, certain, and good sense that you shall inspire, although many meanings offer themselves and many indeed are possible.⁵¹ This is the faith of my confession, that if I could say what your servant meant, that is truest and best, and for that I must strive. Yet if I do not succeed, may it be that I shall say at least what your Truth wished to say to me through its words, just as it said what it wished to Moses.

⁵⁰Something of an understatement! It is interesting to note that Augustine devotes more time and space to these opening verses of Genesis than to any other passage in the entire Bible – and he never commented on the *full* text of Genesis. Cf. Karl Barth's 274 pages devoted to Gen., chs. 1;2, in the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III, I, pp. 103-377.

⁵¹Transition, in preparation for the concluding book (XIII), which undertakes a constructive resolution to the problem of the analysis of the mode of creation made here in Bk. XII.

BOOK THIRTEEN – Hermeneutics and Creation

The mysteries and allegories of the days of creation. Augustine undertakes to interpret *Gen. 1:2-31* in a mystical and allegorical fashion so as to exhibit the profundities of God’s power and wisdom and love. He is also interested in developing his theories of hermeneutics on his favorite topic: creation. He finds the Trinity in the account of creation and he ponders the work of the Spirit moving over the waters. In the firmament he finds the allegory of Holy Scripture and in the dry land and bitter sea he finds the division between the people of God and the conspiracy of the unfaithful. He develops the theme of man’s being made in the image and likeness of God. He brings his survey to a climax and his confessions to an end with a meditation on the goodness of all creation and the promised rest and blessedness of the eternal Sabbath, on which God, who is eternal rest, “rested.”

CHAPTER I

1. I call on you, my God, my Mercy, who made me and did not forget me, though I was forgetful of you. I call you into my soul, which you did prepare for your reception by the desire which you inspire in it. Do not forsake me when I call on you, who did anticipate me before I called and who did repeatedly urge with manifold calling that I should hear you afar off and be turned and call upon you, who call me. For you, O Lord, have blotted out all my evil deserts, not punishing me for what my hands have done; and you have anticipated all my good deserts so as to recompense me for what your hands have done – the hands which made me. Before I was, you were, and I was not anything at all that you should grant me being. Yet, see how I exist by reason of your goodness, which made provision for all that you made me to be and all that you made me from. For you did not stand in need of me, nor am I the kind of good entity which could be a help to you, my Lord and my God. It is not that I may serve you as if you wert fatigued in working, or as if your power would be the less if it lacked my assistance. Nor is the service I pay you like the cultivation of a field, so that you would go untended if I did not tend you.¹ Instead, it is that I may serve and worship you to the end that I may have my well-being from you, from whom comes my capacity for well-being.

CHAPTER II

2. Indeed, it is from the fullness of your goodness that your creation exists at all: to the end that the created good might not fail to be, even though it can profit you nothing, and is nothing of you nor equal to you – since its created existence comes from you.

For what did the heaven and earth, which you did make in the beginning, ever deserve from you? Let them declare – these spiritual and corporeal entities, which you made in your wisdom – let them declare what they merited at your hands, so that the inchoate and the formless, whether spiritual or corporeal, would deserve to be held in being in spite of the fact that they tend toward disorder and extreme unlikeness to you? An unformed spiritual entity is more excellent than a

¹This is a compound – and untranslatable – Latin pun: *neque ut sic te colam quasi terram, ut sis uncultus si non te colam.*

formed corporeal entity; and the corporeal, even when unformed, is more excellent than if it were simply nothing at all. Still, these formless entities are held in their state of being by you, until they are recalled to your unity and receive form and being from you, the one sovereign Good. What have they deserved of you, since they would not even be unformed entities except from you?

3. What has corporeal matter deserved of you – even in its invisible and unformed state – since it would not exist even in this state if you had not made it? And, if it did not exist, it could not merit its existence from you.

Or, what has that formless spiritual creation deserved of you – that it should flow lightlessly like the abyss – since it is so unlike you and would not exist at all if it had not been turned by the Word which made it that same Word, and, illumined by that Word, had been “made light”² although not as your equal but only as an image of that Form [of Light] which is equal to you? For, in the case of a body, its being is not the same thing as its being beautiful; else it could not then be a deformed body. Likewise, in the case of a created spirit, living is not the same state as living wisely; else it could then be immutably wise. But the true good of every created thing is always to cleave fast to you, lest, in turning away from you, it lose the light it had received in being turned by you, and so relapse into a life like that of the dark abyss.

As for ourselves, who are a spiritual creation by virtue of our souls, when we turned away from you, O Light, we were in that former life of darkness; and we toil amid the shadows of our darkness until – through your only Son – we become your righteousness,³ like the mountains of God. For we, like the great abyss,⁴ have been the objects of your judgments.

CHAPTER III

4. Now what you said in the beginning of the creation – “Let there be light: and there was light” – I interpret, not unfitly, as referring to the spiritual creation, because it already had a kind of life which you couldst illuminate. But, since it had not merited from you that it should be a life capable of enlightenment, so neither, when it already began to exist, did it merit from you that it should be enlightened. For neither could its formlessness please you until it became light – and it became light, not from the bare fact of existing, but by the act of turning its face to the light which enlightened it, and by cleaving to it. Thus it owed the fact that it lived, and lived happily, to nothing whatsoever but your grace, since it had been turned, by a change for the better, toward that which cannot be changed for either better or worse. You alone are, because you alone are without complication. For you it is not one thing to live and another thing to live in blessedness; for you are yourself your own blessedness.

²Cf. *Enneads*, I, 2:4: “What the soul now sees, it certainly always possessed, but as lying in the darkness. . . . To dispel the darkness and thus come to knowledge of its inner content, it must thrust toward the light.” Compare the notions of the *initiative* of such movements in the soul in Plotinus and Augustine.

³Cf. 2 Cor. 5:21.

⁴Cf. Ps. 36:6 and see also Augustine's *Exposition on the Psalms*, XXXVI, 8, where he says that “the great preachers [receivers of God's illumination] are the mountains of God,” for they first catch the light on their summits. The abyss he called “the depth of sin” into which the evil and unfaithful fall.

CHAPTER IV

5. What, therefore, would there have been lacking in your good, which you yourself are, even if these things had never been made or had remained unformed? You did not create them out of any lack but out of the plenitude of your goodness, ordering them and turning them toward form,⁵ but not because your joy had to be perfected by them. For you are perfect, and their imperfection is displeasing. Therefore were they perfected by you and became pleasing to you – but not as if you wert before that imperfect and had to be perfected in their perfection. For your good Spirit which moved over the face of the waters⁶ was not borne up by them as if he rested on them. For those in whom your good Spirit is said to rest he actually causes to rest in himself. But your incorruptible and immutable will – in itself all-sufficient for itself – moved over that life which you had made: in which living is not at all the same thing as living happily, since that life still lives even as it flows in its own darkness. But it remains to be turned to him by whom it was made and to live more and more like “the fountain of life,” and in his light “to see light,”⁷ and to be perfected, and enlightened, and made blessed.

CHAPTER V

6. See now,⁸ how the Trinity appears to me in an enigma. And you are the Trinity, O my God, since you, O Father – in the beginning of our wisdom, that is, in your wisdom born of you, equal and coeternal with you, that is, your Son – created the heaven and the earth. Many things we have said about the heaven of heavens, and about the earth invisible and unformed, and about the shadowy abyss – speaking of the aimless flux of its being spiritually deformed unless it is turned to him from whom it has its life (such as it is) and by his Light comes to be a life suffused with beauty. Thus it would be a [lower] heaven of that [higher] heaven, which afterward was made between water and water.⁹

And now I came to recognize, in the name of God, the Father who made all these things, and in the term “the Beginning” to recognize the Son, through whom he made all these things; and since I did believe that my God was the Trinity, I sought still further in his holy Word, and, behold, “Your Spirit moved over the waters.” Thus, see the Trinity, O my God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Creator of all creation!

CHAPTER VI

7. But why, O truth-speaking Light? To you I lift up my heart – let it not teach me vain notions. Disperse its shadows and tell me, I beseech you, by that Love which is our mother; tell me, I

⁵Cf. *Timaeus*, 29D-30A, “He [the Demiurge-Creator] was good: and in the good no jealousy . . . can ever arise. So, being without jealousy, he desired that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself. . . . He took over all that is visible . . . and brought it from order to order, since he judged that order was in every way better” (F. M. Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology*, New York, 1937, p. 33). Cf. *Enneads*, V, 4:1, and Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, III, 3.

⁶Cf. Gen. 1:2.

⁷Cf. Ps. 36:9.

⁸In this passage in Genesis on the creation.

⁹Cf. Gen. 1:6.

beseech you, the reason why – after the reference to heaven and to the invisible and unformed earth, and darkness over the abyss – your Scripture should then at long last refer to your Spirit? Was it because it was appropriate that he should first be shown to us as “moving over”; and this could not have been said unless something had already been mentioned over which your Spirit could be understood as “moving”? For he did not “move over” the Father and the Son, and he could not properly be said to be “moving over” if he were “moving over” nothing. Thus, what it was he was “moving over” had to be mentioned first and he whom it was not proper to mention otherwise than as “moving over” could then be mentioned. But why was it not fitting that he should have been introduced in some other way than in this context of “moving over”?

CHAPTER VII

8. Now let him who is able follow your apostle with his understanding when he says, “Your love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given to us”¹⁰ and who teaches us about spiritual gifts¹¹ and shows us a more excellent way of love; and who bows his knee unto you for us, that we may come to the surpassing knowledge of the love of Christ.¹² Thus, from the beginning, he who is above all was “moving over” the waters.

To whom shall I tell this? How can I speak of the weight of concupiscence which drags us downward into the deep abyss, and of the love which lifts us up by your Spirit who moved over the waters? To whom shall I tell this? How shall I tell it? For concupiscence and love are not certain “places” into which we are plunged and out of which we are lifted again. What could be more like, and yet what more unlike? They are both feelings; they are both loves. The uncleanness of our own spirit flows downward with the love of worldly care; and the sanctity of your Spirit raises us upward by the love of release from anxiety – that we may lift our hearts to you where your Spirit is “moving over the waters.” Thus, we shall have come to that supreme rest where our souls shall have passed through the waters which give no standing ground.¹³

CHAPTER VIII

9. The angels fell, and the soul of man fell; thus they indicate to us the deep darkness of the abyss, which would have still contained the whole spiritual creation if you had not said, in the beginning, “Let there be light: and there was light” – and if every obedient mind in your heavenly city had not adhered to you and had not reposed in your Spirit, which moved immutable over all things mutable. Otherwise, even the heaven of heavens itself would have been a dark shadow, instead of being, as it is now, light in the Lord.¹⁴ For even in the restless misery of the fallen spirits, who exhibit their own darkness when they are stripped of the garments of your light, you show clearly how noble you did make the rational creation, for whose rest and beatitude nothing suffices save you yourself. And certainly it is not itself sufficient for its beatitude. For it is you, O our God, who will enlighten our darkness; from you

¹⁰Rom. 5:5.

¹¹1 Cor. 12:1.

¹²Cf. Eph. 3:14, 19.

¹³Cf. the Old Latin version of Ps. 123:5.

¹⁴Cf. Eph. 5:8.

shall come our garments of light; and then our darkness shall be as the noonday. Give yourself to me, O my God, restore yourself to me! See, I love you; and if it be too little, let me love you still more strongly. I cannot measure my love so that I may come to know how much there is still lacking in me before my life can run to your embrace and not be turned away until it is hidden in “the covert of your presence.”¹⁵ Only this I know, that my existence is my woe except in you – not only in my outward life, but also within my inmost self – and all abundance I have which is not my God is poverty.

CHAPTER IX

10. But was neither the Father nor the Son “moving over the waters”? If we understand this as a motion in space, as a body moves, then not even the Holy Spirit “moved.” But if we understand the changeless supereminence of the divine Being above every changeable thing, then Father, Son, and Holy Spirit “moved over the waters.”

Why, then, is this said of your Spirit alone? Why is it said of him only – as if he had been in a “place” that is not a place – about whom alone it is written, “He is your gift”? It is in your gift that we rest. It is there that we enjoy you. Our rest is our “place.” Love lifts us up toward that place, and your good Spirit lifts our lowliness from the gates of death.¹⁶ Our peace rests in the goodness of will. The body tends toward its own place by its own gravity. A weight does not tend downward only, but moves to its own place. Fire tends upward; a stone tends downward. They are propelled by their own mass; they seek their own places. Oil poured under the water rises above the water; water poured on oil sinks under the oil. They are moved by their own mass; they seek their own places. If they are out of order, they are restless; when their order is restored, they are at rest. My weight is my love. By it I am carried wherever I am carried. By your gift,¹⁷ we are enkindled and are carried upward. We burn inwardly and move forward. We ascend your ladder which is in our heart, and we sing a canticle of degrees¹⁸; we glow inwardly with your fire – with your good fire¹⁹ – and we go forward because we go up to the peace of Jerusalem²⁰; for I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go into the house of the Lord.”²¹ There your good pleasure will settle us so that we will desire nothing more than to dwell there forever.²²

CHAPTER X

11. Happy would be that creature who, though it was in itself other than you, still had known no other state than this from the time it was made, so that it was never without your gift which

¹⁵Cf. Ps. 31:20.

¹⁶Cf. Ps. 9:13.

¹⁷The Holy Spirit.

¹⁸*Canticum graduum*. Psalms 119 to 133 as numbered in the Vulgate were regarded as a single series of ascending steps by which the soul moves up toward heaven; cf. *The Exposition on the Psalms, loc. cit.*

¹⁹Tongues of fire, symbol of the descent of the Holy Spirit; cf. Acts 2:3, 4.

²⁰Cf. Ps. 122:6.

²¹Ps. 122:1.

²²Cf. Ps. 23:6.

moves over everything mutable – who had been borne up by the call in which you said, “Let there be light: and there was light.”²³ For in us there is a distinction between the time when we were darkness and the time when we were made light. But we are not told what would have been the case with that creature if the light had not been made. It is spoken of as though there had been something of flux and darkness in it beforehand so that the cause by which it was made to be otherwise might be evident. This is to say, by being turned to the unfailing Light it might become light. Let him who is able understand this; and let him who is not ask of you. Why trouble me, as if I could “enlighten every man that comes into the world”²⁴?

CHAPTER XI

12. Who can understand the omnipotent Trinity? And yet who does not speak about it, if indeed it is of it that he speaks? Rare is the soul who, when he speaks of it, also knows of what he speaks. And men contend and strive, but no man sees the vision of it without peace.

I could wish that men would consider three things which are within themselves. These three things are quite different from the Trinity, but I mention them in order that men may exercise their minds and test themselves and come to realize how different from it they are.²⁵

The three things I speak of are: to be, to know, and to will. For I am, and I know, and I will. I am a knowing and a willing being; I know that I am and that I will; and I will to be and to know. In these three functions, therefore, let him who can see how integral a life is; for there is one life, one mind, one essence. Finally, the distinction does not separate the things, and yet it is a distinction. Surely a man has this distinction before his mind; let him look into himself and see, and tell me. But when he discovers and can say anything about any one of these, let him not think that he has thereby discovered what is immutable above them all, which *is* immutably and *knows* immutably and *wills* immutably. But whether there is a Trinity there because these three functions exist in the one God, or whether all three are in each Person so that they are each threefold, or whether both these notions are true and, in some mysterious manner, the Infinite is in itself its own Selfsame object – at once one and many, so that by itself it is and knows itself and suffices to itself without change, so that the Selfsame is the abundant magnitude of its Unity – who can readily conceive? Who can in any fashion express it plainly? Who can in any way rashly make a pronouncement about it?

CHAPTER XII

13. Go forward in your confession, O my faith; say to the Lord your God, “Holy, holy, holy, O Lord my God, in your name we have been baptized, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” In your name we baptize, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For among us also God in his Christ made “heaven and earth,” namely, the spiritual and carnal members of his Church. And true it is that before it received “the form of doctrine,” our “earth”²⁶

²³Gen. 1:3.

²⁴John 1:9.

²⁵Cf. the detailed analogy from self to Trinity in *De Trinitate*, IX-XII.

²⁶I.e., the Church.

was “invisible and unformed,” and we were covered with the darkness of our ignorance; for you do correct man for his iniquity,²⁷ and “Your judgments are a great abyss.”²⁸ But because your Spirit was moving over these waters, your mercy did not forsake our wretchedness, and you said, “Let there be light; repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”²⁹ Repent, and let there be light. Because our soul was troubled within us, we remembered you, O Lord, from the land of Jordan, and from the mountain³⁰ – and as we became displeased with our darkness we turned to you, “and there was light.” And behold, we were heretofore in darkness, but now we are light in the Lord.³¹

CHAPTER XIII

14. But even so, we still live by faith and not by sight, for we are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope. Thus far deep calls unto deep, but now in “the noise of your waterfalls.”³² And thus far he who said, “I could not speak to you as if you were spiritual ones, but only as if you were carnal”³³ – thus far even he does not count himself to have apprehended, but forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forth to the things that are before, he presses on to those things that are ahead,³⁴ and he groans under his burden and his soul thirsts after the living God as the stag pants for the water brooks,³⁵ and says, “When shall I come?”³⁶ – “desiring to be further clothed by his house which is from heaven.”³⁷ And he called to this lower deep, saying, “Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”³⁸ And “be not children in understanding, although in malice be children,” in order that “in understanding you may become perfect.”³⁹ “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?”⁴⁰ But this is not now only in his own voice but in your voice, who sent your Spirit from above through Him who both “ascended up on high”⁴¹ and opened up the floodgates of his gifts, that the force of his streams might make glad the city of God.⁴²

For that city and for him sighs the Bridegroom’s friend,⁴³ who has now the first fruits of the Spirit laid up with him, but who is still groaning within himself and waiting for adoption, that is,

²⁷Cf. Ps. 39:11.

²⁸Ps. 36:6.

²⁹Gen. 1:3 and Matt. 4:17; 3:2.

³⁰Cf. Ps. 42:5, 6.

³¹Cf. Eph. 5:8.

³²Ps. 42:7.

³³Cf. 1 Cor. 3:1.

³⁴Cf. Phil. 3:13.

³⁵Cf. Ps. 42:1.

³⁶Ps. 42:2.

³⁷Cf. 2 Cor. 5:1-4.

³⁸Rom. 12:2.

³⁹1 Cor. 14:20.

⁴⁰Gal. 3:1.

⁴¹Eph. 4:8, 9.

⁴²Cf. Ps. 46:4.

⁴³Cf. John 3:29.

the redemption of his body.⁴⁴ To Him he sighs, for he is a member of the Bride⁴⁵; for him he is jealous, not for himself, but because not in his own voice but in the voice of your waterfalls he calls on that other deep, of which he is jealous and in fear; for he fears lest, as the serpent seduced Eve by his subtlety, his mind should be corrupted from the purity which is in our Bridegroom, your only Son. What a light of beauty that will be when “we shall see him as he is”⁴⁶! – and when these tears shall pass away which “have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, ‘Where is your God?’”⁴⁷

CHAPTER XIV

15. And I myself say: “O my God, where are thou? See now, where are thou?” In you I take my breath for a little while, when I pour out my soul beyond myself in the voice of joy and praise, in the voice of him that keeps holyday.⁴⁸ And still it is cast down because it relapses and becomes an abyss, or rather it feels that it still is an abyss. My faith speaks to my soul – the faith that you do kindle to light my path in the night: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted in me? Hope in God.”⁴⁹ For his word is a lamp to your feet.⁵⁰ Hope and persevere until the night passes – that mother of the wicked; until the Lord’s wrath subsides – that wrath whose children once we were, of whom we were beforehand in darkness, whose residue we still bear about us in our bodies, dead because of sin.⁵¹ Hope and endure until the day breaks and the shadows flee away.⁵² Hope in the Lord: in the morning I shall stand in his presence and keep watch⁵³; I shall forever give praise to him. In the morning I shall stand and shall see my God, who is the health of my countenance,⁵⁴ who also will quicken our mortal bodies by the Spirit that dwells in us,⁵⁵ because in mercy he was moving over our lightless and restless inner deep. From this we have received an earnest, even now in this pilgrimage, that we are now in the light, since already we are saved by hope and are children of the light and children of the day – not children of the night, nor of the darkness,⁵⁶ which we have been hitherto. Between those children of the night and ourselves, in this still uncertain state of human knowledge, only you can rightly distinguish – you who do test the heart and who do call the light day, and the darkness night.⁵⁷ For who can see us clearly but you? What do we have that we have not received from you, who made from the same lump some vessels to noble, and others to ignoble, use⁵⁸?

⁴⁴Cf. Rom. 8:23.

⁴⁵I.e., the Body of Christ.

⁴⁶1 John 3:2.

⁴⁷Ps. 42:3.

⁴⁸Cf. Ps. 42:4.

⁴⁹Ps. 43:5.

⁵⁰Cf. Ps. 119:105.

⁵¹Cf. Rom. 8:10.

⁵²Cf. S. of Sol. 2:17.

⁵³Cf. Ps. 5:3.

⁵⁴Ps. 43:5.

⁵⁵Cf. Rom. 8:11.

⁵⁶1 Thess. 5:5.

⁵⁷Cf. Gen. 1:5.

⁵⁸Cf. Rom. 9:21.

CHAPTER XV

16. Now who but you, our God, did make for us that firmament of the authority of your divine Scripture to be over us? For “the heaven shall be folded up like a scroll”⁵⁹; but now it is stretched over us like a skin. Your divine Scripture is of more sublime authority now that those mortal men through whom you did dispense it to us have departed this life. And you know, O Lord, you know how you did clothe men with skins when they became mortal because of sin.⁶⁰ In something of the same way, you have stretched out the firmament of your Book as a skin – that is to say, you have spread your harmonious words over us through the ministry of mortal men. For by their very death that solid firmament of authority in your sayings, spoken forth by them, stretches high over all that now drift under it; whereas while they lived on earth their authority was not so widely extended. Then you had not yet spread out the heaven like a skin; you had not yet spread abroad everywhere the fame of their death.

17. Let us see, O Lord, “the heavens, the work of your fingers,”⁶¹ and clear away from our eyes the fog with which you have covered them. In them⁶² is that testimony of yours which gives wisdom even to the little ones. O my God, out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, perfect your praise.⁶³ For we know no other books that so destroy man’s pride, that so break down the adversary and the self-defender who resists your reconciliation by an effort to justify his own sins. I do not know, O Lord, I do not know any other such pure words that so persuade me to confession and make my neck submissive to your yoke, and invite me to serve you for nothing else than your own sake. Let me understand these things, O good Father. Grant this to me, since I am placed under them; for you have established these things for those placed under them.

18. There are other waters that are above this firmament, and I believe that they are immortal and removed from earthly corruption. Let them praise your name – this super-celestial society, your angels, who have no need to look up at this firmament or to gain a knowledge of your Word by reading it – let them praise you. For they always behold your face and read therein, without any syllables in time, what your eternal will intends. They read, they choose, they love.⁶⁴ They are always reading, and what they read never passes away. For by choosing and by loving they read the very immutability of your counsel. Their book is never closed, nor is the scroll folded up, because you yourself are this to them, and are this to them eternally; because you did range them above this firmament which you made firm over the infirmities of the people below the heavens, where they might look up and learn your mercy, which proclaims in time you who made all times. “For your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.”⁶⁵ The clouds pass away, but the heavens remain. The preachers of your Word pass away from this life into another; but your Scripture is spread abroad over the people, even to the end of the

⁵⁹Isa. 34:4.

⁶⁰Cf. Gen. 3:21.

⁶¹Ps. 8:3.

⁶²“The heavens,” i.e. the Scriptures.

⁶³Cf. Ps. 8:2.

⁶⁴*Legunt, eligunt, diligunt.*

⁶⁵Ps. 36:5.

world. Indeed, both heaven and earth shall pass away, but your words shall never pass away.⁶⁶ The scroll shall be rolled together, and the “grass” over which it was spread shall, with all its goodness, pass away; but your Word remains forever⁶⁷ – your Word which now appears to us in the dark image of the clouds and through the glass of heaven, and not as it really is. And even if we are the well-beloved of your Son, it has not yet appeared what we shall be.⁶⁸ He has seen us through the entanglement⁶⁹ of our flesh, and he is fair-speaking, and he has enkindled us, and we run after his fragrance.⁷⁰ But “when he shall appear, then we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”⁷¹ As he is, O Lord, we shall see him – although that time is not yet.

CHAPTER XVI

19. For just as you are the utterly Real, you alone do fully know, since you are immutably, and you know immutably, and you will immutably. And your Essence knows and wills immutably. Your Knowledge is and wills immutably. Your Will is and knows immutably. And it does not seem right to you that the immutable Light should be known by the enlightened but mutable creature in the same way as it knows itself. Therefore, to you my soul is as a land where no water is⁷²; for, just as it cannot enlighten itself by itself, so it cannot satisfy itself by itself. Thus the fountain of life is with you, and “in your light shall we see light.”⁷³

CHAPTER XVII

20. Who has gathered the “embittered ones”⁷⁴ into a single society? For they all have the same end, which is temporal and earthly happiness. This is their motive for doing everything, although they may fluctuate within an innumerable diversity of concerns. Who but you, O Lord, gathered them together, you who said, “Let the waters be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear” – athirst for you? For the sea also is yours, and you made it, and your hands formed the dry land.⁷⁵ For it is not the bitterness of men’s wills but the gathering together of the waters which is called “the sea”; yet you do curb the wicked lusts of men’s souls and fix their bounds: how far they are allowed to advance, and where their waves will be broken against each other – and thus you makes it “a sea,” by the providence of your governance of all things.

21. But as for the souls that thirst after you and who appear before you – separated from “the society of the [bitter] sea” by reason of their different ends – you water them by a secret and

⁶⁶Cf. Matt. 24:35.

⁶⁷Cf. Isa. 40:6-8.

⁶⁸Cf. 1 John 3:2.

⁶⁹*Retia*, literally “a net”; such as those used by *retiarii*, the gladiators who used nets to entangle their opponents.

⁷⁰Cf. S. of Sol. 1:3, 4.

⁷¹1 John 3:2.

⁷²Cf. Ps. 63:1.

⁷³Ps. 36:9.

⁷⁴*Amaricantes*, a figure which Augustine develops both in the *Exposition of the Psalms* and *The City of God*. Commenting on Ps. 65, Augustine says: “For the sea, by a figure, is used to indicate this world, with its bitter saltiness and troubled storms, where men with perverse and depraved appetites have become like fishes devouring one another.” In *The City of God*, he speaks of the bitterness of life in the *civitas terrena*; cf. XIX, 5.

⁷⁵Cf. Ps. 95:5.

sweet spring, so that “the earth” may bring forth her fruit and – you, O Lord, commanding it – our souls may bud forth in works of mercy after their kind.⁷⁶ Thus we shall love our neighbor in ministering to his bodily needs, for in this way the soul has seed in itself after its kind when in our own infirmity our compassion reaches out to the relief of the needy, helping them even as we would desire to be helped ourselves if we were in similar need. Thus we help, not only in easy problems (as is signified by “the herb yielding its seed”) but also in the offering of our best strength in affording them the aid of protection (such as “the tree bearing its fruit”). This is to say, we seek to rescue him who is suffering injury from the hands of the powerful – furnishing him with the sheltering protection which comes from the strong arm of a righteous judgment.⁷⁷

CHAPTER XVIII

22. Thus, O Lord, thus I beseech you: let it happen as you have prepared it, as you give joy and the capacity for joy. Let truth spring up out of the earth, and let righteousness look down from heaven,⁷⁸ and let there be lights in the firmament.⁷⁹

Let us break our bread with the hungry, let us bring the shelterless poor to our house; let us clothe the naked, and never despise those of our own flesh.⁸⁰ See from the fruits which spring forth from the earth how good it is. Thus let our temporal light break forth, and let us from even this lower level of fruitful action come to the joy of contemplation and hold on high the Word of Life. And let us at length appear like “lights in the world,”⁸¹ cleaving to the firmament of your Scripture.

For in it you makes it plain to us how we may distinguish between things intelligible and things tangible, as if between the day and the night – and to distinguish between souls who give themselves to things of the mind and others absorbed in things of sense. Thus it is that now you are not alone in the secret of your judgment as you were before the firmament was made, and before you did divide between the light and the darkness. But now also your spiritual children, placed and ranked in this same firmament – your grace being thus manifest throughout the world – may shed light upon the earth, and may divide between the day and night, and may be for the signs of the times⁸²; because old things have passed away, and, lo, all things are become new⁸³; and because our salvation is nearer than when we believed; and because “the night is far spent and the day is at hand”⁸⁴; and because “you crown the year with blessing,”⁸⁵ sending the laborers into your harvest, in which others have labored in the sowing and sending laborers also to make

⁷⁶Cf. Gen. 1:10f.

⁷⁷In this way, Augustine sees an analogy between the good earth bearing its fruits and the ethical “fruit-bearing” of the Christian love of neighbor.

⁷⁸Cf. Ps. 85:11.

⁷⁹Cf. Gen. 1:14.

⁸⁰Cf. Isa. 58:7.

⁸¹Cf. Phil. 2:15.

⁸²Cf. Gen. 1:19.

⁸³Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17.

⁸⁴Cf. Rom. 13:11, 12.

⁸⁵Ps. 65:11.

new sowings whose harvest shall not be until the end of time. Thus you do grant the prayers of him who seeks, and you do bless the years of the righteous man. But you are always the Selfsame, and in your years which fail not you prepare a granary for our transient years. For by an eternal design you spread the heavenly blessings on the earth in their proper seasons.

23. For “to one there is given by your Spirit the word of wisdom”⁸⁶ (which resembles the greater light – which is for those whose delight is in the clear light of truth – as the light which is given for the ruling of the day⁸⁷). But to another the word of knowledge is given by the same Spirit (as it were, the “lesser light”); to another, faith; to another, the gift of healing; to another, the power of working miracles; to another, the gift of prophecy; to another, the discerning of spirits; to another, other kinds of tongues – and all these gifts may be compared to “the stars.” For in them all the one and selfsame Spirit is at work, dividing to every man his own portion, as He wills, and making stars to appear in their bright splendor for the profit of souls. But the word of knowledge, *scientia*, in which is contained all the mysteries⁸⁸ which change in their seasons like the moon; and all the other promises of gifts, which when counted are like the stars – all of these fall short of that splendor of Wisdom in which the day rejoices and are only for the ruling of the night. Yet they are necessary for those to whom your most prudent servant could not speak as to the spiritually mature, but only as if to carnal men – even though he could speak wisdom among the perfect.⁸⁹ Still the natural man – as a babe in Christ, and a drinker of milk, until he is strong enough for solid meat, and his eye is able to look into the sun – do not leave him in a lightless night. Instead, let him be satisfied with the light of the moon and the stars. In your book you do discuss these things with us wisely, our God – in your book, which is your “firmament” – in order that we may be able to view all things in admiring contemplation, although thus far we must do so through signs and seasons and in days and years.

CHAPTER XIX

24. But, first, “wash yourselves and make you clean; put away iniquity from your souls and from before my eyes”⁹⁰ – so that “the dry land” may appear. “Learn to do well, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow,”⁹¹ that the earth may bring forth the green herb for food and fruit-bearing trees. “And come, let us reason together, says the Lord”⁹² – that there may be lights in the firmament of heaven and that they may shine upon the earth.

There was that rich man who asked of the good Teacher what he should do to attain eternal life. Let the good Teacher (whom the rich man thought a man and nothing more) give him an answer – he is good for he is God. Let him answer him that, if he would enter into life, he must keep the

⁸⁶For this whole passage, cf. the parallel developed here with 1 Cor. 12:7-11.

⁸⁷*In principio diei*, an obvious echo to the Vulgate *ut praesent diei* of Gen. 1:16. Cf. Gibb and Montgomery, p. 424 (see Bibl.), for a comment on *in principio diei* and *in principio noctis*, below.

⁸⁸*Sacramenta*; but cf. Augustine's discussion of *sacramenta* in the Old Testament in the *Exposition of the Psalms*, LXXIV, 2: "The sacraments of the Old Testament promised a Saviour; the sacraments of the New Testament give salvation."

⁸⁹Cf. 1 Cor. 3:1; 2:6.

⁹⁰Isa. 1:16.

⁹¹Isa. 1:17.

⁹²Isa. 1:18.

commandments: let him put away from himself the bitterness of malice and wickedness; let him not kill, nor commit adultery, nor steal, nor bear false witness⁹³ – that “the dry land” may appear and bring forth the honoring of fathers and mothers and the love of neighbor. “All these,” he replied, “I have kept.” Where do so many thorns come from, if the earth is really fruitful? uproot the brier patch of avarice; “sell what you have, and be filled with fruit by giving to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and follow” the Lord if you would be perfect and joined with those in whose midst he speaks wisdom – who know how to give rightly to the day and to the night – and you will also understand, so that for you also there may be lights in the firmament of heaven – which will not be there, however, unless your heart is there also. And your heart will not be there unless your treasure is there,⁹⁴ as you have heard from the good Teacher. But “the barren earth”⁹⁵ was grieved, and the briars choked the word.⁹⁶

25. But you, O elect people, set in the firmament of the world,⁹⁷ who have forsaken all that you may follow the Lord: follow him now, and confound the mighty! Follow him, O beautiful feet,⁹⁸ and shine in the firmament, that the heavens may declare his glory, dividing the light of the perfect ones⁹⁹ – though not yet so perfect as the angels – from the darkness of the little ones – who are nevertheless not utterly despised. Shine over all the earth, and let the day be lighted by the sun, utter the Word of wisdom to the day (“day unto day utters speech”¹⁰⁰) and let the night, lighted by the moon, display the Word of knowledge to the night. The moon and the stars give light for the night; the night does not put them out, and they illumine in its proper mode. For lo, it is as if God were saying, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven”: and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as if it were a rushing mighty wind, and there appeared cloven tongues of fire, and they sat on each of them.¹⁰¹ And then they were made to be lights in the firmament of heaven, having the Word of life. Run to and fro everywhere, you holy fires, you lovely fires, for you are the light of the world and you are not to be hid under a peck measure.¹⁰² He to whom you cleave is raised on high, and he has raised you on high. Run to and fro; make yourselves known among all the nations!

CHAPTER XX

26. Also let the sea conceive and bring forth your works, and let the waters bear the moving creatures that have life.¹⁰³ For by separating the precious from the vile you are made the mouth

⁹³Cf. for this syntax, Matt. 19:16-22 and Ex. 20:13-16.

⁹⁴Cf. Matt. 6:21.

⁹⁵I.e., the rich young ruler.

⁹⁶Cf. Matt. 13:7.

⁹⁷Cf. Matt. 97 Reading here, with Knöll and the *Sessorianus*, in *firmamento mundi*.

⁹⁸Cf. Isa. 52:7.

⁹⁹*Perfactorum*. Is this a conscious use, in a Christian context, of the distinction he had known so well among the Manicheans – between the *perfecti* and the *auditores*?

¹⁰⁰Ps. 19:2.

¹⁰¹Cf. Acts 2:2, 3.

¹⁰²Cf. Matt. 5:14, 15.

¹⁰³Cf. Gen. 1:20.

of God¹⁰⁴ by whom he said, “Let the waters bring forth.” This does not refer to the living creatures which the earth brings forth, but to the creeping creatures that have life and the fowls that fly over the earth. For, by the ministry of your holy ones, your mysteries have made their way amid the buffeting billows of the world, to instruct the nations in your name, in your Baptism. And among these things many great and marvelous works have been wrought, which are analogous to the huge whales. The words of your messengers have gone flying over the earth, high in the firmament of your Book which is spread over them as the authority beneath which they are to fly wherever they go. For “there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard,” because “their sound has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world”¹⁰⁵ – and this because you, O Lord, have multiplied these things by your blessing.

27. Am I speaking falsely? Am I mingling and confounding and not rightly distinguishing between the knowledge of these things in the firmament of heaven and those corporeal works in the swelling sea and beneath the firmament of heaven? For there are those things, the knowledge of which is solid and defined. It does not increase from generation to generation and thus they stand, as it were, as lights of wisdom and knowledge. But there are many and varied physical processes that manifest these selfsame principles. And thus one thing growing from another is multiplied by your blessing, O God, who do so refresh our easily wearied mortal senses that in our mental cognition a single thing may be figured and signified in many different ways by different bodily motions.

“The waters” have brought forth these mysteries, but only at your word. The needs of the people who were alien to the eternity of your truth have called them forth, but only in your gospel, since it was these “waters” which cast them up – the waters whose stagnant bitterness was the reason why they came forth through your Word.

28. Now all the things that you have made are fair, and yet, lo, you who did make all things are inexpressibly fairer. And if Adam had not fallen away from you, that brackish sea – the human race – so deeply prying, so boisterously swelling, so restlessly moving, would never have flowed forth from his belly. Thus, there would have been no need for your ministers to use corporeal and tangible signs in the midst of many “waters” in order to show forth their mystical deeds and words. For this is the way I interpret the phrases “creeping creatures” and “flying fowl.” Still, men who have been instructed and initiated and made dependent on your corporeal mysteries would not be able to profit from them if it were not that their soul has a higher life and unless, after the word of its admission, it did not look beyond toward its perfection.

CHAPTER XXI

29. And thus, in your Word, it was not the depth of the sea but “the earth,”¹⁰⁶ separated from the brackishness of the water, that brought forth, not “the creeping and the flying creature that has life,” but “the living soul” itself!¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴Cf. Jer. 15:19.

¹⁰⁵Ps. 19:4.

¹⁰⁶That is, the Church.

¹⁰⁷An allegorical ideal type of the *perfecti* in the Church.

And now this soul no longer has need of baptism, as the heathen had, or as it did when it was covered with the waters – and there can be no other entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven, since you have appointed that baptism should be the entrance. Nor does it seek great, miraculous works by which to buttress faith. For such a soul does not refuse to believe unless it sees signs and marvels, now that “the faithful earth” is separated from “the waters” of the sea, which have been made bitter by infidelity. Thus, for them, “tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to those who do not believe.”¹⁰⁸

And the earth which you have founded above the waters does not stand in need of those flying creatures which the waters brought forth at your word. Send forth your word into it by the agency of your messengers. For we only tell of their works, but it is you who do the works in them, so that they may bring forth “a living soul” in the earth.

The earth brings forth “the living soul” because “the earth” is the cause of such things being done by your messengers, just as the sea was the cause of the production of the creeping creatures having life and the flying fowl under the firmament of heaven. “The earth” no longer needs them, although it feeds on the Fish which was taken out of the deep,¹⁰⁹ set out on that table which you prepare in the presence of those who believe. To this end he was raised from the deep: that he might feed “the dry land.” And “the fowl,” even though they were bred in the sea, will yet be multiplied on the earth. The preaching of the first evangelists was called forth by reason of man’s infidelity, but the faithful also are exhorted and blessed by them in manifold ways, day by day. “The living soul” has its origin from “the earth,” because only to the faithful is there any profit in restraining themselves from the love of this world, so that their soul may live to you. This soul was dead while it was living in pleasures – in pleasures that bear death in them – whereas you, O Lord, are the living delight of the pure heart.

30. Now, therefore, let your ministers do their work on “the earth” – not as they did formerly in “the waters” of infidelity, when they had to preach and speak by miracles and mysteries and mystical expressions, in which ignorance – the mother of wonder – gives them an attentive ear because of its fear of occult and strange things. For this is the entry into faith for the sons of Adam who are forgetful of you, who hide themselves from your face, and who have become a darkened abyss. Instead, let your ministers work even as on “the dry land,” safe from the whirlpools of the abyss. Let them be an example unto the faithful by living before them and stirring them up to imitation.

For in such a setting, men will heed, not with the mere intent to hear, but also to act. Seek the Lord and your soul shall live¹¹⁰ and “the earth” may bring forth “the living soul.” Be not conformed to this world;¹¹¹ separate yourselves from it. The soul lives by avoiding those things

¹⁰⁸1 Cor. 14:22.

¹⁰⁹The fish was an early Christian rebus for "Jesus Christ." The Greek word for fish, ἰχθυός, was arranged acrostically to make the phrase Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ; cf. Smith and Cheetham, *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, pp. 673f.; see also Cabrol, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne*, Vol. 14, cols. 1246-1252, for a full account of the symbolism and pictures of early examples.

¹¹⁰Cf. Ps. 69:32.

¹¹¹Cf. Rom. 12:2.

which bring death if they are loved. Restrain yourselves from the unbridled wildness of pride, from the indolent passions of luxury, and from what is falsely called knowledge.¹¹² Thus may the wild beast be tamed, the cattle subdued, and the serpent made harmless. For, in allegory, these figures are the motions of our mind: that is to say, the haughtiness of pride, the delight of lust, and the poison of curiosity are motions of the dead soul – not so dead that it has lost all motion, but dead because it has deserted the fountain of life, and so has been taken up by this transitory world and conformed to it.

31. But your Word, O God, is a fountain of life eternal, and it does not pass away. Therefore, this desertion is restrained by your Word when it says to us, “Be not conformed to this world,” to the end that “the earth” may bring forth a “living soul” in the fountain of life – a soul disciplined by your Word, by your evangelists, by the following of the followers of your Christ. For this is the meaning of “after his kind.” A man tends to follow the example of his friend. Thus, he [Paul] says, “Become as I am, because I have become as you are.”¹¹³

Thus, in this “living soul” there shall be good beasts, acting meekly. For you have commanded this, saying: “Do your work in meekness and you shall be loved by all men.”¹¹⁴ And the cattle will be good, for if they eat much they shall not suffer from satiety; and if they do not eat at all they will suffer no lack. And the serpents will be good, not poisonous to do harm, but only cunning in their watchfulness – exploring only as much of this temporal nature as is necessary in order that the eternal nature may “be clearly seen, understood through the things that have been made.”¹¹⁵ For all these animals will obey reason when, having been restrained from their death-dealing ways, they live and become good.

CHAPTER XXII

32. Thus, O Lord, our God, our Creator, when our affections have been turned from the love of the world, in which we died by living ill; and when we began to be “a living soul” by living well; and when the word, “Be not conformed to this world,” which you did speak through your apostle, has been fulfilled in us, then will follow what you did immediately add when you said, “But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”¹¹⁶ This will not now be “after their kind,” as if we were following the neighbor who went before us, or as if we were living after the example of a better man – for you did not say, “Let man be made after his kind,” but rather, “Let us make man in our own image and our own likeness,”¹¹⁷ so that then we may be able to prove what your will is.

This is why your minister – begetting children by the gospel so that he might not always have them babes whom he would have to feed with milk and nurse as children – this is why he said, “Be transformed by the renewing of your minds, that you may prove what is the good and

¹¹²Cf. 1 Tim. 6:20.

¹¹³Gal. 4:12.

¹¹⁴Cf. Eccles. 3:19.

¹¹⁵Rom. 1:20.

¹¹⁶Rom. 12:2.

¹¹⁷Gen. 1:26.

acceptable and perfect will of God.”¹¹⁸ Therefore you did not say, “Let man be made,” but rather, “Let us make man.” And you did not say, “After his kind,” but after “our image” and “likeness.” Indeed, it is only when man has been renewed in his mind, and comes to behold and apprehend your truth, that he does not need another man as his director, to show him how to imitate human examples. Instead, by your guidance, he proves what is your good and acceptable and perfect will. And you do teach him, now that he is able to understand, to see the trinity of the Unity and the unity of the Trinity.

This is why the statement in the plural, “Let us make man,” is also connected with the statement in the singular, “And God made man.” Thus it is said in the plural, “After our likeness,” and then in the singular, “After the image of God.” Man is thus transformed in the knowledge of God, according to the image of Him who created him. And now, having been made spiritual, he judges all things – that is, all things that are appropriate to be judged – and he himself is judged of no man.¹¹⁹

CHAPTER XXIII

33. Now this phrase, “he judges all things,” means that man has dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over all cattle and wild beasts, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. And he does this by the power of reason in his mind by which he perceives “the things of the Spirit of God.”¹²⁰ But, when man was put in this high office, he did not understand what was involved and thus was reduced to the level of the brute beasts, and made like them.¹²¹

Therefore in your Church, O our God, by the grace you have given us – since we are your workmanship, created in good works (not only those who are in spiritual authority but also those who are spiritually subject to them) – you made man male and female. Here all are equal in your spiritual grace where, as far as sex is concerned, there is neither male nor female, just as there is neither Jew nor Greek, nor bond nor free. Spiritual men, therefore, whether those who are in authority or those who are subject to authority, judge spiritually. They do not judge by the light of that spiritual knowledge which shines in the firmament, for it is inappropriate for them to judge by so sublime an authority. Nor does it behoove them to judge concerning your Book itself, although there are some things in it which are not clear. Instead, we submit our understanding to it and believe with certainty that what is hidden from our sight is still rightly and truly spoken. In this way, even though a man is now spiritual and renewed by the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created him, he must be a doer of the law rather than its judge.¹²² Neither does the spiritual man judge concerning that division between spiritual and carnal men which is known to your eyes, O God, and which may not, as yet, be made manifest to us by their external works, so that we may know them by their fruits; yet you, O God, know them already and you have divided and called them secretly, before the firmament was made. Nor

¹¹⁸Rom. 12:2 (mixed text).

¹¹⁹Cf. 1 Cor. 2:15.

¹²⁰1 Cor. 2:14.

¹²¹Cf. Ps. 49:20.

¹²²Cf. James 4:11.

does a man, even though he is spiritual, judge the disordered state of society in this world. For what business of his is it to judge those who are without, since he cannot know which of them may later on come into the sweetness of your grace, and which of them may continue in the perpetual bitterness of their impiety?

34. Man, then, even if he was made after your own image, did not receive the power of dominion over the lights of heaven, nor over the secret heaven, nor over the day and the night which you called forth before the creation of the heaven, nor over the gathering together of the waters which is the sea. Instead, he received dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air; and over all cattle, and all the earth; and over all creeping things which creep on the earth.

Indeed, he judges and approves what he finds right and disapproves what he finds amiss, whether in the celebration of those mysteries by which are initiated those whom your mercy have sought out in the midst of many waters; or in that sacrament in which is exhibited the Fish itself¹²³ which, being raised from the depths, the pious “earth”¹²⁴ feeds upon; or, in the signs and symbols of words, which are subject to the authority of your Book – such signs as burst forth and sound from the mouth, as if it were “flying” under the firmament, interpreting, expounding, discoursing, disputing, blessing, invoking you, so that the people may answer, “Amen.”¹²⁵ The reason that all these words have to be pronounced vocally is because of the abyss of this world and the blindness of our flesh in which thoughts cannot be seen directly,¹²⁶ but have to be spoken aloud in our ears. Thus, although the flying fowl are multiplied on the earth, they still take their origins from the waters.

The spiritual man also judges by approving what is right and reproofing what he finds amiss in the works and morals of the faithful, such as in their almsgiving, which is signified by the phrase, “The earth bringing forth its fruit.” And he judges of the “living soul,” which is then made to live by the disciplining of her affections in chastity, in fasting, and in holy meditation. And he also judges concerning all those things which are perceived by the bodily senses. For it can be said that he should judge in all matters about which he also has the power of correction.

CHAPTER XXIV

35. But what is this; what kind of mystery is this? Behold, O Lord, you do bless men in order that they may be “fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth.” In this are you not making a sign to us that we may understand something [allegorically]? Why did you not also bless the light, which you called “the day,” nor the firmament of heaven, nor the lights, nor the stars, nor the earth, nor the sea? I might reply, O our God, that you in creating us after your own image – I might reply that you did will to bestow this gift of blessing upon man alone, if you had not similarly blessed the fishes and the whales, so that they too should be fruitful and multiply and replenish the waters of the sea; and also the fowls, so that they should be multiplied on the earth. In like fashion, I might say that this blessing properly belonged only to such creatures as are

¹²³See above, Ch. XXI, 30.

¹²⁴I.e., the Church.

¹²⁵Cf. 1 Cor. 14:16.

¹²⁶Another reminder that, ideally, knowledge is immediate and direct.

propagated from their own kind, if I could find it given also as a blessing to trees, and plants, and the beasts of the earth. But this “increase and multiply” was not said to plants or trees or beasts or serpents – although all of these, along with fishes and birds and men, do actually increase by propagation and so preserve their species.

36. What, then, shall I say, O Truth, O my Life: that it was idly and vainly said? Surely not this, O Father of piety; far be it from a servant of your Word to say anything like this! But if I do not understand what you meanest by that phrase, let those who are better than I – that is, those more intelligent than I – interpret it better, in the degree that you have given each of us the ability to understand.

But let also my confession be pleasing in your eyes, for I confess to you that I believe, O Lord, that you have not spoken thus in vain. Nor will I be silent as to what my reading has suggested to me. For it is valid, and I do not see anything to prevent me from thus interpreting the figurative sayings in your books. For I know that a thing that is understood in only one way in the mind may be expressed in many different ways by the body; and I know that a thing that has only one manner of expression through the body may be understood in the mind in many different ways. For consider this single example – the love of God and of our neighbor – by how many different mysteries and countless languages, and, in each language, by how many different ways of speaking, this is signified corporeally! In similar fashion, the “young fish” in “the waters” increase and multiply. On the other hand, whoever you are who reads this, observe and behold what Scripture declares, and how the voice pronounces it *in only one way*, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.”¹²⁷ Is this not understood in many different ways by different kinds of true interpretations which do not involve the deceit of error? Thus the offspring of men are fruitful and do multiply.¹²⁸

37. If, then, we consider the nature of things, in their strictly literal sense, and not allegorically, the phrase, “Be fruitful and multiply,” applies to all things that are begotten by seed. But if we treat these words figuratively, as I judge that the Scripture intended them to be – since it cannot be for nothing that this blessing is attributed only to the offspring of marine life and man – then we discover that the characteristic of fecundity belongs also to the spiritual and physical creations (which are signified by “heaven and earth”), and also in righteous and unrighteous souls (which are signified by “light and darkness”) and in the sacred writers through whom the law is uttered (who are signified by “the firmament established between the waters and the waters”); and in the earthly commonwealth still steeped in their bitterness (which is signified by “the sea”); and in the zeal of holy souls (signified by “the dry land”); and the works of mercy done in this present life (signified by “the seed-bearing herbs and fruit-bearing trees”); and in spiritual gifts which shine out for our edification (signified by “the lights of heaven”); and to human affections ruled by temperance (signified by “the living soul”). In all these instances we meet with multiplicity and fertility and increase; but the particular way in which “Be fruitful and

¹²⁷Here, again, as in a coda, Augustine restates his central theme and motif in the whole of his “confessions”: the primacy of God, His constant creativity, his mysterious, unwearied, unfrustrated redemptive love. All are summed up in this mystery of creation in which the purposes of God are announced and from which all Christian hope takes its premise.

¹²⁸That is, from basic and essentially simple ideas, they proliferate multiple – and valid – implications and corollaries.

multiply” can be exemplified differs widely. Thus a single category may include many things, and we cannot discover them except through their signs displayed corporeally and by the things being excogitated by the mind.

We thus interpret the phrase, “The generation of the waters,” as referring to the corporeally expressed signs [of fecundity], since they are made necessary by the degree of our involvement in the flesh. But the power of human generation refers to the process of mental conception; this we see in the fruitfulness of reason. Therefore, we believe that to both of these two kinds it has been said by you, O Lord, “Be fruitful and multiply.” In this blessing, I recognize that you have granted us the faculty and power not only to express what we understand by a single idea in many different ways but also to understand in many ways what we find expressed obscurely in a single statement. Thus the waters of the sea are replenished, and their waves are symbols of diverse meanings. And thus also the earth is also replenished with human offspring. Its dryness is the symbol of its thirst for truth, and of the fact that reason rules over it.

CHAPTER XXV

38. I also desire to say, O my Lord God, what the following Scripture suggests to me. Indeed, I will speak without fear, for I will speak the truth, as you inspire me to know what you do will that I should say concerning these words. For I do not believe I can speak the truth by any other inspiration than yours, since you are the Truth, and every man a liar.¹²⁹ Hence, he that speaks a lie, speaks out of himself. Therefore, if I am to speak the truth, I must speak of your truth.

Behold, you have given us for our food every seed-bearing herb on the face of the earth, and all trees that bear in themselves seed of their own kind; and not to us only, but to all the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field and all creeping things.¹³⁰ Still, you have not given these things to the fishes and great whales. We have said that by these fruits of the earth the works of mercy were signified and figured forth in an allegory: thus, from the fruitful earth, things are provided for the necessities of life. Such an “earth” was the godly Onesiphorus, to whose house you gave mercy because he often refreshed Paul and was not ashamed of his bonds.¹³¹ This was also the way of the brethren from Macedonia, who bore such fruit and supplied to him what he lacked. But notice how he grieves for certain “trees,” which did not give him the fruit that was due, when he said, “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God, that it be not laid up to their charge.”¹³² For we owe “fruits” to those who minister spiritual doctrine to us through their understanding of the divine mysteries. We owe these to them as men. We owe these fruits, also, to “the living souls” since they offer themselves as examples for us in their own continence. And, finally, we owe them likewise to “the flying creatures” because of their blessings which are multiplied on the earth, for “their sound has gone forth into all the earth.”¹³³

CHAPTER XXVI

¹²⁹Cf. Rom. 3:4.

¹³⁰Cf. Gen. 1:29, 30.

¹³¹Cf. 2 Tim. 1:16.

¹³²2 Tim. 4:16.

¹³³Cf. Ps. 19:4.

39. Those who find their joy in it are fed by these “fruits”; but those whose god is their belly find no joy in them. For in those who offer these fruits, it is not the fruit itself that matters, but the spirit in which they give them. Therefore, he who serves God and not his own belly may rejoice in them, and I plainly see why. I see it, and I rejoice with him greatly. For he [Paul] had received from the Philippians the things they had sent by Epaphroditus; yet I see why he rejoiced. He was fed by what he found his joy in; for, speaking truly, he says, “I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me has flourished again, in which you were once so careful, but it had become a weariness to you.”¹³⁴ These Philippians, in their extended period of weariness in well-doing, had become weak and were, so to say, dried up; they were no longer bringing forth the fruits of good works. And now Paul rejoices in them – and not just for himself alone – because they were flourishing again in ministering to his needs. Therefore he adds: “I do not speak in respect of my want, for I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased and how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”¹³⁵

40. Where do you find joy in all things, O great Paul? What is the cause of your joy? On what do you feed, O man, renewed now in the knowledge of God after the image of him who created you, O living soul of such great continence – O tongue like a winged bird, speaking mysteries? What food is owed such creatures; what is it that feeds you? It is joy! For hear what follows: “Nevertheless, you have done well in that you have shared with me in my affliction.”¹³⁶ This is what he finds his joy in; this is what he feeds on. They have done well, not merely because his need had been relieved – for he says to them, “You have opened my heart when I was in distress” – but because he knew both how to abound and how to suffer need, in you who did strengthen him. And so he said, “You [Philippians] know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in regard to giving and receiving, except you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent time and time again, according to my need.”¹³⁷ He now finds his joy in the fact that they have returned once again to these good works, and he is made glad that they are flourishing again, as a fruitful field when it recovers its fertility.

41. Was it on account of his own needs alone that he said, “You have sent me gifts according to my needs?” Does he find joy in that? Certainly not for that alone. But how do we know this? We know it because he himself adds, “Not because I desire a gift, but because I desire fruit.”¹³⁸

Now I have learned from you, O my God, how to distinguish between the terms “gift” and “fruit.” A “gift” is the thing itself, given by one who bestows life’s necessities on another – such as money, food, drink, clothing, shelter, and aid. But “the fruit” is the good and right will of the giver. For the good Teacher not only said, “He that receives a prophet,” but he added, “In the

¹³⁴Phil. 4:10 (mixed text).

¹³⁵Phil. 4:11-13.

¹³⁶Phil. 4:14.

¹³⁷Phil. 4:15-17.

¹³⁸Phil. 4:17.,

name of a prophet.” And he did not say only, “He who receives a righteous man,” but added, “In the name of a righteous man.”¹³⁹ Thus, surely, the former shall receive the reward of a prophet; the latter, that of a righteous man. Nor did he say only, “Whoever shall give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink,” but added, “In the name of a disciple”; and concluded, “Truly I tell you he shall not lose his reward.” The “gift” involves receiving a prophet, receiving a righteous man, handing a cup of cold water to a disciple: but the “fruit” is to do all this in the name of a prophet, in the name of a righteous man, in the name of a disciple. Elijah was fed by the widow with “fruit,” for she knew that she was feeding a man of God and this is why she fed him. But he was fed by the raven with a “gift.” The inner man of Elijah was not fed by this “gift,” but only the outer man, which otherwise might have perished from the lack of such food.

CHAPTER XXVII

42. Therefore I will speak before you, O Lord, what is true, in order that the uninstructed¹⁴⁰ and the infidels, who require the mysteries of initiation and great works of miracles – which we believe are signified by the phrase, “Fishes and great whales” – may be helped in being gained [for the Church] when they endeavor to provide that your servants are refreshed in body, or otherwise aided in this present life. For they do not really know why this should be done, and to what end. Thus the former do not feed the latter, and the latter do not feed the former; for neither do the former offer their “gifts” through a holy and right intent, nor do the others rejoice in the gifts of those who do not as yet see the “fruit.” For it is on the “fruit” that the mind is fed, and by which it is gladdened. And, therefore, fishes and whales are not fed on such food as the earth alone brings forth when they have been separated and divided from the bitterness of “the waters” of the sea.

CHAPTER XXVIII

43. And you, O God, did see everything that you had made and, behold, it was very good.¹⁴¹ We also see the whole creation and, behold, it is all very good. In each separate kind of your work, when you did say, “Let them be made,” and they were made, you did see that it was good. I have counted seven times where it is written that you did see what you had made was “good.” And there is the eighth time when you did see *all* things that you had made and, behold, they were not only good but also *very* good; for they were now seen as a totality. Individually they were only good; but taken as a totality they were both good and very good. Beautiful bodies express this truth; for a body which consists of several parts, each of which is beautiful, is itself far more beautiful than any of its individual parts separately, by whose well-ordered union the whole is completed even though these parts are separately beautiful.

CHAPTER XXIX

44. And I looked attentively to find whether it was seven or eight times that you did see your

¹³⁹Cf. Matt. 10:41, 42.

¹⁴⁰*Idiotae*: there is some evidence that this term was used to designate pagans who had a nominal connection with the Christian community but had not formally enrolled as catechumens. See Th. Zahn in *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* (1899), pp. 42-43.

¹⁴¹Gen. 1:31.

works were good, when they were pleasing to you, but I found that there was no “time” in your seeing which would help me to understand in what sense you had looked so many “times” at what you had made. And I said: “O Lord, is not this your Scripture true, since you are true, and your truth doth set it forth? Why, then, do you say to me that in your seeing there are no times, while this Scripture tells me that what you made each day you did see to be good; and when I counted them I found how many ‘times’?” To these things, you did reply to me, for you are my God, and you do speak to your servant with a strong voice in his inner ear, my deafness, and crying: “O man, what my Scripture says, I say. But it speaks in terms of time, whereas time does not affect my Word – my Word which exists coeternally with myself. Thus the things you see through my Spirit, I see; just as what you say through my Spirit, I say. But while you see those things in time, I do not see them in time; and when you speak those things in time, I do not speak them in time.”

CHAPTER XXX

45. And I heard this, O Lord my God, and drank up a drop of sweetness from your truth, and understood that there are some men to whom your works are displeasing, who say that many of them you did make under the compulsion of necessity – such as the pattern of the heavens and the courses of the stars – and that you did not make them out of what was yours, but that they were already created elsewhere and from other sources. It was thus [they say] that you did collect and fashion and weave them together, as if from your conquered enemies you did raise up the walls of the universe; so that, built into the ramparts of the building, they might not be able a second time to rebel against you. And, even of other things, they say that you did neither make them nor arrange them – for example, all flesh and all the very small living creatures, and all things fastened to the earth by their roots. But [they say] a hostile mind and an alien nature – not created by you and in every way contrary to you – begot and framed all these things in the nether parts of the world.¹⁴² They who speak thus are mad [*insani*], since they do not see your works through your Spirit, nor recognize you in them.

CHAPTER XXXI

46. But for those who see these things through your Spirit, it is you who see them in them. When, therefore, they see that these things are good, it is you who see that they are good; and whatsoever things are pleasing because of you, it is you who do give us pleasure in those things. Those things which please us through your Spirit are pleasing to you in us. “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of a man which is in him? Even so, no man knows the things of God, but the Spirit of God. Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us from God.”¹⁴³ And I am admonished to say: “Yes, truly. No man knows the things of God, but the Spirit of God: but how, then, do we also know what things are given us by God?” The answer is given me: “Because we know these things by his Spirit; for no one knows but the Spirit of God.” But just as it is truly said to those who were to speak through the Spirit of God, “It is not you who speak,” so it is also truly said to them who know through the Spirit of God, “It is not you yourselves who know,” and

¹⁴²A reference to the Manichean cosmogony and similar dualistic doctrines of “creation.”

¹⁴³1 Cor. 2:11, 12.

just as rightly it may be said to those who perceive through the Spirit of God that a thing is good; it is not they who see, but God who sees that it is good.

It is, therefore, one thing to think like the men who judge something to be bad when it is good, as do those whom we have already mentioned. It is quite another thing that a man should see as good what is good – as is the case with many whom your creation pleases because it is good, yet what pleases them in it is not you, and so they would prefer to find their joy in your creatures rather than to find their joy in you. It is still another thing that when a man sees a thing to be good, God should see in him that it is good – that truly he may be loved in what he has made, he who cannot be loved except through the Holy Spirit which he has given us: “Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.”¹⁴⁴ It is by him that we see whatever we see to be good in any degree, since it is from him, who doth not exist in any particular degree but who simply is what he is.¹⁴⁵

CHAPTER XXXII

47. Thanks be to you, O Lord! We see the heaven and the earth, either the corporeal part – higher and lower – or the spiritual and physical creation. And we see the light made and divided from the darkness for the adornment of these parts, from which the universal mass of the world or the universal creation is constituted. We see the firmament of heaven, either the original “body” of the world between the spiritual (higher) waters and the corporeal (lower) waters¹⁴⁶ or the expanse of air – which is also called “heaven” – through which the fowls of heaven wander, between the waters which move in clouds above them and which drop down in dew on clear nights, and those waters which are heavy and flow along the earth. We see the waters gathered together in the vast plains of the sea; and the dry land, first bare and then formed, so as to be visible and well-ordered; and the soil of herbs and trees. We see the light shining from above – the sun to serve the day, the moon and the stars to give cheer in the night; and we see by all these that the intervals of time are marked and noted. We see on every side the watery elements, fruitful with fishes, beasts, and birds – and we notice that the density of the atmosphere which supports the flights of birds is increased by the evaporation of the waters. We see the face of the earth, replete with earthly creatures; and man, created in your image and likeness, in the very image and likeness of you – that is, having the power of reason and understanding – by virtue of which he has been set over all irrational creatures. And just as there is in his soul one element which controls by its power of reflection and another which has been made subject so that it should obey, so also, physically, the woman was made for the man; for, although she had a like nature of rational intelligence in the mind, still in the sex of her body she should be similarly subject to the sex of her husband, as the appetite of action is subjected to the deliberation of the mind in order to conceive the rules of right action. These things we see, and each of them is good; and the whole is very good!

¹⁴⁴Rom. 5:5.

¹⁴⁵*Sed quod est, est.* Note the variant text in Skutella, *op. cit.*: *sed est, est.* This is obviously an echo of the Vulgate Ex. 3:14: *ego sum qui sum.*

¹⁴⁶Augustine himself had misgivings about this passage. In the *Retractations*, he says that this statement was made “without due consideration.” But he then adds, with great justice: “However, the point in question is very obscure” (*res autem in abdito est valde*); cf. *Retract.*, 2:6.

CHAPTER XXXIII

48. Let your works praise you, that we may love you; and let us love you that your works may praise you – those works which have a beginning and an end in time – a rising and a setting, a growth and a decay, a form and a privation. Thus, they have their successions of morning and evening, partly hidden, partly plain. For they were made from nothing by you, and not from yourself, and not from any matter that is not yours, or that was created beforehand. They were created from con-created matter – that is, matter that was created by you at the same time that you did form its formlessness, without any interval of time. Yet, since the matter of heaven and earth is one thing and the form of heaven and earth is another thing, you did create matter out of absolutely nothing (*de omnino nihilo*), but the form of the world you did form from formless matter (*de informi materia*). But both were done at the same time, so that form followed matter with no delaying interval.

CHAPTER XXXIV

49. We have also explored the question of what you did desire to figure forth, both in the creation and in the description of things in this particular order. And we have seen that things taken separately are good, and all things taken together are very good, both in heaven and earth. And we have seen that this was wrought through your Word, your only Son, the head and the body of the Church, and it signifies your predestination before all times, without morning and evening. But when, in time, you did begin to unfold the things destined before time, so that you might make hidden things manifest and might reorder our disorders – since our sins were over us and we had sunk into profound darkness away from you, and your good Spirit was moving over us to help us in due season – you did justify the ungodly and also did divide them from the wicked; and you made the authority of your Book a firmament between those above who would be amenable to you and those beneath who would be subject to them. And you did gather the society of unbelievers¹⁴⁷ into a conspiracy, in order that the zeal of the faithful might become manifest and that they might bring forth works of mercy unto you, giving their earthly riches to the poor to obtain heavenly riches. Then you did kindle the lights in the firmament, which are your holy ones, who have the Word of Life and who shine with an exalted authority, warranted to them by their spiritual gifts. And then, for the instruction of the unbelieving nations, you did out of physical matter produce the mysteries and the visible miracles and the sounds of words in harmony with the firmament of your Book, through which the faithful should be blessed. After this you did form “the living soul” of the faithful, through the ordering of their passions by the strength of continence. And then you did renew, after your image and likeness, the mind which is faithful to you alone, which needs to imitate no human authority. Thus, you did subordinate rational action to the higher excellence of intelligence, as the woman is subordinate to the man. Finally, in all your ministries which were needed to perfect the faithful in this life, you did will that these same faithful ones should themselves bring forth good things, profitable for their temporal use and fruitful for the life to come. We see all these things, and they are very good, because you see them thus in us – you who have given us your Spirit, by which we may see them so and love you in them.

¹⁴⁷See above, *amaricantes*, Ch. XVII, 20.

CHAPTER XXXV

50. O Lord God, grant us your peace – for you have given us all things. Grant us the peace of quietness, the peace of the Sabbath, the peace without an evening. All this most beautiful array of things, all so very good, will pass away when all their courses are finished – for in them there is both morning and evening.

51. But the seventh day is without an evening, and it has no setting, for you have sanctified it with an everlasting duration. After all your works of creation, which were very good, you did rest on the seventh day, although you had created them all in unbroken rest – and this so that the voice of your Book might speak to us with the prior assurance that after our works – and they also are very good because you have given them to us – we may find our rest in you in the Sabbath of life eternal.¹⁴⁸

CHAPTER XXXVII

52. For then also you shall so rest in us as now you work in us; and, thus, that will be your rest through us, as these are your works through us. But you, O Lord, work evermore and are always at rest. You see not in time, you move not in time, you rest not in time. And yet you makes all those things which are seen in time – indeed, the very times themselves – and everything that proceeds in and from time.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

53. We can see all those things which you have made because they are – but they are because you see them.¹⁴⁹ And we see with our eyes that they are, and we see with our minds that they are good. But you saw them as made when you saw that they would be made.

And now, in this present time, we have been moved to do well, now that our heart has been quickened by your Spirit; but in the former time, having forsaken you, we were moved to do evil.¹⁵⁰ But you, O the one good God, have never ceased to do good! And we have accomplished certain good works by your good gifts, and even though they are not eternal, still we hope, after these things here, to find our rest in your great sanctification. But you are the Good, and need no rest, and are always at rest, because you yourself are your own rest.

What man will teach men to understand this? And what angel will teach the angels? Or what angels will teach men? We must ask it of you; we must seek it in you; we must knock for it at your door. Only thus shall we receive; only thus shall we find; only thus shall your door be opened.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸Cf. this *requiescamus in te* with the *requiescat in te* in Bk. I, Ch. I.

¹⁴⁹Cf. *The City of God*, XI, 10, on Augustine's notion that the world exists as a thought in the mind of God.

¹⁵⁰Another conscious connection between Bk. XIII and Bks. I-X.

¹⁵¹This final ending is an antiphon to Bk. XII, Ch. I, 1 above.